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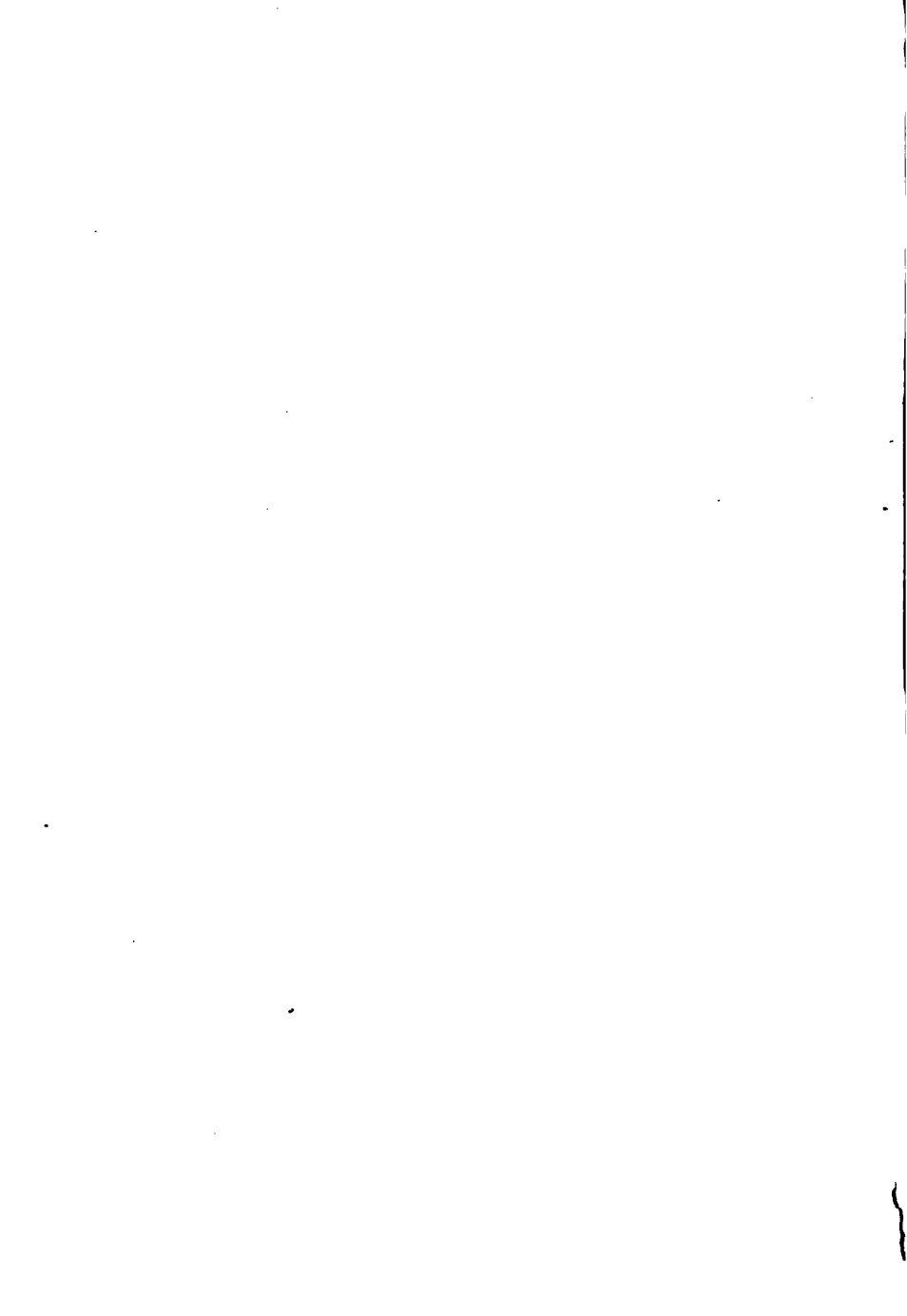
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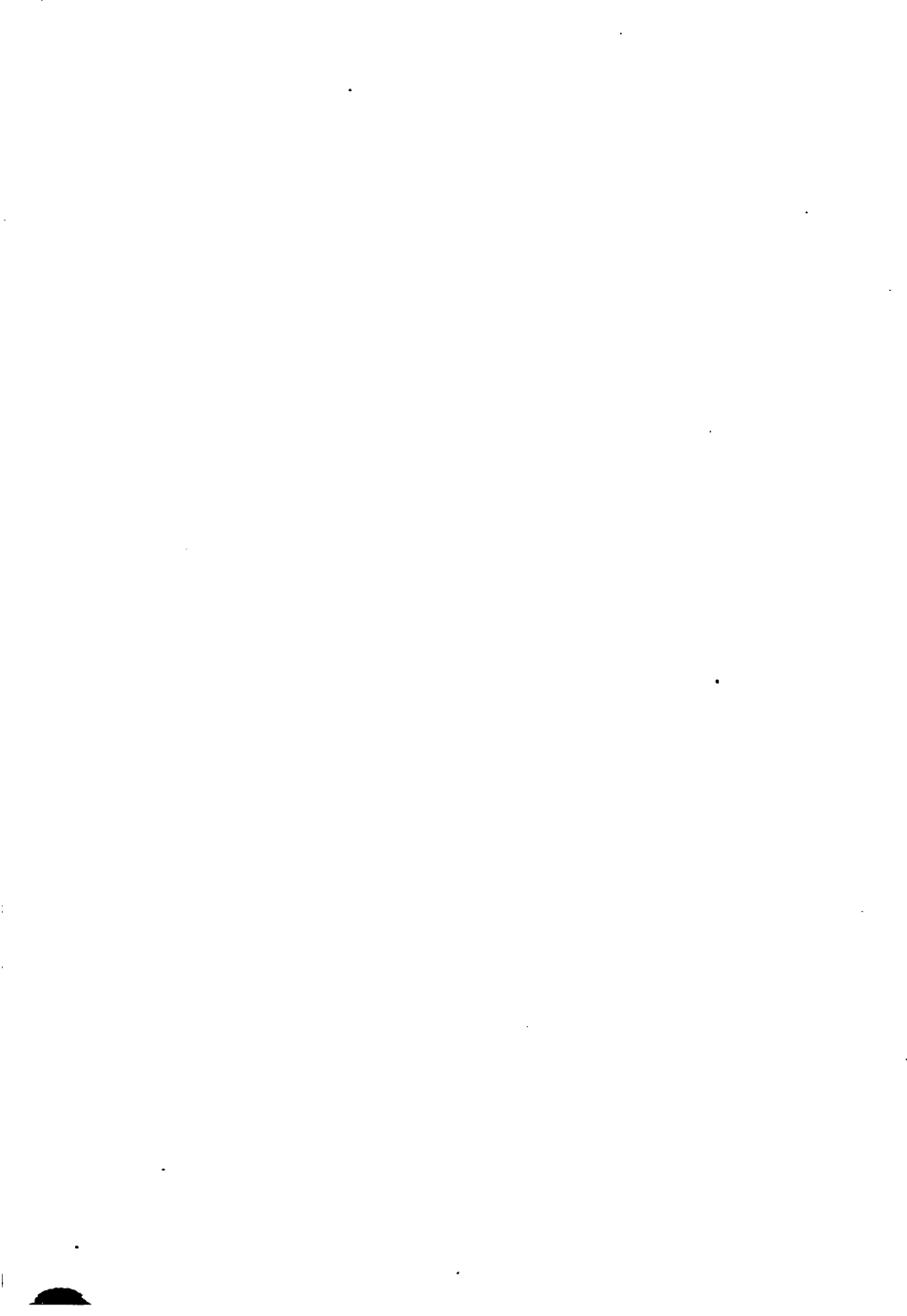
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**THE ADVENTURES
OF NAPOLEON PRINCE**





"She rose from her chair, came close, and bent and kissed him" (*see page 79*).

THE ADVENTURES OF NAPOLEON PRINCE

BY
MAY EDGINTON

*With a Frontispiece by
Cyrus Cuneo, R.O.I.*



New York
CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
1912

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THE ADVENTURES OF NAPOLEON PRINCE

Chapter I

How Johnnie Luck Met a Pretty Rogue

LUCK sat playing on a sixpenny flute like Pan on an immortal reed. The very sick man on the bed dozed and dreamed, and swore in dreams for all the world as if he were awake. Outside—east, west, north and south, if you got out far enough from Bung Creek—rolled prairie. Over that—east, west, north and south, near and far, wherever you looked—rolled the burning blue. North-east—many miles—lay Battleford. Dimly visible in the far-away, Brown and Hooker lifted their great heads. Dropping down south-west was that desirable hell, San Francisco. But Luck desired nothing much in the world, save his flute and his food and his remittance, and occasional adventure of sorts, being young. If he ran short he worked in the mines; but yesterday afternoon the mail had brought in his quarterly thirty pounds from a cold, unsympathetic, deprecating damn place called

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"home." Last night he had been just drunk enough to be really pleased with things; and this morning—well, this morning he had two-thirds of the remittance chinking loose in his breeches pocket, perfectly safe even in a place like Bung Creek, because it chinked against the barrel of a useful Colt and the handle of an ugly old bowie. So he sat in the doorway of the shanty and played "Home, Sweet Home." After the first few bars, sweet and clear, had been played, he laid the flute down, and broke out in a beautiful tenor, leaning his head back against the doorpost:

"Oh, tank de Lord, yo' darkies,
Dat dere's no udder place like home;
Dere's a lot o' tings dat is good on de earf,
An' all us boys was made for mirf,
An' dere's no udder place like home.
Home, sweet home,
Dere's no udder place like home.

"Den tank ole Nick, yo' darkies
Dat dere's no udder place like home;
If dere was I know what I s'udn't do;
I s'udn't go dere; more w'udn't you;
But dere's no udder place like home.
Home, sweet home,
Dere's no udder place like home.

"Make up yo' minds, yo' darkies,
Not to build nowhere like home.
'Mong places an' palaces dere ain't such anudder,
An' don' you go for to look for its brudder,
For dere's no-a place like home,
Home, sweet home,
Dere's no udder place like home."

HOW LUCK MET A PRETTY ROGUE

"Shurrup, you little beast!" said the sick man, awaking; and, forgetting that he must not turn over, turning over, and, getting hurt, swearing frightfully. Luck pulled himself slowly up.

"Come an' help, Johnnie," said the sick man with a loud groan. He had both legs broken through a throw from a broncho the week before, which broncho, after throwing, lay down and rolled on him.

Johnnie Luck, pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth, came over to the bed, straightened him out on his back, and shook his pillows with the tenderness of innate pity.

"Better, Rolands?"

"Aw right."

Luck sat down on the bed-edge, and, after looking at the patient, said:

"You want a shave worse than any man I ever saw. Where's the tack?"

Rolands told him, and submitted to be shaved.

"You ain't goin' to work again yet, Johnnie?" he asked presently, with some anxiety.

Luck slapped his pocket. The other understood the cheerful jingle.

"'Mittance come, eh?" said he. "Then you won't. *That's* aw right. Then you'll stay an' give me a hand. I want someone to sleep here of nights with me while I'm laid by. Not nervous, partic'lar, but——". He looked narrowly at Luck.

ADVENTURES OF NAPOLEON PRINCE

"Nothing to be nervous about, Roly. You ain't worth looting."

The other looked at him very narrowly again.

"Ah!" he replied. "Ah!" and smiled a little with his lips, but not with his squint eyes.

Luck refilled his pipe, and began humming:

"Make up yo' minds, yo' darkies,
Not to build no place like home——"

"Oh, shurrup!" said Rolands., "Come here, Johnnie."

"I'm here, matey."

"Closer, then."

"Shan't. You ain't had a bath this week you've been in bed."

"Oh, don't come the English gentleman," said Rolands, smiling again his eyeless smile; "but I'm glad they did put you to that darn silly trade, English gentleman, 'cause it inculcates cert'n things an' princ'ples. I want to tell you something, Johnnie, to give you an idea of what you're looking after in looking after me. An' why I'm so dead keen about not bein' left alone o' nights. An' to get your promise not to desert me till I'm on my legs again. English gentleman's promise."

"You'd trust that, eh?"

"I know 'em," said Rolands. "Fools! I was butler to one once. That's how. You're talking to an upper servant that was, Johnnie. Like to go?"

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"Bung Creek," replied Luck, "is where the butler and the baronet lie down together. Go on."

The man in the bed hesitated a moment before launching what he obviously thought a thunderbolt.

"I was butler for three months, five years ago, to Barney." Making no impression, he added, "William Barney, as owned the Barney Collection."

"I dunno him," said Luck, cocking an eye; "but who owns it now?"

"Me," Rolands whispered.

Luck nodded. "That your trade?" he questioned with mild interest. "I've often wondered."

Rolands gave assent. "I was in the profession, I was. I'd like to tell you all about that job."

"You needn't confess, butty. You're not leaving for the tropics yet."

"I ain't confessin'," said Rolands, "I'm boastin'. Well, see. I was in the trade. B'longed to a society. It wasn't a syndicate job, taking the Barney Collection, though, but a little private enterprise of me and another's. Darn fine, he was. Crissen name 'Napoleon.' He'd got a head worth all the diplomatic services and Parliaments in Europe. He made the plans and we were to share the swag. He couldn't do much himself—got a sort o' creepin' paral'sis comin' up his right side, but his brain—my word! 'I'm monkey,' he says to me, 'you're the catspaw. It's a fine chestnut.' So it was a fine chestnut, the Barney Collection. Not big—quite littlish, in fact, but things old

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Barney had scoured the world for. Not of partic'lar epochs and places, but any epoch and place. I'll show you presently. He was offered fortunes for 'em, but he'd never part. Kep' 'em and gloated over 'em and added to 'em, down at his place in Kent. Napoleon sends me down as butler, and he wrote and telegraphed constantly to me in code, instructions and so on. He was for all the world like a general commandin' an army by heliograph. Long story. Smart story. I won't go into it. I'd been there three months before I got a chance to touch the collection. I packed it into my port-manteau—I've said it was littlish—and went up to London on special leave to see a dying sister. An' up to Liverpool night train, and happened to just catch a steamer. The monkey hadn't reckoned enough with the cat."

"The cat kept the chestnut?"

Rolands nodded on his pillow, his eyes squinting now with laughter.

"Take up the board just at the foot of my bed, Johnnie," he commanded.

Luck bent leisurely and tried the board. It was nailed down, but not with any firmness. A wrench with a handy chisel brought it up, and below it lay two leather wallets. He lifted them out on to the bed. Rolands took them, and spread the contents pell-mell on the coverlet.

"Shoe," he said, showing an exquisite eighteenth century slipper of gold brocade, crusted with

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diamonds and with a great clasp set on the instep. "Marie Ant'inette's. Inside that clasp is some o' the King's hair, and the Dauphin's, so they say. Necklace that belonged to Matilda of Flanders, and all those paste things and miniatures I dunno anything about, 'cept that Barney refused thirty thou' for 'em. And jewels from coffins in Egypt and what not. Now you see what you're guardin' in guardin' me."

Luck put them back presently, and nailed the board into place.

"Roly," he asked, "why didn't you sell?"

"Easier said than done," said Rolands, "with a collection like that. The things was known. That's where I was wrong to desert Nap; but I didn't think of it. I didn't know the ropes. Now, he—he knew all the markets in Europe and Asia and America where they buy and sell on the quiet. Now here I am, after five years, daren't even offer 'em. I'll wait another five, and then I'll trust to time and luck. Meanwhile, your hand on it, matey, to stand by me till I'm about again."

Johnnie Luck gave his hand.

"Suppose the cat," grinned he, "is one too many for the monkey again——"

"No, no!" said Rolands, very shrewdly. "You ain't got no morals, no precepts, no aims nor no commandments, but underneath you're a durned fool of an English gentleman. Thank 'eaven, I ain't." And he composed himself to sleep.

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A little pale invalid parson-man came to Bung Creek. A very valiant little parson-man, who wheeled in one of those automatically propelling chairs into the one saloon in the place one evening, with these words:

“Gentlemen, I think I have a message for you.”

So he wheeled himself in his chair in among them. There was the usual crowd drinking about the bar, where two women—save the name!—served. Men ridden in from farms outlying, ten, twenty, thirty miles distant, for a bust now the first harvest was over. Engineers from the mines, smart, keen, scientific. Miners from the mines, rough, tired, soused with drink, who had outlived life and outhoped hope. New youngsters, sick of their new farming, come in to Bung Creek to see a bestial thing they called “Life.” There were no old men. Somehow you never see old men out in the North-West; they are all young ones, and aged young ones. They turned to stare inimically at the parson.

“Gentlemen,” said he “I think I have a message for you.”

Besides the message he brought a girl. She walked in beside the chair—a small slim thing with a beautiful little delicate face crowned with a coiffure *à la Joséphine*, very piquante. She wore a modern high-waisted frock of simple muslin, such as had never been seen in Bung Creek, and her hat dangled in her hand, for it was a hot night.

HOW LUCK MET A PRETTY ROGUE

When she came in all oaths stopped, all glasses were put down silently, and all hats that were on came off, the smart engineers with their recent city manners leading the movement. The parson-man's face—large and keen, set incongruously on a small, frail body—lighted.

"I've come to stay among you for a time," said he, bringing the chair to a stand-still plumb up against the bar, "I and my sister. We're going down as far as Calgary, staying a few days at all such places as this, by the way. Wherever a few are gathered together, without a church and without a minister, there my sister and I will pitch our tent for as long as the boys'll have us."

"Mister," said the saloon-keeper, lounging forward, "yo' can't hold church in my bar."

The saloon-keeper was shoved by hostile elbows into the background.

"It's aw right, sir," said a miner, addressing the parson; "yo' come an' be our little pilot. An' Miss, too. 'Tisn't much of a place for yo' to bring a lady to——"

He paused, eyeing her with wonder. Miss stood and gazed at the crowd modestly and kindly.

"Can I speak to them?" she asked eagerly of her brother.

"Speak, Mary," he answered.

She began: "As the gentleman said just now, it would not be right of us to incommode him by holding service in his saloon, and we should not

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propose such a thing. We shall hold services on Sundays in the shed at the back of the gasworks. If you will have us"—this so prettily that smiles and flushes were on half the faces in the room—"we shall stay among you a fortnight, during which time we shall hope for the honour of making the acquaintance of all of you. We shall hope for the honour of your friendship. We're staying at the little hotel by the railway, so you will know where you can find my brother, and he hopes you will all come to him there for any spiritual help, just as if—as if he were in his own parsonage at home. Because he's only taking a holiday—his own people couldn't spare him longer. This is his idea of a holiday! He is such a worker——"

"Now, now, Mary!" said the little parson-man, beaming.

She went on, very prettily. "*Such* a worker he is! And he's collecting for a new organ for our church at home. When we arrived here to-night on the train the town looked fairly deserted. 'No use trying to see anyone to-night, Polly,' he said to me. 'Brother,' I said, 'yes. We'll go down to the saloon straight away and make the gentlemen's acquaintance, and take our first collection for the organ.' And we've come. And I'm not sorry, gentlemen."

She had spoken very quietly and sweetly, and now stood and looked at them, smiling a little. Everybody was staring at her. In a moment or

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two she slowly held out her hat like a collection plate, and it was passed from man to man. They were most of them fairly flush, the farmers from their harvest, the miners with their week's wages in their breeches pockets. Johnnie Luck, who, red and thrilled, had not taken his eyes off such a girl as had never before been seen in Bung Creek, was the first to drop in a dollar. The hat came back to her in about four minutes, weighted with coin and crackling with bills. Remained the saloon-keeper scowling behind his bottles and glasses.

She took the filled hat up to him, amid a sudden murmur of laughter.

"Now you, sir?" she appealed.

"We fellers don't keer for your sort in our places, Miss," said he.

"Please sir," she murmured. He fished up some dirty bills from his trousers pockets, selected, slowly, a four-dollar one, and dropped it into the hat, to the accompaniment of a ripple of applause. She gave the saloon-keeper a smile that was cheap at the price, and came forward, the hat crushed together like a basket in her slender arms.

"Splendid, gentlemen!" said she.

"Splendid, my brothers!" said the little parson.

"All come to service," she urged, "in the shed behind the gasworks to-morrow morning." (It was Saturday night.) "And please, gentlemen, bring whatever instruments you have. And now, good-night."

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The parson started his chair moving. It hit against a corner of the counter. "Bear a hand, mateys!" cried he, cheerfully. Some dozen of them ran to assist, with the kindness of rough brutes to helpless kin. The chair was steered straight for the open door, and the girl walked beside it. But now they would not let their new pilot go without escort—strong escort—to the railway hotel. The smartest of them formed a bodyguard; the others, the drink-soused wrecks who suddenly saw how they had sunk below the level of a dear girl's eyes, envied, but stayed behind. The girl, looking round swiftly, caught Luck's eye and held it. A slight motion of her head brought him walking by her side with his heart thudding and all his nerves a-tingle.

"If you don't mind," she murmured very low, as the cortège set out into the summer dark, through the straggling streets of the town—"I'm rather afraid——"

"Afraid?" he whispered back.

"Of—places like this. But my brother is so brave, though he is helpless."

They were walking so close that their hands, hanging at their sides, touched. Luck's hard fingers closed over something incredibly soft and small—hers. The engineers and the farmers were held in animated converse by the parson from his chair. Luck and the girl drew a thought aside, walking nearly in a gutter.

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"Why," he said, "there's nobody here would harm a hair of your head. Couldn't."

She left her hand in his. "Oh, I know—I know, of course. They've all generous instincts—right instincts. I won't talk about my nervousness. It's stupid. We'll speak of something else. Anything. What do you do? Farm? Mine?"

The question made him look at himself. What did he do?

"Nothing much," he said, going hot red in the darkness. "I work a bit sometimes when I've got to. I'm what is called a remittance man."

After a short silence, "Then—you fool!" said the little girl to Johnnie Luck.

"I know," he nodded. "I'll alter. I'll work. I'll start all new."

She turned her head aside to smile involuntarily. There was no mirth in the smile, though, only half-ironical amusement at his fatuousness.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"Out there just now," he waved a dim arm. "Just outside the town—last house in Bung Creek. It's Rolands' shanty."

"Did you say 'Rolands'?"

"Ah! Fellow who got bucked off a broncho last week and broke his two legs. I'm staying and nursing him a bit; sleeping there nights 'cause he's so nervous."

"Nervous! Why, is he rich, living in a 'shanty' in Bung Creek?"

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"Got some—things, I believe," he replied evasively; "anyway, I go and cook the grub twice a day and sleep there nights."

"You're very good, Mr.——"

"Luck."

"Mr. Luck. And here we are. My brother must go and visit poor Mr. Rolands and read to him. I shall tell him all about it."

With the tiniest pressure of Luck's hand she was beside the invalid chair. Two brawny farmers lifted it and swung it sheer up the hotel steps.

"How strong you are!" she gasped.

They looked very pleased and conscious, settling their soft collars and flaming ties. Had they been wearing them, her words would have set them pulling their waistcoats down. She gave a hand to each, left and right, smiled collectively at the others, reminded them of morning service, and with her brother disappeared within the portal of the little Railway Hotel.

The bodyguard dispersed to various quarters of the scattered town, to sleep—not to drink another drop that night. *A propos* of which, there is no class of men on earth so full of sheer delightful sentiment about women and angels as your Colonial.

Very crowded the next morning was the shed behind the gasworks. A sort of orchestra was formed of a fiddle, six concertinas, a piccolo, a trombone, two combs and tissue paper, bones, and Johnnie Luck's flute. "Mary" conducted the

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hymns, standing on an empty whisky case, in her high-waisted muslin frock, with the wide hat set on her Josephine hair. The hat came off presently when she made another collection for the organ, to which all liberally contributed. The parson, from his chair, prayed and preached gloriously.

Luck told Rolands of the advent of angels.

"Parson's coming to see you, Roly. Talk to you about your sins. Read the Good Book to you."

Rolands started cursing.

"Don' you let any stranger pry round me, Johnnie. Parson or no parson, at first sight I'd——" and he drew his Colt out from under his pillow and flourished it wildly.

"You couldn't, man," said Luck laconically. "He's crippled or something. 'Ull come to see you in a pram."

"Don' care whether he's crippled or not. I'll shoot 'un at sight, I swear, Johnnie Luck. Nobody but what I know is coming near me here. Better the devils you do know nor the devils you don't."

"I'll tell him," said Luck.

When Luck told him, this little parson-man only smiled secretly.

The bachelors of the town organised a dance when the parson and his sister had been a week in Bung Creek. Not one of the usual affairs—ending in drinking and other things—but something more exclusive, select, to which, for lack of something at once more attractive and respectable in

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the shape of womankind, the nearest farmers' wives and the storekeepers' and the hotelkeepers' wives were asked to meet the newly-arrived evangelist. Also a couple of girls imported by one of the engineers from Battleford, and warranted to behave like young ladies. It was a great affair, and it took place in the shed behind the gasworks. The lighting afforded by the oil lamps was assisted by coloured lanterns made somehow, out of something, by the Chinese labour in the place to give a sensation of the real thing. Miss Mary's acceptance—on dainty paper—of her invitation was handed round at the meeting of the dance committee, and was much dwelt upon. They all liked the way she dotted her i's. "And uses 'em, too," said he who was aforetime considered the licensed wag of the place, but who, for the remark, was promptly floored, all but pistoled when he got up, and pitched out of the "Committee Room" neck and crop, with a recommendation not to return to his erstwhile brothers. (The note got lost at that committee meeting, as it changed hands, and twenty-four hours later was taken roughly from where it had been hidden tenderly, between somebody's shirt and skin, on the left side, and was consigned to the nearest temporal flame, and commended to the inaccessible eternal one.)

So it was to be a great night.

The little parson-man, receiving that morning the daily seekers after spiritual advice, which he

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dispensed from ten till twelve, with Miss Mary at his elbow, in the parlour of the Railway Hotel, detained Johnnie Luck till the last idle dog had slouched away.

"A word with you, Mr. Luck," said he, his great ecstatic seriousness shining all over his large pale face and mystic eyes, "about your friend."

"Poor Mr. Rolands," said pretty Mary earnestly. Luck sat down again.

"While all the people in the town," said the parson, with feeling, "are enjoying themselves to-night that poor sick fellow will be alone."

"He'll be as safe as houses," replied Luck. "He keeps a gun under his pillow, and I shall lock him in and put the key in my pocket."

"I don't like it," said the parson. He struck his left hand down on the arm of his chair. "I shall go down to pass the evening with him. Leave that door unlocked, if you please, Mr. Luck, and I will make your friend's acquaintance to-night. I have only delayed doing so because I understood that he is reluctant to see strangers. However, men of my calling, sir, have a right of way. A right of way. Leave that door open and I'll chance the gun."

And the parson looked a very brave, resolute little fellow.

"You'd better not," said Luck, after thinking. "Roly's likely to let it off, if he's nervous, without waiting to look."

"Don't go, brother!" cried Miss Mary.

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"My dear little sister," replied the parson, turning on her a look of great tenderness, but firmness too, "I am going. You will kindly leave that door unlocked to-night, Mr. Luck, and I will wheel myself down to your place when you've all gone to the ball, and trust to my profession and my condition"—he indicated his helplessness—"to do what arms would do for a layman and a strong man. I am going. I have said it. And so, good-morning, Mr. Luck, and thank you for your promise of the open door. A suggestive phrase that—'the open door.' Let all doors be opened, and goodness will enter in. Never fear. Good-morning, Mr. Luck."

Mr. Luck went out, a little dazed by the glances of Miss Mary's eyes, but dimly conscious of having had an unoffered promise accepted. He had strolled a few yards from the hotel when light feet pattered after him. He turned. It was the parson's sister.

"Mr. Luck!" she implored.

He stood. They were just by the railway track; a sweet breeze blowing and ruffling her curly hair. She showed agitation.

"Mr. Luck," she said, clasping her two hands round his arm, "if you've made a promise to my brother, make one to me."

"My eye!" said Luck, off his head. "Not half! Tell me to go and paint the town red. Tell me to go and get the moon for you to wear in your hair to-night. Tell me——"

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But she signified, with a dimpling smile, that it was none of these things.

"My brother," she said, "is so rash. He is afraid of nothing, but I—I who have to take care of him"—the tender baby! Absurd!—"I am afraid. He has made up his mind that he ought to visit Mr. Rolands to-night, and sit by him and read to him while we are all dancing, and nothing will stop him. So, please, promise me that somehow you will see that the gun is unloaded to-night. The—the gun that he keeps under his pillow, you know."

"Easy!" said Luck, sending her a passionate glance. "That's easy done. I wish it was something more."

"You promise?" she faltered.

"*Promise!*" He saw her anxiety. "Don't have the least fear," he said. "It'll be done. And the pilot can walk right in and convert Roly to-night without protest or prejudice."

"You've made me happy," she said. She stood beside him, so small and slight, that she reminded him of a wind-blown flower on the prairie beyond.

"Make me happy," said Luck.

She looked up into his fair red face.

"If I can——"

"Give me the pick of the waltzes to-night, and let me see you home after."

"Promised."

Johnnie Luck thought to-day was a very good day indeed. Remittance men, of course, can't bear

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looking at to-morrow. To-morrow's a fiend when each day dies dead, and each night is an end of it, instead of a bridge spanning Hope and Hope.

When night came dropping, purple and soft, with golden stars in her robe and a golden moon on her brow over the North-West, prairie and river, valley and hill, all Bung Creek except the worst scum, had converged to one point, the shed behind the gasworks. The company had all made what toilets were possible, but there were no dress clothes. It was a night of nights. Johnnie Luck, taking the pick of Miss Mary's waltzes, was a proud young man. English ball-rooms had brought his dancing near perfection; she waltzed beautifully and decorously, not with the stiffness and weight of the rest of the women there, nor with the abandon of those others—who weren't; but as they waltz at home, you know . . . and no blasphemies, please, about home to-night.

Then, when night had come dropping, purple and soft, golden starred and golden crowned, over the town, and at the far end of it, very alone, Rolands lay in a dim shanty staring at a guttering candle, and covering the chest of his dirty night-shirt with the ashes of his vile tobacco, the little parson-man wheeled away from the Railway Hotel. He covered the distance, smiling, in about ten minutes, and, bringing the chair sideways up to Rolands' door as a rider edges a docile steed beside

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a gate, he opened the door and wheeled in, still smiling.

"Good-evening, brother!" said he.

Rolands lay on his back stiffly helpless, but his head rolled round at the voice.

"Nap!" barked he, as a dying man might bark "Hell!" if he had a previous glimpse.

There was dead silence for a moment while the chair wheeled up within a yard of the bed, and monkey and cat eyed each other.

"I've come for the Barney Collection, matey," said the little man.

"I'm damned if you get it, then!" said Rolands hoarsely, diving a hand under his pillow and out again. His visitor sat quietly in his chair while the Colt spoke and powder flashed, filling the air with fumes.

"Curse you!" said Rolands, hurling the revolver at the other's head. "Some 'un 've taken the bullets out! Of all the —— goes, this licks creation. To think you've tracked me here arter five years, you cur, and me not got a darn penny good out of the Barney Collection arter all! If I was only on me legs I'd eat you up, you little hound, that I would!"

Napoleon had caught the pistol in his left hand and cast it away. The left hand held something useful now, that covered the man in the bed.

"Roly," said he, very softly, quietly and humorously, "get out of bed. Never mind your

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broken legs. Crawl out hands first and drop the legs after you. Find me the Barney Collection and hand it up politely. Three minutes I give you, Roly. If you're not out of bed by that, I'll shoot you and search the place myself. I'll shoot you, Roly. Hear that?"

Because he remembered, across five years' gulf, Napoleon's softness, quietness, and humour, in less than the allotted time the sick man had tumbled out of bed somehow, and lay on the floor, legs stiff in splints, groaning and squirming with horrible pain.

"Time presses, matey!" said Napoleon, watching him smilingly as he lay there wincing.

Rolands dragged himself forward on his stomach, cursing unceasingly. The chisel Luck had used a few days ago lay under the bed. He reached for it, wrenched the loose board up, and revealed the collection.

"Intact?" Napoleon asked.

Rolands looked up at him, with his eyes red-shot, and nodded.

"Reach up and lay those two wallets on the foot of my chair," said Napoleon. "I have, as you see, only my left hand, and that is addressing you, my brother."

The wallets were laid, one after the other, on the chair, and Rolands lay on his back on the floor breathing murder.

Napoleon went into silent laughter.

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"Take comfort, brother," said he. "Take the comfort which, in this latest profession of mine, I am able to offer you. Lay not up for yourself treasure on earth, where the moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; you'll remember that in the future, won't you, matey? Well, well, Roly! This has been, spiritually, a very busy week for me, but it behoves me, during the next hour or so, to get still busier. So I must e'en cut short my errand of mercy here to-night; and trusting you will get no ill effects from the excitement of receiving a visitor, and will not suffer, in that position, from any draught from the door, I will leave you, my friend, to compose yourself to sleep."

The chair backed, turned, and wheeled slowly out. The door was pulled to. For a very little way down the street the wheels could be heard running; then silence settled on the shanty. Rolands lay still on his stomach, not risking the pain of turning, laid his dirty face on his arms, and cried.

About four o'clock the next morning Luck came home. He was rather a sad young man, because half-way through the dance Miss Mary, being seized with faintness, had been obliged to return to the hotel to bed. Dashed were those hopes of the walk back with her in the dawn. He pushed open the door of the shanty violently, and there on the

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floor sprawled Rolands, his head on his arms, asleep. Luck woke him.

"Hallo, matey!" said he, irritably. "Been feeling your feet?"

Rolands moved, blinked, stared, and, remembering, started to direct Johnnie Luck to the nearest road to blazes. When his flow of language showed signs of abating, Luck demanded lucid explanation.

Rolands gave that, nearly whimpering with rage.

"Roly," Luck stammered, perspiring, "I'll go and—go and——"

"You!" Rolands burst out. "You thick-yedded fool, you! Go after 'em, will you? Mighty lot o' good, that! They're not in Bung Creek now. They've cleared, hours ago. There isn't nobody in Bung Creek'll ever catch old Nap!"

"Don't see how they could get out. They got no horses. There hasn't been a train stop here this night, and won't be till 6.30——"

"You dum muddler, Johnnie Luck! Nap won't wait on no stopping stations. What time did that girl leave the dance?"

"'Bout eleven o'clock. But——"

"There y'are, then," Rolands yelled. "There wasn't no train stopping, but there was the express through to Winnipeg at twelve. They goes down, plants themselves plumb on the line, gets took up, and rides away from Bung Creek and into the city. Easy as A B C. Easy as easy. Nap, he

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wouldn't stop. I know Nap, curse him! Risky? He takes risks."

Johnnie Luck sat down and put his head in his hands. He sat there for perhaps a quarter of an hour, not making further reply to Rolands, because he heard nothing that he said. Through the open door the dawn light came in. In a few minutes came a distant rumble on the stillness, growing nearer. Luck jerked his head up suddenly, widened his nostrils, pricked his ears, and listened to the five o'clock non-stop that ran through Bung Creek eastward. Two strides brought him to the door, and there against the clean hill lay the oncoming trail of smoke. Johnnie was badly in love, and Love laughs at stopping stations if it can ride on cow-catchers.

"Where you going, boy?" croaked Rolands behind him. "Going arter that collection? Come back, Johnnie!"

But Luck was not pursuing any diamonds ever mined; he was after something far livelier, dearer—jewels set in a human head.

Chapter II

The Forming of the Partnership

To the little semi-paralysed gentleman with the strikingly Napoleonic head, who had arrived at the Ritz Hotel, London, with a pretty sister and a valet, was brought, on the morning after his arrival, a visiting card bearing the name:

Mr. John Luck.

and no address appended thereto.

A waiter brought the card to the sitting-room door of the suite of rooms which the semi-paralysed gentleman had engaged, and gave it to the valet. The valet took it in to his master, Mr.—appropriately named by prophetic parents—"Napoleon" Prince. Mr. Napoleon Prince was having breakfast, it being only eleven o'clock of a hot August morning. His sister, small and slim, with her hair dressed *à la Joséphine* and a high-waisted frock, so that together they looked rather like an impression of the First Empire, was with him at the table. He passed the card to her with a silent laugh—not a

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smile—and she read the inscription. She bit into her red lower lip with her little white teeth, and grew paler.

"Bring the gentleman up, Dapper," said Mr. Prince to the valet.

Dapper, who was really one of those incomparables so rare among the class that ministers, a complete fool, had noticed nothing of the Joséphine girl's agitation. Descending to the lounge, he found the visitor waiting in a seat beneath palms. Meanwhile Napoleon was saying to his sister:

"There is really cause for nothing but amusement here, Mary," tapping the card.

She smiled, and helped herself to a peach.

There was shown into the room a tall, fair young man, burned red and brown by foreign suns. He wore flannel shirt and breeches, long boots the worse for wear, but scrupulously polished, a softly flaming tie, and carried a cowboy hat in a manicured hand. He had presumably made what concessions he was able to the conventions of a call by the boot-cleaning and the manicuring. There was about him, in spite of the outfit, an air of English universities and creamy society. He stood just inside the door, and bowed, as if uncertain of his reception.

"You may go, Dapper," said Napoleon to the servant, who withdrew.

He leaned back in his wheel chair, and looked at Mr. John Luck by the door.

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"Glad to see you, Mr. Luck," said he. "Very glad indeed. Let me see—we met, I think, about three weeks ago, in Bung Creek, a remarkably nasty little mining town in North West Canada. Will you breakfast, or have you breakfasted? Do come farther in, sit down, and never mind the hour of your call. I love informalities. You must have come over on the same boat as my sister and myself."

"Steorage," said Luck coming forward, "which accounts for our not meeting on board. You had just relieved a friend of mine in Bung Creek of his——"

"Of the Barney Collection," said Napoleon with his noiseless laugh. "Just so. And have you followed me to compel me to disgorge? That will not be possible, I am afraid, since the collection is already scattered among a hundred dealers in Europe and Asia. Its value, I may add, is gathered together, and lodged at my bank."

Luck put his elbows on the breakfast table, helped himself to fruit, bit into it, and replied, looking across at Napoleon from a pair of dare-devil eyes.

"Let the Barney Collection go hang! I want to be taken into partnership."

Napoleon did not reply, but turned to his sister.

"Mary," he asked. "Shall we?"

She nodded. "I told you in Bung Creek,"

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she said to Luck, "that you were a fool to scrape along on a peppercorn remittance from home."

"We'll take you into partnership," Napoleon added. His incaution about the arrangement was superb. "I'll put you at once on a trial job. I can plan, but I can't always do. My infirmity renders me so helpless, as well as bringing me into conspicuity. We are not in London for nothing, Mary and I, as you may surmise. We are never anywhere without purpose. In this undertaking I shall be head, you my hands. Mary——"

"I hope that Miss Prince," said Luck quickly, "may in future be able to avoid personal risks. Surely you and I——"

Napoleon looked at him with a glance like the flight of an arrow. "May be, may be!" he agreed. "I see your view. Meanwhile, will you work, if necessary, blindfold?"

Luck assented.

"When I know you better," said Napoleon, "I shall of course give you more confidence. You're the kind of man I like. I wouldn't work with a cad. You are a gentleman. I don't want to know your story or your antecedents. You carry your birthmark. If the world has used you hardly, so much the better. You will have no scruples about hitting back as I hit. Scruples of any sort must go—my partners may have honour, but not honesty; pride, but no principles; manners, no morals. You follow me?"

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"I'm your man," replied Johnnie Luck simply.

"Undoubtedly you are," said Napoleon. "Have you any money?"

The question was asked as from one good fellow to another, and could not offend. Luck shook his head. At a glance from her brother, Mary vanished into an adjoining room, and returned with a little sheaf of bank notes. Napoleon selected two of ten pounds each, and handed them to Luck.

"A loan, a wage, a matter of business," said he crisply. "Take them. You'll have plenty for yourself soon. Book a room somewhere fairly respectable. Buy some clothes. Call on me for more cash when you want it. Change your name if you like."

"Not necessary," answered Luck after a pause. "I dropped half of it three years ago, when I went under, not to disgrace the family."

"Very well," said Napoleon. "Now, your first instructions are these. Go to a certain solicitor's office—No. 121 Oxford Street. The names of the solicitors are Allerby and Weather. You will see Allerby. Ask him if the firm will undertake a case for you—any kind of case you like. Call on your invention."

"Then?"

"Then come and tell me what Allerby says," Napoleon eyed him. "Inquisitive?" said he. "Dissatisfied?"

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"Not a ha'porth."

"Good," replied Napoleon, "and good-morning."

Luck went out, hugging to his heart the wine of unlawful adventure, and the vision of the soft-eyed Joséphine girl. He walked to the Strand, booked a room at a quiet hotel, was fitted presently with ready-made clothes, and about three o'clock, having lunched hugely, walked, a very presentable young Englishman, up Oxford Street.

No imposing premises were Allerby and Weather's but a couple of rooms in a great block of offices—an outer room, where a clerk sat, and a bored office-boy played an adapted sort of "Snap" with dummy, and an inner room, where, presumably, was Mr. Allerby.

Luck was ushered, his card preceding him, into Mr. Allerby's office. He saw a short, round man, growing a little bald, of florid complexion, in appearance of intense respectability. He rose, bowed, and motioned his visitor to a seat.

"What can I do for you, my dear sir?"

Luck stated a case. "The fact is, I'm in a difficulty concerning this beastly Employers' Liability, and so on. My housekeeper, entirely through her own negligence——"

The story rolled nimbly off his tongue. At the close of it he said that, though reluctant to resort to the law courts on the matter, he felt it his duty to make an example of the case, and wished to

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ask Messrs. Allerby and Weather to undertake it for him.

Allerby put his finger tips together, looked judicial, and replied that undoubtedly there was a case, a strong case—touching upon one or two salient points—but that owing to press of immediate business, the firm would not be justified in endeavouring to give their attention to it. He waxed confidential, leaning across his desk.

“My dear—ah—Mr. Luck—I assure you that, though it goes sorely against the grain to say good-bye to an agreeable client like this, we couldn’t do you justice. I must be honest with you. We couldn’t do you justice. Case is this. We’re an old established country firm—very fine practice in the North—and we’re just feeling our way to establishing a London branch. I’m here to feel the way. Business has rushed in to such an extent that—understaffed and overworked as I am here just now, and in these wretched temporary premises—I’ve all I can do to cope with it. My partners are sending up our head clerk from the home branch directly, and I am shortly going to be joined by Weather, junior. If you had come to us a fortnight hence we would have been delighted. As it is——”

With regrets the visitor rose, and held out his hand.

“To whom do I owe the honour of the recommendation?” said Allerby smoothly.

“Fact is,” replied Johnnie Luck, with his boyish

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smile, "I'm a casual sort of chap. I was in this block—going to see the—er—architects on this same floor, and I saw your plate. 'As well drop in here as anywhere else,' I says to myself. That's how the thing was done."

"I see—I see!" said Allerby, with no change of expression. "And I think I may say that you couldn't have done better than to come to us in the ordinary course of things. As it is—well, well, you understand. Good-day!"

A taxi took Luck to the Ritz by four o'clock. He asked for Mr. Prince, and was shown up. Mary was pouring out tea, and received him with a welcoming smile. He gave an account of the afternoon's quest. Napoleon merely nodded, with no surprise.

"Have a cup of tea," he said, "and then go to No. —A Ludgate Parade, to the offices of Messrs. Fowler and Fowler, and see if they will take up the case against your housekeeper. They won't close till six. Call to-morrow for lunch, and tell me the result."

Five o'clock found Luck at No. —A Ludgate Parade. It was a block of business premises. The plates on the doorway showed that the office of Messrs. Fowler and Fowler was on the third floor. Luck mounted. A particularly foolish-looking young clerk opened to him, and went to see if Mr. Fowler were at liberty to see him. There appeared to be no other clerks.

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"Show the gentleman in, Peaswood," said a voice from the inner room, and Luck was ushered into the presence of one of the heads of the firm. A very tall, thin, wooden-faced man received him.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Luck?" he asked, reading from his visitor's card, when he had indicated a chair.

Mr. Luck gave him the tale of the negligent housekeeper.

"You certainly have a case," said the wooden-faced man consideringly. "A very, very strong case indeed. In fact, it is one of those certain cases peculiarly dear to my professional heart." He laughed at this, so Luck laughed too, and they became exceedingly amiable together. "But the fact is, I'm afraid I daren't undertake it. It naturally goes against the grain to send you away, but I have no choice. I'm chock-full of work here—over-full, brimming over. These are temporary premises only, and my present staff is temporary only. Let me explain to you—I don't see why you shouldn't be told how matters stand. We're a very old country firm with a sound practice, and we're feeling our way to the establishment of a London branch. Always move, grow, plant, multiply, that's our motto. And a good one it is—don't you think—eh?"

"Deuced excellent!" replied his much interested visitor.

"Well," continued Mr. Fowler, "the venture

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is exceeding our utmost expectations. Business has fairly rushed in to such an extent that I can't manage it alone. I wrote down to my brothers yesterday—only yesterday it was—and I said: 'Find me some good smart clerks, for I haven't time; and one of you must come up and join me. I must have George up.' George is my youngest brother. As it is, I'm working at tremendous pressure just now. I couldn't do you justice. Of course, if I were one of those fellows who are all for grab—grab—grab—I'd take it and run it through somehow, just to get a fee from you. I shouldn't care morally about winning. But I'm not that sort. No, sir! So I reluctantly say I must decline. You understand perfectly how I stand, I hope?"

"Absolutely," replied Luck unblushingly.

"With many regrets, good-bye," said Mr. Fowler.

Johnnie Luck, having spare cash burning in his pockets, did himself exceedingly well that night. He dined excellently in Piccadilly. He took a stall at a problem play, found it dull, and left it for a music-hall. Had supper at the gayest place he could find, and so, merry, to bed, to sleep the sound sleep that falleth alike on the just and the unjust.

"I will give you," Napoleon began after lunch the following morning, "an outline of explanation to the apparent puzzle. In the first place, neither Allerby nor Fowler is a lawyer at all. There are

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no such firms, as far as they are concerned, as Allerby and Weather, or Fowler and Fowler. They are two of the cleverest members of a gang vaguely known to, but never exactly located by, the police of Europe as the Cosmopolitans. The Cosmopolitans are at present engaged on one of the widest sweeps they have ever undertaken. They have members in every country in Europe, in India, and in certain cities of America, each one in quest of a certain object. One is entrusted with the theft of, say, ducal regalia; another with famous jewels belonging to a famous beauty; others, in Amsterdam and Johannesburg, with illicit diamond buying. These things are sent, as soon as taken, *through the ordinary post*, to Allerby and Fowler, who have been appointed receivers. If flat enough, the jewels or what not are sent between cardboard in legal envelopes, or in boxes made like books, that when wrapped up have all the appearance of books with their jutting covers. They are sent in a hundred ways. It is easier and safer for two men to receive—and two men of apparently respectable calling—than for one only. Most of the property fixed upon by the Cosmopolitans to be stolen has, I believe, been sent now. When it is all gathered together, it will be taken to the house of a member, a dentist in Fitzroy Square. He is pretty well a bogus dentist too, but he only sets up to be a cheap one, and if patients don't pay they must submit to be hacked. All the property, then, would be taken to the basement

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of the house, where there is a work room. In six hours all the jewels could be unset, parted, and rendered safe to offer in certain markets known to the Cosmopolitans. And the proceeds, of course, are divided between the whole syndicate. That is the arrangement as the Cosmopolitans propose. I dispose."

"Are the clerks in Fowler's and Allerby's offices members of the profession?" Luck asked.

"I think not," replied Napoleon. "The fact of their respectability, their ordinary clerkhood, helps to provide a cloak. And they are easily gulled. The Cosmopolitans would not choose bright boys for that work. They are set to do copying—easily found—and to write business letters relating to legal cases, which letters are all sent to members of the band. The thing is surprisingly and beautifully simple."

"And my part?"

"Is to get the whole bag of tricks from Allerby's and Fowler's offices," replied Napoleon. "In two days everything should have been raked in. The collection will have been placed, in wash-leather bags, in a hollow in the backs of their desks. There is a sliding panel on the left, just on the other side of the drawers. Your methods I leave to yourself. This is your trial job. If it comes off, Mary and I take you as partner. Remember this, too. If you like a melodramatic way, and put a pistol to their heads, they can't shout 'Police!' Daren't!

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Remember, though, they'll likely put a pistol to yours. How's that?"

"Not out!" replied Luck.

"Don't come here again till you bring *the* reason," said Napoleon; adding drolly: "We don't want to be mixed up with you. Remember, we have a reputation to look after."

There was laughter in that for the three of them.

It was just two days later when Luck slipped a small but deadly thing of polished steel into his pocket, equipped himself with a small Gladstone bag, empty, and took a hansom to 121 Oxford Street.

Knocking at the door of Messrs. Allerby and Weather's office, he met with no response. He put his head in and looked round; everything was orderly and quiet, but no clerk drove his pen at the high desk, and no blasé office boy played "Snap" with dummy. He felt the blood creeping up in a furious wave to his head.

"Too late! Cleared, by gosh!" he gritted silently, but while he stood there peering round the door, a boy with letters to post ran down the corridor and, passing, volunteered information over his shoulder.

"Allerby's clerk and 'is boy 'ave gone out. Got a day orf for it. Wish Oi 'ad!"

"Day off? What for?" said Luck.

"Whaffor? Test Match. Australia's in." He went on contemptuously. Luck entered softly, and

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closed the door behind him. Very good indeed. Then let us hope Mr. Allerby sat alone in the inner room.

"Now, sir!" said Johnnie Luck to himself, a grin on his lips and light in his eyes, "for the fun!"

In he went—into dead silence, on a dead man. There sat a stiff hulk that had once been the fat Allerby, with its head and arms flopped forward on the desk, and on everything near sinister spurts of red. A smashed inkpot lay upon the floor, near a broken walking stick. The coat was half ripped from the body at the desk. There were signs of a murderous struggle before the deed was done.

"Dead!" said Luck, breathing the word. His grin died. He was alert and watchful, alive to the danger of his position. He took off his hat to the dead thief, acting involuntarily, and touched him with experienced fingers. He had seen violent death in many forms out in the North-West. Allerby had to all appearances been killed two or three hours ago. He was stiffening and cold.

Luck glanced round, and pulled himself back to his errand. A look at the high desk showed him the panel slid back and the aperture empty.

"Lost!" said Luck, gritting his teeth. "Lost, by an hour or two!"

He thought frenziedly. "Fowler!" flashed into his brain. "Better go on and get what's left, any way." He trod on something. He stooped and picked it up. It was a small enamel waistcoat button.

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He pushed the dead man back in his chair to look at his waistcoat. All the buttons were on. He dropped the button into his pocket, went out, locked the door behind him, and took the key, knowing that every hour's grace before the murder was discovered would probably be valuable. He was rather pale under his tan when he came out into Oxford Street, but as nonchalant-looking as ever. He jumped on an omnibus—a harassed 'bus conductor can remember less of faces than a more leisure cab driver, probably—and left the key in it.

It was just after five o'clock, but "Mr. Fowler is in, sir," said the affable little clerk, Peaswood. "Step this way."

Luck was shown in to the wooden-faced man.

"I think I have had the pleasure before, sir," said Fowler, after a pause, during which his eyes had fixed themselves on Luck's face. "Some bother about your housekeeper, as far as I remember. But I'm very busy—very pressed indeed for time this afternoon, and I'm afraid I must treat you with scant civility. Sorry, indeed, to turn a would-be client——"

Luck's glance had found the man's waistcoat buttons. The third was missing.

"My business," he rejoined, "is merely to restore some property to you."

He held out his hand, and in the palm of it lay an enamel waistcoat button. Fowler suddenly began to stare horridly. Luck added:

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"I have just come from an office called Allerby and Weather's."

After a perfectly dead silence of perhaps three minutes Fowler sat down. Luck sat down opposite, and they faced each other across the desk. Fowler began to play with the things on the mahogany slab.

"Who are you, then?" he asked at last.

"My name is Luck."

Fowler consigned the name to perdition, and added: "Profession?"

"Judge for yourself. Do you want your life?"

"It has become, within the last two minutes," said the wooden-faced man, "of absolutely no value at all."

"I had an offer to make."

"An offer?"

"Ransom."

Question and answer came out quite dry and cool.

"As I told you," said Fowler, "I wouldn't give a brass farthing for my life now. I've lost the game. Unless——"

His hands stopped moving about. Luck saw what was in his mind reflected in his face, and showed a revolver muzzle above the desk.

"Ah!" said Fowler.

"You see my terms," said Luck. "Pay or hang."

"Are you a Cosmopolitan?"

"No, sir. I'm an honest thief, who wouldn't go back on a mate."

"Evidently a raw hand," said Fowler. "I'm

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an old one. I could give you a few maxims, but I won't. I'm giving you enough as it is."

His right hand, playing about, opened a little drawer, and extracted a tiny folded paper with powder in it. He emptied the powder rapidly on his tongue, and went on talking. His coolness was superhuman.

"Cure for nerves, that. I've had nerves all day. You wouldn't believe that, would you? But I have. Shan't have 'em again, though. You've got nerve, not nerves. Where'd you learn it? You're Colonial, eh?"

"Curse small-talk!" said Luck.

"Oh, curse anything you like! Going to stay? Because I've got an engagement."

"When?"

"Within the next two minutes, I expect."

"Where?"

"It's not polite to ask," replied Fowler.

A knock came at the door. Peaswood looked in.

"Post, sir," he announced, laid a flat package on the table, and withdrew. The package was shaped like a book, wrapped thinly in brown paper. Luck laid a finger on it.

"Waiting for the last consignment, were you?" he asked.

"Ah!" said Fowler. "That's greed, that is. See where greed leads you. I ought to have cleared with what I'd got directly I'd—said good-bye—to him."

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He referred to his victim expressionlessly.

"Greatest mistake in life," he prosed, "to be too thorough."

A sudden spasm jerked him. He bit into his lower lip.

"Nerves!" he ground out diabolically. "Wait a minute." He dropped his head down on his arms a second or two, where it writhed about. Suddenly the writhing stopped, and he sat strangely still. Then Johnnie Luck knew what he ought to have known five minutes ago. It was not nerves, but the powder in the paper from the drawer, and the wooden-faced man had gone to fulfil a long engagement.

Luck got up like a man in a nightmare, and crept, scarcely daring to breathe, to the back of the desk. Suppose Peaswood looked in! He groped for the panel, and after a century of a minute found something slide under his fingers. An aperture was revealed, in which lay some dozen or so smallish wash-leather bags. He crammed them into his Gladstone adding the book-shaped packet. His hands were trembling.

"Now then, little girl!" he savagely adjured himself. He straightened up, and opened the door. Little Peaswood, foolish-looking, with receding chin and weak eyes, was scratching away on a high stool.

"Oh! Ah!" said Luck, reopening the door, to put his head in again, as if in response to some last

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remark from the figure at the desk. "I'll tell him. Thanks awfully, if you can spare him. See you to-morrow."

Out he came finally, shutting the door, and addressed Peaswood.

"I say, Mr. Fowler says you'd be good enough to direct me to Adam Street, as it's all on your way home. He says there's nothing more for you to do here to-night."

With anyone less obviously a fool, the thing might not have worked. As it was, very joyful at the idea of getting away twenty minutes early:

"Very pleased indeed, sir," said Peaswood, jumping at the suggestion. "I'll just put me desk straight, tidy up, get me 'at."

"I'm in a deuce of a hurry," replied Luck, leaning against the inner door.

"You don't come back to lock up?" He threw out a feeler as they set out together.

"Mr. Fowler does it, sir," replied Peaswood. "He usually stays later'n me."

Then, to make assurance doubly sure, Mr. John Luck took little Peaswood, solicitor's clerk, and made him gloriously drunk. He was as drunk as some lords—a good deal drunker than most lords. Having done this in a kind, friendly and condescending manner, Luck taxied to the Ritz. Napoleon and his sister were in their sitting-room. He gave the story hastily but exactly, and handed over the Gladstone. Napoleon counted the wash-

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leather bags, nodding and listening without comment. Then:

"Good, *partner!*" said he, holding his left hand out to grip Luck's. And:

"Bravo, *partner!*" said the *Joséphine* girl, taking Luck's other hand between two as soft as rose leaves.

"Now," said Napoleon hastily, "you must get. Get as fast as you can get. To-morrow morning there'll be a cry for the man who last saw Fowler alive, and that clerk will have your description pat. Catch the night boat, and go across to Paris. Lie very doggo. Polly and I are coming over in three weeks' time. Meantime we stay here."

He paused.

"Any questions now?"

"Yes," replied Luck. "How did you know of the Cosmopolitans' plans? What are your methods of gaining information?"

"In this case," said Napoleon, "it was simple. I am a Cosmopolitan."

"What! Then——"

He waved a hand. "You're going to say that I cheated my own brotherhood, using you as a cat's paw. The answer to that is that four years ago the Brotherhood cheated me. I never forgive, John Luck, and I never forget. They owed me. They have paid. The bill is receipted. As for cat's paw"—he indicated his paralysed limbs—"I want hands," said he. "I am but head. You go to Paris. Mean-

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while the society's safe. Those two dead men tell no tales."

"But you?"

"I tell no tales either," replied Napoloen, smiling his enigmatic smile. "I stay here and uplift my voice in anger among the Cosmopolitans, because this widely organised scheme has seemingly smashed. The jewels! The jewels! Where are the jewels? Get away, boy. When I see you in Paris we'll both be rich men. Polly, give him money, and send him away."

Glancing at the pair, he wheeled away into the next room, letting the folding doors fall to after him. Luck was left gazing at Mary across the table. She rose, and unlocking a desk, produced bank-notes, which she counted and gave to him.

"Fifty," she said.

He still looked.

"What, more?" she asked, smiling.

"Mary," said Johnnie Luck fervently. "I worship you——"

"People do," said Mary. "I wish they wouldn't."

"And I want those little hands of yours kept out of all risks. Now your brother and I are partners——"

"Silly boy!" said Mary to Johnnie Luck. "Go to Paris. Wait for us. We'll adventure gloriously there. Here's the fifty."

Besides the fifty pounds, she decided on giving Johnnie Luck something else. A kiss. *The* kiss of

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Luck's life up till that moment. Thus she sent him away happy.

For little Mr. Peaswood, too, was a happiness of short life. About eleven o'clock, in the warmth of a perfect August evening, he managed to convey himself home.

"It wash a goo' world, my boysh. Never had such a time wiv a toff! Shime said toff couldn't jine in's own treat to the pickshers afterwards. Got an engigement. Engigement! Engi—! Rich! that ish! We'd 'ave shown 'im engigement! We'd 'ave mide an evernin' of it! We'd 'ave interdooced 'im to a little bit o' loife! We are one of the boysh. We care for nothin'——"

Not even for an absent landlady's injunction for in-comers, printed in pencil on cardboard, hanging from the gas bracket by the front door:

HUSH!

MIND THE CLOTHES BASKETS ON THE STAIRS

"But tra! la! la! We will not 'ush! And 'ang the clothes baskets on the stairs!"

Chapter III

The Eyes of the Countess Gerda

AMONG the new tenants in the new block of very desirable flats not far from Victoria were a lady, young, charming and alone; a semi-paralytic man of any age from thirty to forty, accompanied by a pretty sister; and a tall, bronzed young man, who had apparently nothing more serious to do than to organise beautifully his bachelor housekeeping. The first named lady had been installed in Flat 24 for a month when the invalid and his sister moved into No. 20 of the flats below; the bronzed young man entered into possession of No. 23 a few days after the occupation of No. 20.

The young man, whose name, as testified by the indicator in the vestibule, was Mr. John Luck, had not been there many days before he made the acquaintance of the invalid and his sister. It was begun in quite an accidental fashion, as the hall porters saw—the trio most obviously never having met before—and it progressed casually and as politeness demanded, beneath the eyes of the same porters and a lift attendant of inquiring mind—just a “Good-morning, again!” or “Fine weather!” or “Beastly

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day!" and the like. A few days of these vestibule meetings resulted in the discussion of a camera which the invalid man was taking into the Green Park for the purpose of snapshotting winter scenes. It appeared Mr. John Luck knew a good deal of that make of camera; the invalid—Mr. Napoleon Prince, as testified by the indicator—had not used it before.

"You were just going out?" said the little paralytic pleasantly. "Only for a walk? Walk our way, won't you, for a few minutes, and go on telling me about this machine?"

So that Mr. John Luck walked out by the chair of Mr. Napoleon Prince, which he wheeled himself, and by the side of the very pretty girl, his sister. All of which was seen and observed by the porters and the lift-man.

"If people of our profession only realised, Johnnie," the little man in the chair observed as they passed out of the quadrangle, "what a deal depends on these seeming trivialities, there would be more genius rewarded, and fewer police triumphs."

"We have nothing definite in view, Nap?" the young man hazarded.

"No, no!" Napoleon replied. "Why should we? We are gourmets, not gourmands. We have enough for the present, *n'est-ce pas, mes enfants?*"

"Let's be good for a while, Nap," said the girl.

"You hear that, Luck," said Napoleon, smiling. "Mary tells us to be good. We will settle down

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for a few months, and be beneficent citizens, then. We'll do the theatres, and you shall take Mary to the races, and we will make the acquaintance of our neighbours, and entertain them innocently."

"Hurrah!" cried Mary. She wore a high-waisted coat of clinging lines, furs, and a wide hat, and she looked exquisite.

Johnnie Luck walked with freer step.

"Good!" he agreed. "Very good!"

"I believe," said Napoleon, glancing at them, one on either side of him, as he wheeled along past Buckingham Palace, "that you are both wretchedly respectable at bottom." They turned into the Green Park. "Leave me to run about and take my photographs, and philosophise on the profits of respectability, while you two take the brisk exercise that is good for you, and philosophise on—anything you like."

There was the faintest trace of a smile—a little grim or wistful—on his large pale face as he steered away from them. They walked about the Park for an hour, seeing nobody but each other, hearing nothing but their own low-toned talk, and forgetting entirely the size of the world—theirs being populated by two—until running wheels beside them brought them back to realisation of Napoleon.

"I am sorry," said he, "but I have used all my plates, and want my lunch. Johnnie, our acquaintance has ripened sufficiently, I imagine, for me to ask you to share the lunch."

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The trio went home, and lunched together in the Princes' dining-room. After the meal:

"Mary is going to shop," said Napoleon. "She is going to the Stores, because it is so respectable. But you, Johnnie——"

Johnnie Luck looked hopefully at Mary, who, in the sweetest of frocks *à la Joséphine*, was standing to warm one small slippered foot at the fire.

"Don't take him with you, Mary," said Napoleon whimsically. "I want someone to talk to." Adding: "And you don't know him well enough, either."

She laughed, told Luck to stay, and left them.

"Get cigars, Johnnie," said the little man, "draw up that chair, put your feet on the mantelpiece—because it must be such a fine thing to be able to do—and make yourself generally comfortable."

They smoked at ease, each looking into the fire silently. Presently:

"Like your place, Johnnie? I've never asked."

"All right, thanks."

"I mentioned you should take number twenty-three or twenty-four. Better not to be on the same floor, you see."

"I see. Oh! yes, these little cautions are worth observing, of course. Number twenty-four was taken before we came, you know."

"So I suppose," said Napoleon, looking into the fire. A quarter of an hour ticked by before he roused himself to say anything further. Then it was, gently:

"Johnnie, you're seeing something in the fire,

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ain't you, old man? Don't be ashamed to be sentimental; be proud of it. I was seeing much the same sort of thing, I guess."

John Luck had seen the Joséphine girl's little face, of course, gleaming up at him, but——

"*You!*" he said, confounded, to Napoleon. "*You, Nap!*"

"Yes, I," said Napoleon, with a snap, looking up. "I've got a man's heart, I suppose, if I've only got half his body. And at *that* time, you see, I was whole. It was seven years ago, nearly."

Luck nodded, and looked at him in a man's silence of sympathy.

"It was the only time I've ever been done, Johnnie," said the little man. "Done, and not got my own back. You see, it was a woman. Like to hear? I'd like to tell you. I was travelling in Italy for the Cosmopolitans' gang I've told you about, and we'd got a great scoop on. I was their smartest man, and they gave the chief part to me. Well, I was in the Opera House in Florence one night, when I saw one woman among all the others. It was a crowded house—Royalty there—but after I'd looked at her I didn't see much else—you know. She was young and dark, with marvellous eyes; dressed in white with a scarlet cloak. She was with a man, and they sat close to the orchestra. I managed to follow them out, and to see her close. My word, Johnnie, magnificent! But, I thought, not happy. She had no gloves on, and there was no wedding

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ring—so she was, that far, free. I went home and dressed. Next morning— Ever been in Italy, Johnnie?”

Luck shook his head.

“Such mornings as you get!” said Napoleon. “It was spring, I remember, about March— Ever read poetry, Johnnie?”

‘ . . . white and wide,
Washed by the morning’s water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain side.’”

The little man’s voice caressed the words melodiously. He went on:

“I met her in the square, riding down to the river. I kept her in sight all the morning, and followed her when she rode at a foot pace back to an hotel. So I learned her address. I forgot all about the Cosmopolitans, and all that sort of truck. There seemed only one thing that mattered. . . . She was evidently staying at the hotel. I learned her name: the Countess Gerda di Veletto. I wrote to her, signing myself: ‘A very mad Englishman,’ and giving an address. Johnnie, boy, that same evening a page from the hotel brought me an answer. I have it here in my letter case. I’ve always carried it. Like to see it? Because I’d like to show it to you.”

The folded sheet that he pulled out was worn almost to tatters at the creases. Johnnie Luck, feeling rather foolish and rather intrusive, read:

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MY DEAR STRANGER,

Your tribute pleased me. Did you suppose it would not? Don't you know that a woman can never receive too many kind words? Where did you sit in the Opera House? And I wonder if I saw you as you saw me? I do not think it, because, if so—— But I do not think I had better write what I was going to write. It would not be wise. I only want to thank you for the pleasure of your assurances, which come to me in a time of deep trouble and anxiety. And although I have never met—and never shall meet—my very mad Englishman, I am pleased to sign myself,

His friend,

GERDA DI VELETTA.

Luck passed this back in silence, and Napoleon returned it to the letter case, and thence to his inside breast pocket. He went on evenly.

“Johnnie, by that time I was loving her as I never loved a woman before, and never shall again. Her ‘deep trouble and anxiety’ gave me thought. I wrote her, crazed. Could I do something? Might her mad Englishman meet her at any hour and any place? Any way, would she command him? She wrote back that she could not see me that evening, as a friend would be dining with her. A friend? Who was this ‘friend’? I got half mad with jealousy, and watched the hotel, as if I could pick out her visitor from the crowds. But when I saw the man who had been with her at the Opera go in, I knew that I had picked him out.

“I went home and wrote to her again. I begged her to make an appointment with me, let me do something for her if I could. She answered at once, as before, saying that I could call the next day,

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but she could see nobody till then. She was at her wits' end to escape from some trouble. I read a good deal between the lines of that letter, as she meant me to do. She knew how to leave room between the lines—which is an art, my dear Johnnie, of the highest order. I saw despair and fear in it. She said recklessly at the end that it was only monetary, her trouble. Five hundred pounds, after all, would clear her, and she was going to ask her friend for it that night. I remember phrases such as: 'I'm not that kind of woman, either, you very mad Englishman. . . . It goes cruelly hard . . . but there! he will be only too eager to give, as it will be only too bitter for me to take.' And then, with a sort of sudden return to formality, she added that she would be pleased to give me a few minutes' interview the next day.

"Johnnie, Gerda knew her book, boy. She realised, as very few people of our profession realise, what an important study is your book of psychology. Women, as a rule, are better at that game than men. Criminologists trace crime to heredity, to suggestion, to physical phenomena, to environment. But women go one better than that. They use the emotions; they know the weight of an eyelash, the value of the turn of a head, of a word, and more, of an unsaid word. It was what she did not say in that letter that made me see red and shake with absolute bestial rage. I thought of the chap at the Opera—recalled his face—his tricks of gesture, his age, all about

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him. He was a nice-looking, young, dark fellow, but I got a vision of Mephistopheles. I imagined him driving a bargain with her for the five hundred. I had plenty of money—the Cosmopolitans' money—on me. I got notes for five hundred and put them into a letter, begging her to take them from the very mad Englishman, who would not even ask to see her in return, rather than from her 'friend.' But how I hoped for that meeting she'd promised! She sent an answer filled in between the lines—you know. I was to call and be thanked in person for 'the loan.' The next evening, at seven, I was to dine with her."

"And?" Luck asked, after a longish pause had fallen.

Napoleon replied tersely.

"I went, blindfold as I had acted, and shaking with excitement, to her hotel at seven o'clock. I came out at seven ten, sane. She had left early in the morning with, presumably, several articles of jewellery missed by other visitors, and my—or rather the Cosmopolitans'—five hundred pounds. Police inquiry—from the other victims, not me, Johnnie—elicited the fact that she had left Florence with her 'friend,' but they could not be traced. I cursed solid for some while—imagining her laughter."

Luck nodded.

"It must have been the softest thing she'd ever been on," said Napoleon, "and yet she was dealing with the cleverest man she had, in all probability, ever met with."

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He made the assertion ruminatively, and with no conscious arrogance.

"Since then," he resumed, "I have relied less on science in my profession, less on logical sequence, and have recognised that chance, emotion and adventure are very potent contingencies to be reckoned with. Her eyes had melted me. My science, my logic, my ingrained suspicion of the world, went by the board. It was, as I say, a very soft thing. She could not have expected to draw the money before she had granted me an interview, at least. And how she must have laughed when she did it! She and her friend! It must be the joke of their lives. And when you come to think of it, Johnnie, it is excruciatingly humorous that I—I—I—should have tumbled into *that!*"

There was nothing in the little man's pale face to betray that he had ever felt the excruciating humour of the situation, so John Luck did not laugh either.

"Logic is a fool to love," said Napoleon.

"It is an interesting story," Luck remarked.

"What reminded me of it," said Napoleon, turning his head, and fixing his auditor with his brief bright glance, "was seeing her eyes in the fire just now, as you were seeing someone else's, eh, Johnnie? I've never, these seven years, forgotten Gerda."

"Nor forgiven her?"

He evaded that. "And what called up those eyes, Johnnie, was seeing another pair very like

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them as I came out of the building this morning. She was a pretty woman named Muswell, the lift-man told me."

"My neighbour, I expect, in number twenty-four."

"That so? Do you know her? She looked wistful, worried, down on her luck, though Mary tells me her frock must have cost exactly ten pounds nineteen and eleven pence halfpenny."

"No, I don't know her. Often met her going up or down, of course. I've noticed the worried air. Perhaps she's just lonely. Seems a sin for a pretty woman like that to be living all by herself."

"She has eyes just like Gerda's," said Napoleon softly. He looked into the fire again, his chin sunk a little, his face merely a pale mask. Then he asked:

"Have you ever credited me with weakness, Johnnie?"

Luck smiled so broadly at this question that a spoken negative was unnecessary.

"Yet all men are weak," said Napoleon, answering the smile, "and my weakness, my soft spot, my tenderness, is for eyes like Gerda's. I loved her—and she hurt me. She had never set eyes on me—I just worshipped from my distance. Never mind. I loved her, and love is love, and, as I say, above all the logic in the world. I had a charwoman in Paris once with eyes a little like hers, and I did what I could to help that charwoman because of Gerda. Gerda wouldn't have done it, but never mind. Now

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I meet Mrs. Muswell here in these flats, and she has eyes that are the very duplicate of Gerda's. She looks lonely, unhappy, unlucky. Convention forbids Mary to call on her, and offer her some palliation of her loneliness, because it seems that she arrived here first. Apparently she will not call on us. And I want to do some good turn for a girl with Gerda's eyes. Arrange the matter for us, Johnnie."

"How?"

"Make her acquaintance, as she's next door. Make her talk. Make her tell you she's lonely. Then beg her to call on those nice people, the Princes, whose acquaintance you have made since coming here. And so on."

"How do I make her acquaintance, Nap?"

"Oh! run along, Johnnie!" said Napoleon, vastly tickled at this helplessness. "You are a very pretty young man—don't blush! You have the ordinary social gifts, and a pair of eyes to appreciate the blessings the gods grant you in the way of alluring neighbours. You have a charming flat next her own, and you are both solitary young people. The conditions are so favourable as to allow of positively no interesting obstacles to surmount at all."

Mary here returned from the Stores, and voted her shopping dull.

"Polly," said her brother, "Luck, here, is going to bring his neighbour, Mrs. Muswell, to call on you to-morrow afternoon. It is an old love-story——"

Mary looked frostily from one to the other.

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"Of mine, child, not Johnnie's," Napoleon continued, preparing to wheel from the room; "an old love-story of which her eyes remind me. So we are going to be exceedingly kind to Mrs. Muswell, child, please."

A quite beautiful woman opened the door of her flat to Mr. John Luck the next morning. She was tall, dark, slight almost to leanness, and vivid; she looked any age from twenty-five to thirty, but it was most probably thirty. She wore an artful gown. Her eyes were very lovely—big, straight, innocent, appealing.

"I am sorry to trouble you," said Mr. John Luck, with his engaging smile, "but I have lost my kitten, and I think she must have come in to you, with the milk, or something. May I look, please?"

The lovely apparition looked Mr. Luck over.

"Come in," said she simply, and, closing the door behind him, led the way to a little drawing-room as artful as her frock. A very queer Eastern little drawing-room. She motioned him with frank kindness—her absence of all conventional mannerism was refreshing—to a seat, and inquired the name and description of the kitten.

"She answers to anything, but is generally called 'Puss,'" replied Mr. Luck admiringly, "and she is about the most spiritual cat I have ever met."

"What colour is your dear little kitten?"

"She is white," said Luck. "All spirits are,

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you know. I am sure you would love her. Are you fond of cats?"

"Very," she answered, smiling softly and doubtfully.

She stared at him much as a puzzled child might do. Then they rose and looked for the kitten all over the flat, but it could not be found. No answer came to any appeal of "Puss!" or any other name. The search proving futile, they returned to the drawing-room, and sat down again.

"I am your next-door neighbour, you know," he said, when one or two topics had been exhausted, and she gave him no unkind hint to go.

"Oh!—yes?" she said doubtfully.

"They are jolly flats, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"But even a flat is very lonely for one person, isn't it?"

"Yes." She added with great simplicity: "I am very lonely."

"What a sin, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Muswell," said she, hesitating over the name. He registered the hesitation. "I have no friends at all in London now." And she sighed.

"Why not call on some of the people here? The newer comers, you know."

"Oh, do you think they——"

"Would love it?" said Mr. Luck. "I do. There's a charming pair, brother and sister, just below you, whose acquaintance I've made since coming here.

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They'd be delighted, I know they would. Their name is Prince."

"Oh! Do you mean the poor little invalid gentleman, Mr.—?"

"My name is Luck. And I do mean the invalid and his sister. I say, are you very, very conventional?"

She shook her head, still smiling her doubtful, half timorous smile.

"No, I'm afraid I've lost touch with English conventions. I—I've been out of England so long."

A faint sigh again, and the words seemed to call up to the dark wells of her eyes some best-forgotten thing from fathoms deep.

"Then," he said, "do let me take you down to call this afternoon, Mrs. Muswell. Will you?"

After the necessary preliminary hesitations, she consented.

"Although," she said, "I am afraid of making friends. I——"

"Why should you deprive people?"

"My story," she said after a pause, "is rather an extraordinary one. I—I could hardly tell such a stranger, but——"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Luck, promptly rising to take his leave. They skook hands by a sort of mutual impulse, she looking at him very straightly, he looking back very reassuringly. So he returned to his own demesne, anticipating with pleasure the hearing of this pretty woman's extraor-

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dinary story at a very near date, for he was but human. "In here after dinner," said he, looking thoughtfully round his drawing-room, "over coffee, with a dim light. Almost any cushions would suit her as a background."

He took her down that afternoon to call on the Princes, as prearranged.

The visit was a success. Afterwards Mary said, but kindly, that she looked like a woman with a story.

Luck assented grudgingly to the possibility.

Napoleon, with his mysterious smile, agreed with Mary. The young widow certainly had a story. He looked remotely into the fire. Probably he was seeing Gerda's eyes.

The young widow's extraordinary story was not long withheld from Johnnie Luck.

That same evening, having dined in his flat, he was seated at his piano, playing softly, and singing softly in a voice worth better things, some doggerel nigger melodies, when a lady was ushered in on him by the very discreet servitor whom Luck had engaged.

It was Mrs. Muswell.

She was in a simple black chiffon gown, and she looked appealing.

"You will think this very strange, I suppose," she began, as he jumped up with every manifestation of pleasure to meet her. "At least, I suppose you will think it strange—I forget just exactly what

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one may or may not do in England. Can I sit down?"

"I am sure you may do that," said he, smiling, and hastily dragging forward a chair which held cushions of the right colour for her complexion.

She dropped a soft black roll which she carried—it looked like a small hearthrug—and sank into the chair.

"*You* were so very kind to me this morning and this afternoon," she said hesitatingly, "that I would like to—to tell you about myself, unconventional as I suppose it seems. But then, as I told you, I have forgotten how to be properly conventional like your nice English girls."

She bit her lip, and her eyes looked as if they held tears.

"My dear Mrs. Muswell," he said interestedly, sitting down near her, "conventions are always wrong, because they indicate a state of things that calls for unnatural restraint. Whereas things are not in the least in that most deplorable state. Why can't we all be natural, and say what we like to each other? Why make acquaintance by the almanac?"

"Why, indeed?" she echoed innocently. "Can I, then, tell you everything, and ask your advice upon the situation, because I have no older friend than yourself here? Would a nice English girl do it?"

"She would love it," replied Luck earnestly.

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She was very charmingly full of doubts and indecisions, half smiling. "I was brought up in England," she said; "my mother was English, but my father was Italian. You can see the Italian in me, can you not?"

The discreet servitor here brought in the coffee tray, to which he had discreetly added a second cup and saucer, and withdrew. Luck ministered to his guest; she tasted the coffee and gave a little exclamation.

"How good! I have not had it so good since I escaped from——"

She stopped. "We used to eat sweets with it there," she said rather faintly. "Rich, delicious sugary things like chocolate, marrons glacés, almond paste, crystallised violets and Turkish delight all rolled together."

A box of chocolates, bought for Mary, was pushed away behind the furnishings of an occasional table. Luck found this, and, untying the ribbon, offered the sweets.

"It is the nearest thing I can do," said he apologetically.

She helped herself. She had very white teeth, over which her red lips crinkled back prettily. "Not that I want to remember anything about it," she sighed. "It is all too painful—too degrading—too——"

"I assure you that I will give you the best advice in my power."

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"I know it, and I am going to tell you my story."

He sat before her, holding the open chocolate box; she began to talk, stopping now and again to help herself and nibble at the bonbons as a child may nibble sweets and tell a fairy tale.

"My mother, as I told you, was English, my father Italian. I was brought up during my childhood in England, but when I was eighteen I went with my parents to Paris. There my mother died, and I was left entirely to my father's care. It was not good care. Heaven forgive me for speaking ill of him, but it was very bad care. So bad for a girl of only eighteen, straight out of a convent school in England."

"A convent school?"

"Yes. I spent my holidays there as well as the terms. It was very peaceful and sweet; I loved it. One lived asleep. When I came out of that dear place the awakening was very sudden, crude, bewildering. But then I realised the world outside, and that I was alive in it. I simply threw myself into all the excitement my parents provided. When my mother died, my father went on providing excitements. I played, like a child still, with everything and everybody, till at last, seeing that I could not or would not understand that I was grown up, and what were his aims for me, my father spoke. 'Julie,' he said—in Paris it was, after a ball—'when are you going to marry?'

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"The question was a horrid shock. I had not thought of marrying. I was happy. My world was Arcadia—not a dull one, of course, in Paris—but mentally Arcadia. 'I shall always stay with you, papa,' I said to him lightly. 'I have other plans for you, *ma chérie*,' said he to me heavily. And the next day he introduced me to Prince Mustapha. The prince had just come from Constantinople on a diplomatic mission, I understood. He was quite young, charming, and polished like our own men. I went about with him a great deal, my father dropping chaperonage when possible. I let the prince, as it were, into my Arcadia among all my other friends. I had very few women friends; but that, of course, was my father's fault. You believe me that it *was* Arcadia?"

She looked like a child afraid of the construction which may be put by an irreverent elder upon the truth which it is telling.

"I see you believe me," she resumed. "You are good, kind. Then came a horrible day; my father storming and telling me that I was talked about in every club and café in Paris; and Mustapha proposing marriage. I was so afraid of my father, so anxious to escape from such a blustering parent, that I accepted the prince. We were married in Paris—I, like an ignorant girl, not questioning the validity of the rite between one of his religion and one of mine, and we—my husband and I—travelled back together to Constantinople."

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A long pause.

"I do not really think that I can go on," she said very faintly. But when she had dried her eyes and eaten a few more chocolates she insisted bravely on doing so.

"The prince had a harem——"

"Good heavens!" cried Luck.

"A harem. And I was one of his—called by courtesy—wives. I had been in his house twenty-four hours before I knew. I reproached him passionately. I said: 'If my father knew of this——' He replied: 'Your father knew well. I paid him twenty-five thousand francs to help him with his debts.' So I understood that it was a question of buying and selling. I, a free girl with English blood in my veins, had been sold! I saw what a broken reed I had to lean on in my father—my only reed, too! What could I do? I had been with Mustapha for a week. I—I stayed. I became one of the harem. One of the sleepy, fattening, decorated pets and slaves. I was that for eight years, and suddenly I revolted strongly enough to devise, with all the odds against me, my escape. I planned it for seven months, watching every sign and listening to every sound of life I could catch from outside to help me build a scheme. One thing I was resolved on: I would not go penniless.

"Just at that time there was a craze among us in the harem for making mats of black silk and wool an inch and a half thick. I had been for

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eight years Mustapha's favourite, and he had lavished jewels on me. As soon as I began to plan my escape, I commenced to hide these chains and necklaces in the weaving of my mat. One by one, very cunningly, I put my ornaments away, always keeping up to the last something to wear when Mustapha sent for me. I quarrelled with the other women, who had hated me from the beginning, and for seven months we hardly spoke, so I could sit away from them, and they never came to look at and handle my work, and chatter about it, as they did with one another's. By the time the mat was nearly finished my plans were ripe, and occasion came. We always walked at will on the roof garden. I went up alone with my mat one evening, and dropped myself right down from the roof into the top of a big fruit tree underneath. It seemed a sickening distance. I lay there and looked over the wall into the street. It was a comparatively quiet spot, away from the market place and principal squares. At last I dared to climb down and over the wall by the aid of the fruit trees that were trained along it. So I walked out free into a street for the first time in eight years. As free as I could be, that is. Of course, I went veiled. I got my passage money and an escort privately from the British Consul, and so I came back at last to England and to London."

She stopped to eat chocolates, and for some time there was a silence.

"Poor, poor girl!" said Johnnie Luck at last.

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"You are good, kind," she said softly. "Advise me."

"What to do with your life? I couldn't."

"No, no!" said she. "What to do with my jewels. They represent my capital, you see. I have no money. I must sell them, yet very privately, because I could not bear anyone to hear this story—except you, of course, my good friend. The English are so prejudiced. I want to start a new life among them fairly. Besides, there is another reason why I must keep my secret." She looked reserved.

"Your story is, of course, perfectly safe with me."

"I know it. To return to the jewels, there must be at least ten thousand pounds' worth in the mat."

Luck looked respectfully at the soft black roll lying at their feet.

"Would you confide in the Princes?" he asked. "Napoleon Prince knows a great deal about—er—the—the curio markets of the world, and he might be able to assist you."

Reluctantly she consented to confide in Mr. Napoleon Prince at the earliest opportunity—on the morrow, if possible.

After she had gone, leaving a faint aroma of some Eastern perfume clinging to his cushions, Luck descended to No. 20. He found Napoleon up, smoking before a gorgeous fire, but Mary had retired early to bed.

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"News, Johnnie?" said the little man, smiling slightly.

Luck related Mrs. Muswell's story. "Preposterous, eh?" he asked.

Napoleon had listened through it, merely nodding and commenting, with very little amazement. "Preposterous enough to be true," he replied oracularly. "You will learn not to discredit melodrama, Johnnie, presently. All the melodramas ever written] are nothing to the melodramas that are lived every day."

"She's going to ask your advice on my recommendation, Nap."

"She couldn't come to a better quarter," replied Napoleon, looking into the fire.

"You will help her, then, in some way, like a good chap?"

"I shall help—Gerda's eyes!" said Napoleon, smiling.

"Good-night, Nap."

"Night-night, Johnnie."

And he was left looking at the eyes in the fire.

The tenant of No. 24 came, according to arrangement, the next afternoon to the Princes' flat. She carried with her a rolled-up black bundle—the mat woven, according to her story, in the harem of Prince Mustapha. Luck was there. Mary was charmingly kind. Napoleon pressed her hand in his left one, and said that he hoped she would not be

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vexed to know that Mr. Luck had already told them the story. Mr. Luck thought she might be glad to be saved the very painful recital.

No, she was not vexed. Yes, she was glad—thank you, kind people. She unrolled the black mat.

“Feel!” she said to Napoleon.

He felt, among the softness of the silk and wool, chains and layers here and there of hard, lumpy substances.

“Necklaces?” he queried.

She answered eagerly, frankly: “Two necklaces, nearly a dozen brooches, a girdle, a chain, many pairs of earrings, ruby, emerald and topaz. The necklaces are diamonds and pearls. How can I sell these things so as not to excite suspicion and call attention to myself? Mustapha may be looking for me, and I dare not attract his notice.”

“He could not touch you in England, dear child,” said the little man, with a fatherly air.

“But the story!” she said passionately. “The story! That would come out! And it must never be known—because I—I have so much at stake—I——”

Suddenly she put her handkerchief to her face and sobbed, her shoulders rocking. Napoleon watched her thoughtfully. Luck was really distressed. Mary administered what comfort she could give to a stranger and rang for tea.

During the dispensing of it the visitor recovered

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somewhat, and looked up with a quivering smile through tears that made her black eyes shine like jewels.

"What must you all think of me?" she gasped. "I am sorry. I am very sorry. But, as I said, I have so much at stake. I—I am going to be married."

She sipped her tea, while Mary and Luck looked at her with exclamations of mutual sympathy and interest.

"You see," she said in a low voice, "I am not really Mustapha's wife. The marriage in Paris was not valid. In spite of my—my degradation, I am free. Let me tell you." She caught Mary's hand, looking with great understanding from her to Johnnie Luck. "You, dear girl, you will feel with me. On my way home to England I met, in Austria, a young officer of the Austrian army, on leave. We—we"—her eyes drooped—"we loved each other from the first moment," she said in a strangled voice, "and I promised to marry him. I tried to forget my story. Then I saw everything in what seemed its hideous impossibility, and I went on, without a word of good-bye to him. I dared not trust myself to say good-bye. But he followed me here."

"Delicious!" cried Mary warmly to Luck. He looked back at her as if to say: "Exactly as I should do!"

Their visitor went on: "And he found me

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yesterday. I renewed my promises to him, and we shall be married as soon as I have sold these and provided myself with a little money, and bought a trousseau, and so on. You see, ostensibly I am a young widow in comfortable circumstances. I am so afraid of the least hitch—of any inquiry leading to knowledge of what constitutes my capital”—she indicated the mat—“and then as to how I came by these Eastern-looking jewels—even if Mustapha does not trace me as I dispose of them. You understand—it’s not a wicked deception? It is the happiness of two lives—mine and Friedrich’s—that——”

“We understand perfectly,” said the *Joséphine* girl sweetly. Napoleon was looking at the black roll.

“May we see some of the things?” he asked.

The visitor assented, and cutting the strands of the mat, they brought some of the ornaments to light. They were much as she had described them—rather roughly cut gems, some in heavy Eastern settings. Napoleon examined them one by one with the air of a connoisseur. He took little implements out of his waistcoat pocket, and tapped the stones, looking at them closely, their owner meanwhile looking closely at him. She grew a little pale during the examination, and spoke of the devotion of Mustapha, who would lavish ornaments to any value upon her.

“I think,” Napoleon said at last, “that I

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might get you three thousand pounds for these in various markets that I know of. I am a bit of a traveller, as you may know, and through buying art curios I have been in touch with many dealers in Europe and Asia."

Her face fell. "You think they are not worth more?"

"They may be," he replied, "but that could be ascertained when they have been examined by experts. Sleep on the matter, my dear lady, and then let me know if you will put it into my hands."

"You are good," she said gratefully. "Good and kind, all of you. We may be able to talk further of it to-morrow. Friedrich is coming to dine with me to-night. Would you——" She looked from one to the other.

"Would you," Mary responded, "bring him down to us for coffee? We should be charmed."

The invitation being accepted with thanks and beaming smiles, Mrs. Muswell withdrew, Johnnie Luck accompanying her to carry the black roll to the flat above. She extolled the kindness of his friends and himself.

"Is he rich?" she asked plaintively, "your Mr. Prince?"

Receiving a cautious reply, she said childishly: "If he is, perhaps he would like to buy my jewels himself, and dispose of them at his leisure, at a big profit. It will be so hard for me to wait. So very,

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very hard. And I will not go to Friedrich without what they call a *dot*."

Accepting with a smile the compliments obviously to be turned on this, she vanished into her flat, and they saw her no more until nine thirty, when, charming and excited, she brought down Friedrich for a few minutes to be introduced to them. He was a dark, spruce, military-looking man, extremely smart. After coffee she took him back to her own flat again.

"Darling things!" said Mary. "Be kind to them, Nap."

"Yes," said Luck, "be kind to them, Nap."

"Children," said the little man, drinking a third cup of coffee in unwonted absence of mind, "I am already devising extensive plans of benevolence and philanthropy. All the world loves a lover. Here is to our pretty friend and her gallant Friedrich!" He drank the toast in coffee. "I anticipate that we may see her quite early in the morning."

It was comparatively early in the morning when Mrs. Muswell called at No. 20. Mary had gone out betimes to buy some articles of which her brother professed himself in instant need, for which she had to go half across London, and so would not be back before lunch. Johnnie Luck had, in response to a message from the paralytic, descended to No. 20. When he came, Napoleon had little to say, however,

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beyond desultory chat. He seemed to be listening. When a ring was heard, his face cleared and he smiled.

"I would lay you a hundred to one, Johnnie, that is the heroine of the Harem Melodrama."

"Do you mean to imply that you do not believe——"

"My dear Johnnie, I discredit nothing and credit nothing. I tell you she has Gerda's eyes, which is ample reason for my doing what I am about to do."

She was ushered in.

"Ah, my dear lady! We were speaking of angels. A very good morning to you!"

But she looked as though the morning were far from very good. She was *distracte*, worried. Under her arm she carried the black mat in a roll. When, seemingly too abstracted to give any formal greeting to either man, she had sat down, she said impulsively:

"Mr. Prince, I come to ask your immediate help in my trouble. Friedrich"—her eyes looked wet—"is ordered to rejoin his regiment. He is leaving England to-night."

They were all attention, making little murmurs of sympathy. She went on:

"He implored me yesterday evening—it was after we left you—to marry him before he left, to return to Austria with him. But first I want to get rid of these. I will not go to Friedrich's family—

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his cold, proud family—without a penny. Mr. Prince, what shall I do? Who will buy at a moment's notice?"

"Very few people, I am afraid, dear lady," said Napoleon.

She bit her lip and trembled. Her eyes were magnificent.

"I told you yesterday," he said, taking her unresisting hand, "that you could probably get three thousand for the lot without much haggling. *Probably*—not certainly. I do not trust my judgment to say certainly. You might get more, as I also told you, if you were content to wait and submit them to the really best experts——"

"No, no!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "I could not wait—now. Who would give me three thousand for them?"

"That," he replied, "I could not say at such short notice. I should have to find out. But I will give you two five for them down now, here, if you are willing to take it."

"Two thousand five hundred?"

"Yes. I do not offer you the full three thousand I suggested as their value, because, dear lady, I am a hard business man underneath my soft side, and you must give discount for cash, and for the trouble in store for me in disposing of the jewels. Also I may get barely more than my own money back, or even not as much. There *might* be a great deal more, I own, but the chances

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are as much for one as t'other. You see all this?"

"I see—I see." She began breathing lovely gratitude, but he stopped her.

"Don't thank me. I mentioned just now that soft side of mine, and my softness is for your eyes."

She looked at him, beautifully. He looked back full at her, appreciatively.

"You have the eyes," he said softly, "of someone I once loved. Luck, an errand, please."

Luck came forward.

"My bedroom is next door, and there's a little dispatch case on the table by my bed. If you don't mind—my wretched helplessness," he explained to her, as Johnnie Luck left the room. When the door closed, he added: "I want to claim a tremendous boon of you, dear lady, because you have the eyes of the girl I once loved."

"Ask it," said she, all softness.

"A kiss," said the little man.

In a moment Johnnie Luck would be back. She gave herself time for a little murmur of hesitation, surprise; then she rose from her chair, came close, and bent and kissed him. Her lips were very soft, and she kissed Napoleon on the lips. She sat down again. A flush swept up all over his pale face, passed, and was gone. The face was serene again when Luck came in with the dispatch case.

Napoleon unlocked it with his left hand, and found three crackling notes.

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"I don't often keep this amount of money out of my bank," he explained. "It is pure coincidence, accident, what you will, that I have it to hand this morning. Later in the day it would have been paid to my account. They are three thousand-pound notes. Could you oblige me, somehow, with the change, dear lady?"

"Five hundred pounds," she considered.

"If you will hand over that, I will hand over this," he said with such charming apology that there could be no insult in the caution. "I am, as I said, a business man, and I do things in a business-like way."

"I can give you the notes, I believe," she answered. "I have about that amount, and I will go to get it. It is absolutely my all, of course, and it would not have been a *dot* fit for an Austrian officer's wife."

Luck sprang to open the door. She passed out smiling—not to her own flat, though, but hastily down to the street. Near the Army and Navy Stores her Friedrich waited.

Napoleon sat waiting her return, the fingers of his left hand drumming on the notes on the table, his eyes fixed rather absently on space. The black mat lay on the floor.

"Nap," said Luck, "ain't it risky, old man?"

"Her eyes, Johnnie!" said Napoleon. "Her eyes!"

He would say no more. In perhaps ten minutes

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the beautiful visitor hurried back. She was flushed and a little breathless, which condition she explained by the fact of the search she had had for the notes. She had put them securely away, under lock and key, forgotten where, and been terrified—so terrified—in consequence. But here they were, all safe and sound. Would Mr. Prince count them?

Mr. Prince counted them, thrust them into his breast pocket, and handed over three thousand-pound notes, enclosing them first in an envelope out of the dispatch box. He stretched out his left hand, and she put hers into it. He looked up at her, standing tall, vibrant, glowing, victorious.

"My congratulations to Friedrich," said he. "My felicitations to yourself. A very pleasant journey. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, kind, good friends." She shook hands with both. "I am going out now. Guess for what?"

"To be married?" Luck hazarded.

She nodded. "To be married. We leave for Austria to-day."

"Happy Friedrich!" said Luck.

"Happy Friedrich!" cried Napoleon.

The graceful creature went out, making an emotional leave-taking. The two men were left together, and the black mat lay on the floor. Napoleon's face had grown deathly.

"Mary will be amazed," began Luck.

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"Oh! Ah!" He looked down at the mat.
"Cart that truck away, there's a good fellow."

"Truck? I suppose you'll see your money back again all right?"

Napoleon looked—laughed noiselessly.

"Stuff's simply 'fake' all through, Johnnie, my dear good fool."

"What, Nap? And you knew it? Well, Nap, who's the fool?"

"Not I, Luck. 'Friedrich,' perhaps, and she. My notes were 'fake,' too."

Johnnie sat down.

"Ah! I can do notes. One of the things I've learned. Those were three of the kind the Cosmopolitans use, though, and were ready to hand."

"Her five hundred?"

"Real. Screaming humour? Rattling farce, eh?"

"So, after all—you cheated Gerda's eyes?"

"I cheated Gerda's wits."

Light began to show through for Luck. He gazed at the little man, now beginning to tremble in his invalid chair.

"We've been dealing with Gerda, you see, John Luck. And with her 'friend.' Who do you think, Johnnie, was the man she brought in to drink my coffee and liqueurs? The chap of the Florence Opera House! And what do you think is written inside the flap of that envelope I put her notes in?"

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Luck shook his head.

"'To Gerda, from her very sane Englishman.' Funny, eh? Any questions, Johnnie?"

"Yes, Nap. Did you take these flats because you knew she was here?"

Napoleon nodded.

"Did you mean all through to get back at her, as soon as you had the chance?"

Napoleon nodded.

"Did you know what kind of story she'd come out with this time?"

Napoleon shook his head. "Know? Who does know, John Luck, what a woman plots and plans? Women lick men—they lick the rest of creation—at tricking. They don't work by logical sequence, but by accident. You can't insure against that kind of accident, either. There's no policy obtainable. Women—they haven't human science, but they're given monkey minds. Their mischief is more nimble than ours. They lay a plot like a three-volume novel about princes, and harems, and troubles and anxieties and love, and start creation playing their absurd melodramas and believing they're real. They feel your pulse, and they know all about you. And nature aids a woman—saturates her in the part she's taking. She can laugh and cry and quiver—her brain plays on her body like a bow on fiddle strings—and she's given lips that are so cursed soft, Johnnie—and eyes! And I've got my own back, Johnnie. There's no laugh any more,

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except for me. But do what I will, I'll never get the feel of her lips off mine—nor her eyes out of my heart—never exorcise her away."

Johnnie Luck got up very suddenly and quietly, and left the little man swayed against the table with his head on his arm.

Chapter IV

King's Business

"COUNT six tables to your left," said Napoleon to his guest John Luck, "and note the man sitting alone."

The place was Maxim's in the Rue Royale. The trio of English people, the little semi-paralysed man who had wheeled into the famous café in his invalid chair—it being a warm autumn night—his sister and his guest, sat at one end of the room in a little alcove with raised floor, whence they could look over the sea of smart, reckless, inconsequent people packed together like sardines at the innumerable close-set tables. The trio were quiet, detached, philosophic of life. The girl was beautiful in a high-waisted cherry coloured frock, veiled with dull blue; her hair was dressed *à la Joséphine*; you looked at her once, and you saw a charming creature; you looked twice, and you saw her very chic; you looked thrice, and you saw she was the most chic woman in the restaurant. All the men in the place within range had looked thrice; she was superbly indifferent. One of the best bands in Paris was playing, but was drowned in the clatter of conversation. The room was hot, simmering and shimmer-

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ing. John Luck, bidden to count six tables to the left, and note a man sitting—strangely, in such a place—alone, tore part of his attention from the *Joséphine* girl, counted the tables, and noted the man—a large-built, swarthy fellow, with interest for nothing but his dinner, despite the overtures of acquaintanceship extended unmistakably from various quarters. He ate hurriedly.

"Italian or Bulgarian," Luck hazarded.

"Nearly right," replied Napoleon. "Balukian."

"Balukian? Why, that's where——"

"That's where the throne totters," finished Napoleon. "Hangs on a hair. The king is at present in England. He went a week ago, finding things too hot. Ran away. It was no less, and no more, than sheer fright which caused him to plan a sudden visit to London. He left behind his ministers, who were also his father's ministers, many of them, to hold his throne for him."

Great contempt rang in the little man's voice. In a moment, however, he added, extenuatingly: "He is only a boy, though, twenty-three or -four—I forget which. Yesterday he signed away his kingdom. Mary is *au courant* with these things, but you, my dear Johnnie, are not, I presume. The man dining over there is none other than Fernana, who has been the head of the Republican party in Balukia, and is at this moment, I suppose, or at least will be as soon as he returns to his country,

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the head of the Republic. He and three other democrats arrived in London yesterday, with papers of abdication for the king to sign."

"Did he put up a fight?"

"Probably not much. He signed—with his left hand, as he happened to have sprained his right; but no matter. The signature stands. And he formally gave into their keeping the crown jewels of Balukia, which he had taken with him on his visit. Armed with these, Fernana and his friends return to Balukia, and soon win over such of the people as waver towards the king. Balukians are not cowards as a rule, and they hate cowards."

"How do you know all this before the newspapers?"

"I have a servant in Balukia," which was his royal way of speaking of his paid informers. "The mayor of Balukia received a telegram yesterday from Fernana, not to be made public until his return—the contents of which telegram my servant learned, and passed on to me here in code. Adding up two and two, I arrived at the conclusions I have given you. It is rather an interesting story, eh?"

"H'm—very."

"The suddenness of their last move has taken me rather by surprise," said Napoleon, looking out meditatively over the crowded room. "Though, of course, everyone in Europe was prepared for abdication or regicide, sooner or later, if the present feeling continued in the country."

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They had arrived at ices. Six tables away, the Balukian finished his dinner and rose. His big figure was conspicuous, threading its way among the crowded tables.

"Our friend departs—probably to catch a night train," said Napoleon, smiling quietly.

The two months of their acquaintance had taught Johnnie Luck to know the little man's quiet smiles. There were millions of mischief in them. Napoleon beckoned his waiter, and sent for a Continental Bradshaw. In the pages of this he became immersed, while his pretty sister talked to Luck across the table. In four minutes, however, he interrupted the *tête-à-tête*.

"Our friend Fernana," said he, looking up, his finger crooked in the page, "cannot leave Paris till the morning. How annoying for his natural impatience! Listen here!" He gabbled out a rapid table of trains and times. "How he must fret and fume, our red-hot Republican! His hurry over his dinner, then, was not because of an imminent departure. Well, well! It is not our business, after all, if the man gets indigestion. Probably he has little fish of his own to fry in Paris to-night. Mary, may we return to the hotel and have coffee there? I am going to propose to our friend here a little excitement after his own heart."

She assented, and they went out, forcing a passage, with many charming apologies, for the invalid chair. Napoleon's valet, Dapper, was wait-

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ing outside, according to instructions, to assist his master through the thronged streets. Luck and Mary walked together some little distance behind the chair.

"What is the new departure?" he asked her.

She shook her head. "I don't know. It may be merely adventure, for we've made plenty lately. It may be more——"

"Piracy?"

She nodded. "We shall hear."

They had a private sitting-room at their hotel. Arrived there, Napoleon sent for a black box from the bottom of a cabin trunk. The inestimable Dapper brought it, and withdrew. The box proved to be long and shallow. Luck and Mary stood by, watching with no little curiosity. Napoleon unlocked it, drew off a layer of felt and a layer of wadding, and leaned back, listening with laughter to their involuntary exclamations of surprise.

In the bed of the box lay a "set" of crown jewels. A crown, beautifully fretted, and set with stones, a huge ruby in the centre; stars and arcs of diamonds surrounding it; a sceptre; a diamond chain in heavy gold; stars of various orders; and a huge shoulder clasp.

"Balukia!" said Luck presently.

"Johnnie," Napoleon replied, "you're improving, boy! You're growing an imagination. Yes, these are the crown jewels of Balukia. Put a price on them."

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"I'm not an expert," said Luck.

Mary, handling, weighing them, and bringing them close to her sharp bright eyes, pronounced shrewdly: "A hundred thou'."

"They are worth about a hundred and fifty pounds," said Napoleon, "being a fake. A good fake, of course, to deceive you, Polly. They'll deceive your betters, too, child, before we've parted with them. Six years ago," he explained to Luck, "when Polly was at school and hadn't been initiated, the Cosmopolitans made a plan to lift the crown jewels of Balukia. The job was entrusted to me—I could walk then—and I had these made. They were done by an inspired old rascal in a Bagdad bazaar. I sat with him while he worked. We copied them from photographs and an article published in a rash manner by a magazine, as magazines do. We enlarged the photographs again and again, and put them under a microscope. Also I had certain details from—a servant—in Balukia. The plan fell through—it was recalled, in fact—and it left me in possession of these little articles. I have been following up Balukian politics since, not from any ulterior motive, but because I once had a near interest in the country. Consequently I have been interested to learn what I learned this morning."

He stopped speaking while coffee came in and was served. He wheeled his chair to the open window, and looked down on the streets of full Paris—Paris at night time, Paris alive, vibrant,

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enjoying. His large pale face was half in light, half shadow, and brooded mystically. He seemed to forget the pair behind him for some little while. Mary's voice roused him, saying: "Coffee, Nap."

"Ah!" He wheeled back from somewhere into an hotel sitting-room for coffee.

"Sorry; I forgot you—I was away at the moment," he explained. "I was in the Past, which is a Land of Sleep. Men shouldn't go there. Don't you go there too much, ever, Johnnie Luck. It should be forrard, forrard, forrard away all the time, and it's a fine good world for rogue or saint. Rogue or saint, too, they're only a matter of terms. How'd you like a pure adventure this time, Johnnie? How'd you like to bring back a Lost Cause? All for sheer altruism? And for love of a ripping adventure full of sport and danger and brazen cheek?"

There sat the little man in his invalid chair, flushed with his talk of pure adventure, ripping adventure—Lost Causes—sport and danger—and brazen cheek.

"Come on, sir!" cried Luck.

"Am I in it?" asked Mary.

"My dear, no!" said Napoleon. "Should anything happen"—she did not pale, having learned immense hardihood from the extraordinary little man—"you will find enough placed in your name at the Crédit Lyonnais for all you will ever need. You would be quite a rich woman, Polly."

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"I should be a very lonely one, Nap," said she.

"Pshaw!" said Napoleon lightly. He patted her hand. "Johnnie, we start to-night. I looked it up at Maxim's. We get a train at nine-thirty for Boulogne—we shall catch the first boat. Tomorrow we shall be in London. Before Balukia sees Fernana and Co. again, we shall have started back with His Majesty King Ranald the Third. *Vive le roi!* We take, of course, these with us."

He laid his live hand—the left—lightly on the black box. "Get away, Johnnie," he ordered. "Change, and meet me here again in twenty minutes. And ring for Dapper, please."

Luck rang, and waited till master and man had left the room. Then he turned to Mary.

"I don't know," he said, "quite what we are going to do, but in case, as he says, anything happens——"

They kissed. "Mary," said he, "I wonder if we'll ever be able to marry?"

"Not while you are a professional thief," she answered, sighing, "and I an accomplice. This is not good-bye, Johnnie, for nothing *must* happen. Good luck—good sport—and *au revoir*."

It was known in London society—all that was left, or happened to be in town in October—that His Majesty King Ranald III. of Balukia, with a strangely curtailed suite, had arrived in the metropolis, and was quartered at the Savoy Hotel. This

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news of the visit of the monarch of a petty kingdom created little stir. No dinner parties, no balls, no political receptions, were beaten hastily together in his honour. Two visitors, arriving to see him in the early afternoon, were told that his Majesty was lunching in his private dining-room. Would they wait?

Napoleon, sitting in the vestibule in his invalid chair, replied that they could not. Their business was of the first importance. His Majesty would not know their names if submitted, but they must beg for immediate audience. The little man had about him that quality which calls for instant attention and obedience. His very waiting was regal. The manager himself went to inform the king, and returned to say that the gentlemen might be shown up. The servant who had attended the chair withdrew to the door, and Napoleon wheeled himself to the lift. Luck squeezed in beside him, and they were borne up to the apartments of the King of Balukia.

He sat eating his lunch. A very young man, tall, dark, weedy, with an irresolute mouth, and furtive, sullen fright latent in his eyes. His manner was haughtily royal, but tempered by his training two years before in an English university, where he had dropped into a sporting set. Withal he seemed not a bad fellow. Two other men, both elderly, and in the uniform of the Balukian army, were lunching with him. They presumably formed the

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dethroned monarch's suite—all that still adhered to him.

Ranald stared at his visitors a moment from his chair, then made a simulation of rising and bowing, saying:

"I am afraid I have not the pleasure, gentlemen."

"We have come, your Majesty," said Napoleon, with his strange smile fleeting for a moment over his large pale face, "to inquire after your Majesty's right hand; but also to tender our congratulations on the injury which prevented it being used the day before yesterday."

The king started, and flushed darkly.

"You know a good deal, sir," said he, looking away; "perhaps you know also that I signed with my left hand. Who are you?"

"Two Englishmen," answered Napoleon, "with the English love of order, loyalty and constitution; therefore two men with your interests at heart. Are you congratulating yourself, sire, on having obeyed those servants of yours the day before yesterday?"

The king was silent a moment. He looked exceedingly young and incapable, yet with the underlying promise of better things if he could gather the manhood to fight for his chance. Then:

"Cursing myself, gentlemen!" said he briefly in reply.

The two Balukians, who were now standing at

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attention—the king still sat—looked at each other and murmured.

“Ah!” said Napoleon, wheeling forward a little. “Then take back your kingdom, your Majesty.”

The two Balukian officers gazed at him eagerly. Some hope flashed into Ranald's face, and died again.

“May I speak at some length?” Napoleon asked; and without waiting for permission: “My friend John Luck and myself have just arrived from Paris. I was acquainted, rather better than most people, perhaps, with the state of affairs in Balukia. I have a friend there. Dining at Maxim's last night, I saw Fernana. I pointed him out to Luck. I knew—or at least I guessed, knowing your Majesty's whereabouts—what his errand to London had been. Luck and I followed him. I scraped acquaintance on the pretext of mutual friends in the damned Republican party. We accompanied him to his hotel—he could not leave Paris last night—and he showed us the crown jewels.”

These things rolled glibly off Napoleon's tongue. He sat gazing at the rapt Balukians.

“Later that night,” he continued after a slight pause, during which he glanced at Luck, who was following his words with close attention, “my friend returned to the hotel, and took a room there close to Fernana's. We had coffee'd with the scoundrel previously, and as a result—he slept well.” All

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smiled at this. "At eleven o'clock—I believe it was exactly eleven?"

Johnnie Luck corroborated.

"At eleven o'clock my friend stole the crown jewels of Balukia, and left the hotel. Paris hotels admit of perfect freedom in coming and going night and day. They do not look askance in Paris. We motored to Dieppe, and took my steam yacht across, and here we are, at your Majesty's service—two Englishmen with no pressing claims upon their time and trouble, who are only too glad, too honoured, to offer their humble help to prop a throne."

The king's elbows were on the table now, his chin in his palms, his dark eyes glowing.

"And the crown jewels?" he half whispered.

"Bring them here, Johnnie," said Napoleon.

Luck, who had stood in the background, advanced, bowed to the king, and laid what looked like a large brief case on the table. Tied to its handle, as a walking stick may be strapped to a portmanteau, was a long slender thing wound about with brown paper. This unwrapped, there was discovered the sceptre of Balukia, thus carelessly travelling. The king took and held it. Napoleon unlocked the case, and lifted out, all with his nimble left hand, one by one, the crown, the stars, the great neck chain, the shoulder clasp. They lay glittering on the white damask of the lunch table.

"Examine them, your Majesty," said the little

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invalid quietly. "And you, gentlemen, examine them too. Satisfy yourselves."

They gathered round, handling everything. Napoleon waited carelessly. Luck waited with cold thrills at his heart. The king turned to the little man, and gripped his hand. His eyes had filled with tears.

"My friend," he said, "my friend, what can I say of your courage, your enterprise, your——"

"Say nothing, sire," Napoleon interrupted. "Say nothing. *Do*, sire, *do*! This is the time of action. Look at me," he said, indicating his body, shrunken all down the right side, and his helpless right hand. "Cripple as I am, were I king, I would not bow my head and sit down under this. If I had your youth and strength I would be ashamed, I would be cut to the heart, I would hide for evermore from all men worthy the name of men, if I did not ride into the streets of Balukia right on Fernana's heels, and take back what was mine. Get up, sire, get up! Get what the Americans would call a move on you! Mind and body, Ranald of Balukia, get a move on you! I am here to help."

He looked half wistful, half humorous.

"A fine helpmate!" added he, dropping into irony.

"A very fine helpmate indeed, sir," said the king, with no irony. "Can you give me a plan? I see you have one. Remember"—he shifted in his chair, and grew red—"I have—have abdicated."

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"Is your right hand better to-day?" Napoleon asked. "May I examine? It is better. It gives you very little pain. Good. By the time you arrive in Balukia, your Majesty, that right hand must be well, and, mind you, all here, *that right hand has never been sprained*. Officers and gentlemen, you take your oath of that. Perjury for your king, gentlemen, is a virtue. Listen to this:

"The day before yesterday, Fernana, with two other representatives of what is very previously called the Balukian Republic, called on his Majesty here in London, where his Majesty had come for a visit, and requested him to sign away his throne. This infamous proposal, or threat, his Majesty refused for a moment to entertain. Neither would he part to these faithless servants with what was his for the time of his reign—the crown jewels of Balukia. 'I hold my crown and sceptre,' said his Majesty to Fernana—you heard him, gentlemen both—'until of my own free will I lay them down—or until death takes them from me, and gives them to my son.' (Hint of near alliance, gentlemen, received with some thrill by loyal Balukians.) 'Or until I am assured by my dear people unanimously that this is their undivided wish. To you, sir, representative of an insignificant body of rebels, I resign none of my privileges, which it is my intention to continue to enjoy for the rest of my life, among my dear people.'

"On this, gentlemen, Fernana and Co. departed

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baffled. Baffled? No. Cheats and rogues, gentlemen, they determined to take back with them that which would surely push the king from his throne, and the hearts of his people, as they had planned. They forged a signature. Clumsy, unlike—because, say they, it was written by the king's left hand, his right being sprained. And Fernana also produces, with this precious document, the crown jewels."

A long sigh shook the king.

"He will tell them, and convince them, of the robbery in Paris."

"He will say nothing about the robbery in Paris," replied Napoleon. "He will produce the jewels."

Amid a dead silence he proceeded:

"Your Majesty is not aware, I dare say, that there exists at the present moment a complete imitation set. They are well made, and would deceive many experts. They were made in your father's time, as far as I can gather—I don't pretend to intimate detail—by a Continental band of thieves who had some design upon the crown jewels. The design, I should imagine, was found to be impracticable, and was abandoned. Fernana knew of this imitation set, and I think we may rest assured that rather than go back to Balukia with a clumsy and doubtful signature, *and* a tale of having been robbed of his proofs by the way, he will obtain the imitation set, and palm it off on the unsuspecting people.

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This, of course, is merely my surmise. But it is a logical surmise, gentlemen, I think?"

"You know a great deal of what seem to be hidden affairs, sir," said one of the officers. Napoleon smiled.

"It is my hobby," he replied simply. "I go here, there, and everywhere, and I look and listen here, there, and everywhere. I am not able to take the active part in life that every man wishes for. My activities, my interests, are all here." He tapped his forehead and mused a moment. Suddenly it seemed as if a quick pride shook him. "Sire," he cried, "do these gentlemen of yours doubt my bona fides? Doubt an Englishman's disinterestedness? If so, allow me to wish your Majesty good day!"

He seized a lever, and made as if to wheel away, but the king himself sprang up to stop him, crying:

"No, no, sir! You are invaluable. I am, of course, grateful. What are your further plans?"

"Are they not plain?" said the little man, recovering the good temper he had apparently lost for the moment. "You travel back now, to-day, this hour, express for Balukia, on Fernana's very heels. No sooner has he given his story to the people, than their king himself comes hot-foot, denying it. 'Look at my right hand; it was never sprained! Look at the crown jewels! Those are faked!' Your Majesty, smaller men than you have carried through greater ventures on sheer

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bluff; on one superb lie. You were weak—be strong. You were afraid—be courageous. You are ashamed—purge out cause of shame. With you, backing a royal word—a royal lie—which needs no backing, are these two officers; and with you will travel my friend and myself, two Englishmen to teach you what to say; to teach you—and to preach you at all the street corners of the capital. I have looked out our trains. We shall be in Balukia to-morrow night, about six hours behind Fernana.”

The king jumped up. He shook Napoleon's hand, he shook Luck's. He had new pride, new confidence, new joy. The shame was almost wiped from his face.

“My friends,” he said huskily. “My good friends.”

Napoleon smiled.

“We meet on my yacht, sire,” said he, “at five o'clock. I leave with you your own”—he indicated the crown jewels. “Pack them carefully, sire, and do not let them leave your hands. We must run no risks.”

The lift took him down, with the rather dazed Johnnie Luck, and Dapper awaited them. They went out into a beautiful October day, warm and bright. Napoleon spoke no word till they were back at the small hotel where they had left port-manteaux. Then:

“Any questions, Johnnie?”

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"The robbery in Paris?"

"Fernana will have nothing to say about that, as he never was robbed in Paris."

"The king has the faked set after all; Fernana the real."

"The king must not know that: it would destroy what nerve he's got, poor rabbit! We'll manage the exchange in Balukia, somehow. Leave things to me. Follow me."

They supped late, in Paris, in a very Bohemian restaurant, where incongruities of dress and company are little noticed. The place is full of incongruities. Napoleon, who had assumed the reins, ordered the supper, something very quickly served, light yet substantial. He made all drink champagne, the king more than the others. He was known there, it seemed (as indeed they knew him in representative cafés of nearly every city in Europe). The *maitre* heard of his presence from a whispering waiter, and hastened across to exchange compliments. The *chef* presently slipped up from his kitchens, and edged among the crowd to this table, to inquire if everything was as Monsieur pleased. At a hint from Napoleon they were served with especial celerity. He was very gay. They all drank to the enterprise, and silently—"No names here, gentlemen," said he—toasted the king. An early hour the next morning found them seated in the express, tearing south-eastward.

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Balukia is south of the Danube, east of the Adriatic; a petty kingdom, full of little bickerings called civil wars; private quarrels called politics; emotional discontents called democracy; love of spilling blood or money called free-hearted independence. Ruled by a tottering institution called a monarchy; over-ruled by any brigand who likes to blaspheme at a street corner against existing orders. It is a very beautiful country, plentiful with wine, corn, fruit, flowers, and hot-headed, lazy people. These—the people—were thronging now into the city. It swarmed with them like a hive; it buzzed with their voices. They waited for the messages which Fernana was giving them from the balcony of the town hall. He stood in the balcony with his confrères around him. He had arrived late the night before; early in the morning the news had fled through the country, and all who could come in to hear it confirmed—to laugh or weep—came flocking in all day. By evening Fernana was ready to speak, and they to hear. Two “Ministers of the Republic” stood by Fernana; they bore the regalia, which winked and shone in the street lights. When he sent his great voice out, there was a hush over the packed mass below. Thousands of lifted faces gleamed up at him.

He said: “Brothers and sisters, you sent me on a mission, and I have returned to you. I have not returned empty. I bring back that which I

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set out to get." A long wave of sound—sigh, exclamation, joy, suppressed grief—rippled below him. "You see here, people of Balukia, the crown jewels resigned to me by Ranald, late King of Balukia. He carried them away with him—the property of the nation away with him—to England. But I followed, brothers and sisters, and I brought your own back to you, together with the papers of abdication signed by Ranald. The signature can be seen in the Council Chamber to-morrow. The public will be freely admitted. The handwriting is shaken, owing to the fact that the signature was written by his left hand—and perhaps owing to his fright, my people—because his right hand had been recently sprained. And now I have to say to you——"

The great Balukian began his impassioned oration in silence, broken only by the movements of the crowd, which surged below him like a rough sea. Opposite the town hall, the width of a street and a courtyard away, enclosed in stone wall and high railing, stood the palace, dark and empty. The very servants had left it to join the crowds outside.

Now, suddenly, from the dark balcony of the palace went up two rockets, flaring into the sky one after the other. Fernana's speech stumbled and broke. He stared across with eyes nearly starting from his head. Ten thousand heads turned to see the bright eyes of lighted windows flashing out from behind the palace balcony, against which

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light stood in strong relief a group of men. Ten thousand voices began in whispers that rose to roars: "The king!"

"We have no king, brothers!" cried Fernana. His voice was lost. "Fools! We have no king!" Nobody heard him. The people, in one solid, swaying mass, surged towards the courtyard, whose gates stood open. Above them stood Ranald of Balukia erect, soldierly, in full regalia. The crown flashed on his head, the chain about his shoulders. Near him were two officers of the Balukian army, on his right hand a little man with a wonderful white face sat in an invalid chair; on his left stood a tall, bronzed young Englishman, looking down with the king at the pack beneath. For a while nothing could be heard but the roaring of the people—those who had heart to cheer, cheering; those who had not, not daring to groan, and by and by, from sheer emotion, raising their voices with the majority.

When this had continued solidly for perhaps five minutes, the little man in the chair was seen to touch the king's arm. "Make them be silent, and speak," said he to the young man.

The king raised his hand and waited. When the noise had sufficiently subsided, he spoke the things he had been told to speak. He spoke for perhaps ten minutes, and his liquid voice was eloquent of courage and of love; the courage of fear, and the love of his life, but they could not

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know that. As he went on, he gained confidence in himself and them. When he held up his right hand, declaiming: "Look, my people! This hand has never been sprained, though it should be burnt rather than do the deed of which it is accused. Look, my people, at what I wear—my bonds to you! Over against me on the town hall balcony I see the crown jewels—imitation gauds—provided by my enemies to make good their dastardly story. I have travelled night and day, my people, to reach you—I, my officers, and my two English friends——" The crowd broke, and part ran roaring to the town hall.

"My God!" said the king faintly, turning to Napoleon, who sat calm. "There'll be murder! Mishveloff!—Parda—call out the guard—restore order."

But the king's guard, which, withdrawn to a distant quarter of the city, had been sullenly awaiting orders from new masters, was not in time to save Fernana. Whose bullet it was that found the rebel's head was not ascertained. "And," said Napoleon, as, in a group, they watched the fracas in the streets, "do not inquire too closely, your Majesty. Heads seem very hot, and hearts seem very loyal. So far, so good. Send orders to your soldiers and your police, though, so save that set of regalia"—which was done. The king obeyed like a child, asking no questions, being merely the mouthpiece of a little paralytic in a bath chair.

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Police and soldiery worked, coaxing, humouring. The spirits of the volatile crowd soared from red murder to ecstasy. Truant servants ran back to the palace; the kitchens were staffed; the fires fed; tables made ready.

About three o'clock in the morning, when the streets were comparatively quiet from cheers and song, the king sat down to supper with his English friends.

The duplicate regalia had been brought intact from the town hall, and deposited in the palace.

"It should be kept," said Napoleon, as they ate and drank merrily, in spite of exhaustion, "as a memento, a national possession, a national reminder to all anti-loyalists."

When, in the autumn dawn, he and Luck were ushered by bowing servants to princely quarters, he detained his companion.

"Mind valeting me, Johnnie? I miss Dapper. Hate strange servants."

He wheeled into the apartment allotted to him, and required exigent service, but said little. Having rendered assistance, Luck left him lying back on his pillows, looking remote, and humming a fragment of something. It sounded like:

"'Twas a g-r-reat toime i' th' ould town to-night!"

Johnnie Luck slept well. The royal valets in the morning brought to him black coffee deliciously made, and prepared a scented bath. He and

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Napoleon breakfasted with their royal host, and with ministers who had hastened to the palace early to tender their congratulations, turn their coats, and renew their facile allegiance. The "faked" jewels were sent for—those Ranald had worn the night before now being under the keeper's lock and key—and were examined with great interest by all present.

"A marvellous imitation!" "Wonderful work!" was the unanimous verdict. The invalid Englishman was interesting on the subject of the Continental band who had created the faked regalia; his tongue ran fluid like water—or rather wine, seeing the sparkle it had. He spoke with sincere regret of the farewell to Balukia so immediately imminent. Thanks, gentlemen, for your compliments, your hospitality; but he could not be long away from his doctors, his nurses, his own initiated valet. The royal physicians are at his service? Thank you, your Majesty; with all respect to those gentlemen, he dare not trifle with what the gods had left to him of health. He would put himself until to-morrow into the tender care of his best friend, Mr. John Luck, but to-morrow they must say good-bye.

"Au revoir, sir," said the young king, deeply moved. They flanked the breakfast coffee with cocktails, and drank, all: "À la rencontre!"

Two popular Englishmen were cheered when they moved through the streets of Balukia that day.

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The city made holiday; there was no work. There had been no sleep the night before, but no one wanted sleep. Every house displayed garlands. Everyone meeting everyone cried: "*Hurra! Brava!*" and the like.

The "faked" regalia was to be lodged in the City Museum when each piece had been properly inscribed with the date and epitaph of the rebellion of 1912, for a monument and memorial thereof.

Meantime, the English guests had the free run of the palace. John Luck was more interested in the streets without, but the invalid chair wheeled here, there and everywhere, through the interior of a king's house, through the vast corridors, halls, reception rooms, guard rooms, even the kitchens. The little paralytic took an absorbing interest in architecture, and in régimes as much as architecture.

"One is the building of hands, the other the building of the mind. Both interest profoundly, and we do not want your servants' attendance, sire, only to be free to wheel here and there, to look; to admire. The gallery, for instance, with the portraits of your ancestors; remember, we have never been in Balukia before, much less guests in a king's palace, and pray humour an eccentric and allow him to be as rude as he likes."

Very soon the servants and the sentries had become used to a strange little Englishman wheeling upon them round corners and in unfrequented rooms

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—a very lovable little Englishman, with an air of high nobility which impressed. “He explores the palace; let him explore.” And very often: “*Brava*, lord!” without knowing why. He returned their salutes royally, one of these g-r-reat English.

This was by nightfall. When they had dined, they went out to see the streets and the holiday makers, all gayer than ever. The king was riding among his people, but Napoleon wished to be wheeled down to the river, the Bal which cuts like an artery through one of the main streets of the city, and is spanned by one of the most beautiful bridges in Europe. Upon this bridge he wheeled himself, and looked over at the carnival upon the water below. Gondolas passed, and coracles, filled with singing people; lovely girls strummed guitars. The Englishman threw down coins, which were caught if they fell into the boats, dived for if they fell into the water; and the women threw kisses back, and their males were so good-humoured with it all that they did not mind. A slim dark fellow alone in a rocking coracle drew down to the bridge, and looked up laughing at the Englishmen. He caught a coin, he caught two. With ruefulness and laughter he pulled at his shirt bosom to show them where the shirt had been torn from shoulder to waist in the frolic of carnival. He pretended to shiver with the cold through the rent, and hugged himself with his arms.

“Coldish wind for a bare skin, Johnnie,” said

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Napoleon, and tossed down to the fellow his rolled-up cloak, which he had not put on. It was caught deftly, with voluble thanksgiving, and the coracle glided away and disappeared under the bridge.

"Beautiful bridge, Johnnie," said Napoleon. "Beautiful city; beautiful girls; beautiful everything. But I wish I hadn't given away my cloak; Johnnie, we'll go back to the palace, and to bed."

They were asleep long before the city slept. And the next morning, early, they took their departure. The King was in bed after his arduous days, and had to be awakened to say good-bye to his guests.

"I am ashamed!" he cried, very sleepy; "ashamed! But I rode half the night. They would not let me go. I am desolated that you must leave us. Come again soon, my brothers. Ah! what brothers Englishmen are!"

He kissed each of the men on both cheeks. "Ask for all you wish," said he. "They are bringing round my own carriage for you. Have you breakfasted as you would? The royal train, of course, will take you to the frontier. The line is cleared, and you will have no delays. Parda saw to all arrangements yesterday. Again, command everything you wish." And, obviously moved, he let them go.

They headed, of course, for Paris, where a little *Joséphine* girl awaited them. At Vienna they wired her "All right." But it was not until they had nearly reached Paris that Napoleon turned to John Luck, and asked:

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"Any questions, Johnnie?"

"Not this time, I think."

And he laughed, for of course it had been pure adventure, sheer altruism.

"It has been all I promised you, Johnnie, eh?"

"Man, it's been grand—top hole. You are simply great. Life's worth living."

Napoleon smiled.

"The proceeds, of course, will be divided as usual," he remarked.

"The proceeds——?"

"The crown jewels of Balukia. The real set, that Fernana, poor devil, carted away from England, and lost his life for."

"But we left them in Balukia—to be inscribed—to be treasured in the City Museum."

"Johnnie, you're young. The crown jewels are on their way to Cairo, where they will be unset, recut, and pass through other experiences. I had a friend in Balukia, with a coracle and a torn shirt. I went Nap on this hand, Johnnie, begging your pardon for the atrocity."

Something slipped away from life. Purity and altruism vanished from this adventure. Luck looked out of the window at the flying Swiss landscape; mountain tops against the serenest possible sky. After two hours' silence between them:

"Nap," said he at last. "Nap! And I thought this was going to be clean sport!"

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After more silence the little man excused himself gently, and almost wistfully.

"Johnnie, don't grudge me the only game I know how to play. Don't cut off my beer. You'll never temperance-reform me, partner. I must have my drop."

Chapter V

Nemesis and the Noodle

A BORN raconteur, when he chose to loosen his tongue, Napoleon was a pleasant host that night to his one guest, John Luck. They were dining at Frascati's in the ground-floor room, owing to the little man's enforced mode of locomotion, at a table against the wall. From there they could look over the big room, humming with talk and laughter. It had been a good dinner, the invalid being nothing if not an epicure—of many other things than dinners—and being also, as I have indicated, in colloquial vein.

"Johnnie," he asked, when, having told many good stories and lighted very good cigars, they had reached coffee and liqueurs, "how does a place like this strike you?"

"Quite favourably," said Luck, looking round.

"Pshaw!" said the little invalid good-humouredly. "That wasn't quite what I meant, Johnnie. When men of our profession enter any room like this, they should feel like harvesters walking into a field of ripe corn."

"Oh! The main chance!" Luck laughed.

Napoleon sipped *crème de menthe*, and gazed bril-

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liantly from his deep eyes out over the room, smiling.

"Full of chances, Johnnie, chock-full. This room is to me like a book full of pages, and on every page is a chance. You're young, Johnnie. Healthy. Superficial, therefore. You don't read books. Happy man, Johnnie! No, you can live your story, see, much as you like." His eyes travelled to his guest's splendid shoulders, and vital bronzed face. "I——" The eyes turned away, and roved over the room. "I am reduced to reading. My books are left to me in lieu of what you've got. Books, of course, are fools to life. No really full-living man or woman ever writes or reads one, unless from motive. But, my God, Johnnie! what an achievement is the Book of the World! Each page written, of course, in a different language, and men like me have time to become proficient linguists."

"You are translating a page at the moment, Nap!"

"I'd like to, Johnnie, if the chance offers, as people say. As usual, people are always wrong in expecting chances to offer themselves. They don't. You must first make your choice, then pursue it."

The little paralytic gave an indicatory glance to his left.

"Several tables away, Johnnie—the young, weather-beaten fellow dining alone. Watch him a few moments."

Johnnie Luck looked at the man indicated. He was tall, broad, weather-beaten, of brown colour-

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ing not unlike Luck's own. He had reached the end of what had probably been a long and excellent dinner, judging from the wines he had taken as testified by the array of empty glasses. He was drinking port now, with his walnuts, which he ate very slowly, with long absent-minded pauses between, and an air of forgetting his surroundings in the overwhelming consciousness of something deeply troublous. Furrows cleft between his thick brow, and he stared down at the table-cloth and then round him now and again, in a curious puzzled manner. Once or twice his lips moved, as though he murmured to himself, and for some few minutes he was occupied in studying the menu through which he had eaten. Then he studied the programme of music, his lips moving—all in such an intent way as to render ordinary acts extraordinary.

Watching him, one saw that others were watching too—his waiter, the wine waiter, the stolid Turk who brought his coffee, the attendant who wheeled a selection of smokes to his table, all apparently observed his peculiarity, from the curious glances they cast when their duties brought them to his side. For the rest he was well groomed, spruce and healthy-looking, and apparently an unlikely subject for "nerves."

"Trouble there, Johnnie," Napoleon remarked.

"How should you diagnose the case?"

"I should guess a woman," Napoleon replied with his brief smile, "for the simple reason that one always

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guesses a woman. Maybe not, though. I wonder what it will prove."

"At any rate," said Luck, observing the distraught young man, "we shall never be given a chance to prove it, in all probability."

"With any certainty we shan't," replied Napoleon, "but I shall make the chance before he and I leave this restaurant."

He made the decision with quiet satisfaction, anticipation in it. There was very little expression in his fine pale face, and his eyes were remote. Only the slight smile that was apt to curl the corners of his lips at such times indicated that the spirit of campaign was upon him. Luck, of some months' acquaintance with the sign, recognised it.

"In a few minutes," said Napoleon, breaking a pause, thoughtful on his part, curious on Luck's, "our friend yonder will leave, as he has finished, does not seem inclined to stop for a smoke, is alone, and has no excuse of company to linger, and there are impatient people waiting for accommodation. I am sorry to hurry you, Johnnie, but I am going to ask for my bill, so as to be in readiness to accompany him in his departure."

The little man's account was rendered, paid, and his waiter the recipient of a tip that must have re-awakened his long-fled young enthusiasm in his calling.

A few yards away the distraught young man seemed to rouse to the consciousness that he should be making a move. He pulled out his watch, and looked blankly

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at it like one in a dream. Then he looked round as if doubtful of his mode of procedure. His waiter, who had been anticipating a sign, brought his bill. When it was paid, the young man, all in the same absent manner, rose and went out. After him wheeled a little calm-faced man in an invalid chair, who addressed his companion *sotto voce*.

"Johnnie, look as if you don't belong to me, will you? You can come out close to us—stand about—hear what I say—all that kind of thing. But for the future of five minutes, Johnnie, we are strangers. It is a ten to one chance that he did not notice us dining together. If he did, that need not presuppose acquaintance."

Napoleon's valet, Dapper, waited for his master in the vestibule, and went to the cloak-room for his coat and hat in the rear of the absent-minded young man. The invalid sat in his chair a yard or two from the cloak-room door; Johnnie Luck stood very near as if waiting for a less crowded moment to claim his apparel. The young man came out, hatted and coated, and the wheel-chair at the same moment moved a little forward. Result: a slight collision.

"Awfully sorry," said the young man stammeringly.

"My fault entirely," said the invalid. "I beg your pardon. But you see my awkwardness isn't altogether criminal. This cursed carriage, which is my only means of independent locomotion, takes up more room than I should do by myself."

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The young man murmured politely and sympathetically, looking dazed, and roused himself as if to walk out. He stopped at a request from the man in the chair.

"My man seems a long time getting my things. Sorry, but would you mind looking to see if you can spot him? A fat, fair chap."

The young man glanced over other people's shoulders, but could not see the dilatory one.

"Never mind, my dear sir," said the little invalid patiently. "And thanks; I can wait." His brief smile flashed out. "Life is chiefly 'wait' for my sort," he added.

This called forth another murmur of politeness and sympathy. Their eyes meeting in a long glance, they grew suddenly more assured of each other.

"Do you mind telling me," said the young man impulsively, "I'm in the deuce of a queer hole—do you mind telling me the name of this place?"

Napoleon's keen eyes were on his face again instantly.

"Frascati's," he answered quietly.

"Can't remember ever hearing of it," said the young man wretchedly.

Napoleon smiled. "It's an institution," said he. "Do you usually drop into places for dinner without knowing their names and reputation for cooking?"

"I haven't the least idea," said the other, "what I usually do. No doubt I knew the name when I turned in, and, of course, I might have waited to

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read it over the door when I went out, unless I had asked somebody inside. I nearly asked my waiter, but I felt such an egregious ass."

"Didn't you think of the cover of the menu?"

The young man made a startled sound of annoyance.

"Jove! No. How blind one is to the obvious! I merely looked down the dinner I'd eaten, trying to find some familiar word that might suggest something. And where I'm going, and what are my plans for to-night, or if I've made any plans, I haven't the least idea. Awkward, isn't it?"

"Lost your memory?" asked Napoleon quietly.

"I suppose that's what it is. My recollection begins with the fish. Farther back than that I can't go. I don't know how it was; it just happened suddenly, I suppose. I went over all the words in the menu and music programme to see if they would suggest anything to me, but nothing came. I've got a couple of sovereigns in my pocket. But Lord knows what I'm going to do!"

He thrust his hat to the back of his head, passed his handkerchief over his brow, and dropped the handkerchief into his overcoat pocket. Luck was hovering near.

"Do you mind looking to see if you can spot my man again?" Napoleon asked of his new acquaintance. "Fat, fair chap."

"Oh, I can remember that," said the young man, laughing a little, and turning to look. The wheel-chair pressed against him, while its owner

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also anxiously scanned men's backs. His left hand nimbly and delicately drew out the handkerchief from the pocket near him, and he glanced rapidly round the corners. "James Loulon" was marked in one of them. The handkerchief was thrust out of sight, and he was asking: "Can you see him?"

"He's at the counter now," replied the young man, moving forward a little to get a better view. The nimble left hand plucked Luck's coat-tail. He turned.

"Your handkerchief, Johnnie," said the little man in a breath of a whisper. He had it in a second, and it was dropped beside the chair. Luck moved off. "James Loulon" came back with Dapper at his heels, bearing coat and hat. The valet, according to his estimable habit, had obeyed instructions of delay to the letter.

"You've been the devil of a time!" said Dapper's master, with weary irritation, as he was hoisted from the chair sufficiently to get into his coat. "My dear sir, thanks for hurrying him; and you dropped your handkerchief just now. I couldn't lean down far enough to reach it."

The young man picked up the handkerchief, and was thrusting it into his pocket, when "Stay a moment," said Napoleon, arresting him, "would it be marked? Did you think of looking?"

"I didn't," replied Loulon. A ray of expectancy flushed his face; he pulled out the handkerchief, searched eargly in the corners and found "John Luck."

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"What is it?" the little man asked kindly.

He read the name from the silk square given him.

"Well, it's John Luck," he said, looking up.

"Doesn't that begin to call your memory back? Can't you think of people—an address?"

The other shook his head, knitting his brows.

"Nothing at all. Even my name is utterly unfamiliar. What the deuce I'm to do I don't know. Where do they put people whose memories play them these kind of tricks? Police stations—infirmaries—until they're restored to anxious friends? Oh Lord!"

"No, no," said the invalid, beginning to wheel forward, "you shan't incur any of that unpleasantness if I can help it, Mr. Luck. Ten to one you'll be right again in the morning. If not, you must see a doctor. But if you like, now, to come home with me and rest for awhile, and let us try together to refresh your memory, and if you care to put up with me for the night should we not be able to do so, why, I should be charmed."

The suggestion was made simply and naturally, and with the cordial charm that the little man possessed.

"I am not a conventional man," he added humorously, "and there seems to me nothing startlingly unusual in offering you this little temporary help, if it does not appear startlingly unusual to you to take it."

"Such help from a stranger is most startlingly

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unusual, I should think," said the young man, warmly, "and thank you extremely for it."

"Care to come?"

"If I really may."

They turned out of the restaurant into Oxford Street. It was a fine frosty night, an exhilarating air, and sky full of stars.

"My name is Prince," Napoleon informed his companion as he wheeled along, with Dapper behind the chair, "and my sister and I have a flat near Victoria. I enjoy the air, but if you like to taxi it I will give you the address, and you can explain matters to my sister, and await my arrival."

"I'll walk with you, thanks."

"And we'll try to refresh your memory on the way."

They cut into the Strand, and went by way of Charing Cross, Whitehall, and Westminster, into Victoria Street, Napoleon putting indefatigable questions to awake his companion's dormant recollections. Localities, public names, common topics of the day's papers—all puzzled him.

"If you could start me once with some name I know from association," he said, "I might get hold of things."

The little man pointed out to him that the "John Luck" on his handkerchief had not as yet assisted to this end, and the young man agreed woefully. By the time they arrived at the block of flats, that he was low-spirited, rather alarmed, and exceedingly

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worried, was clear. They ascended in the lift to the third floor, where Dapper unlocked the door of No. 20 to them with his master's key. Invited to leave overcoat and hat with the valet the guest did so, and the wheel-chair preceded him along the corridor and was checked at a door.

"My sister will be in the drawing-room," said Napoleon, turned the handle, and guided himself in.

The visitor saw a girl with an enchanting, memorable face lying in a cushiony chair by the fire. She looked up as they came in, showing big shining eyes fringed with very long lashes; she wore one of her high-waisted frocks, and her hair was dressed as usual *à la Joséphine* in a modernised way, so that as usual she gave one the impression of having stepped straight out of a First Empire portrait.

"Mary, my dear," said her brother, wheeling forward; "I bring you a visitor whose name, he and I believe, is Mr. John Luck."

She gave the slightest start, then came forward with outstretched hand and question in her face.

"He has lost his memory temporarily, Polly," Napoleon continued, "and instead of asking a policeman, he asked me to help him."

"Oh! How do you know," she said roguishly to the stranger—she was, in her way, as much of a dare-devil as her extraordinary brother—"that the police wouldn't have been infinitely more dependable?"

All laughed at this.

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"That remains to be proved," said Napoleon jocularly; "meanwhile he puts himself into our hands for the night. Sit down, Polly, and we will tell you what we know. Sit down, my dear fellow. You're not worrying too much, I hope?"

"Don't worry," said Mary sweetly.

It was a charming room, rose-lighted, silk-cushioned; the brother and sister were a charming pair in it. There was no doubt that he had found very desirable friends to aid him in his perplexity, and the stranger responded that, under the enjoyable circumstances, nothing was farther from his intention than worry. He felt himself, however, a helpless incubus.

They disposed of this with kindest protestations, and the story was told to Mary Prince. After the telling they tried him again with suggestions to recall his memory, but nothing availed.

"Say to yourself," said the invalid earnestly, "'My name is John Luck. As John Luck, what relatives have I? What business connections, if any? What plans? What claims?' Work as it were from the pivot of 'John Luck.' Take that one bit of knowledge as the central fact about yourself. Fortunate," he said, turning to Mary, "that I saw the handkerchief drop, or we wouldn't have even that to go upon."

"Very fortunate," she agreed.

"Does not the name," continued Napoleon, "remind you of anyone or anything?"

After a few moments of comic despair, "Abso-

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lutely of nothing and nobody," the guest confessed.

Napoleon studied him thoughtfully.

"You look," he said, "the least bit run down; depressed. It may be due, of course, to the experience of the last few hours, and the experience of the last few hours may be due to previous overstrain of some sort. I suggest that you go to bed, and sleep as well as you can. My man will look after you." He rang the bell. "Dapper," he ordered, "spirits in the dining-room. My dear fellow, I am going to give you a stiff 'un. And then, Dapper, see that there is everything ready in one of the spare bedrooms."

"I will see to that," said Mary, moving away.

When she had ordered the arrangements for the comfort of an unexpected guest, she returned to the untenanted drawing-room. The men were on the other side of the wall, having "stiff 'uns." She could hear their voices and an occasional laugh. Then the sound of their exit and entry into another room—the bedroom prepared. She was not excited, puzzled, or curious, but stood warming one little foot, on the fender-rail, looking into the flames, pinching her under-lip thoughtfully between finger and thumb, and smiling a delightful smile full of mischief. She did not move when presently a ring at the bell heralded a very late visitor, but kept her position till a maid showed in a tall bronzed young man.

It was John Luck.

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Seeing, with delight, Mary thus adorable and alone:

"Well, darling," said he softly, coming up behind her; she glanced over her shoulder. "All alone? Please, may I have a kiss?"

"Certainly——"

Luck held her close and kissed her.

"——not!" she gasped.

"Mary," said he fervently, "I am awfully sorry."

"Johnnie, I don't believe you."

"I am awfully sorry, really, that there wasn't time for more before you said 'not.'"

Mary's little face was flushed like a rose, and her big eyes shone. She turned her head away from him, and sighed and bit her lips.

"Johnnie," she said tremulously, presently. "No, don't. I believe it's business to-night."

"Not business now?"

"It will be in a minute, when Nap comes in."

As if testifying to the correctness of her time-limit—which she spent with Johnnie Luck's arm round her waist, he murmuring protestations into her ear—almost directly they heard the chair running outside, which sound was followed by a rattling of the door-handle. They were sitting on the Chesterfield in front of the fire when Napoleon wheeled in, smiling.

"Well, children?" said he, halting beside them.

"How did you know Johnnie was here?" Mary asked.

"I am talented at guessing likely things," he replied.

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"Johnnie, I have just put to bed the chap who has borrowed your name for the next forty-eight hours."

They looked askance.

"And your handkerchief," Napoleon added. "Here is his real patronymic."

He drew out from under his cushion a crumpled white silk square, and handed it to Luck, who read: "James Loulon."

"Of course you know the name, Johnnie?"

"Loulon, the explorer?"

"Ah! Just back from a two years' private expedition. He has now gone to sleep with your handkerchief under his pillow to make him dream. The name on it is the only clue the poor fellow has to his identity, you see. Dapper lent him pyjamas big enough to squeeze into, and during the business of fitting up, I managed to look at the shirt he was wearing. It carried no mark beyond a laundry mark, so there is nothing there to help us."

The little man began grinning.

"Nothing at all to help poor Loulon," said he, "beyond the name on a pocket hanky that isn't even his own. Well, children?"

"Well?" they asked.

He replied by a request.

"Mary unless the fire has been replenished with this morning's paper, will you get it for me, please? Also a number of the *Artful Magazine*, dated June, 1909, which you will find in my desk."

She complied. During the finding of the papers

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he sat silent, drumming on the arm of his chair with the thin, nervous fingers of his left hand. When she came back with the magazine and paper, he thanked her; and turning the leaves, found an article in the one, and a short notice in the other, which he displayed to them, they looking together over his shoulder.

The article, illustrated, was on pictures, the paragraph to which Napoleon pointed referring to the collection of Sir Robert Akers, Bart., of Akerston, Kent. Among the collection, the writer noted, were a Cuyp and a Rembrandt purchased by their present owner at Christie's during the sale of the art treasures of a Dutch collector. The paragraph ran as follows:

"Mr. James Loulon, the intrepid young explorer, has returned to England very quietly according to his modest wont. He has, we understand, rented Akerston, Kent, for the next three months, from Sir Robert Akers, who is at present in Sicily. Mr. Loulon, who only landed yesterday, goes down for rest and quiet to Akerston to-morrow. He has, he informed our representative who called on him immediately on hearing of his arrival, never seen the place, but met Sir Robert in Italy, where he stopped for a day or two on his way home, was shown photos of Akerston, and immediately effected arrangements with the owner—who, by the way, is quite an old friend of his—and by wire with Sir Robert's agents in London, for tenancy. Asked about his experiences, Mr. Loulon," etc., etc.

Napoleon shifted a little in his chair, and began to talk.

"Queer, as most people think, the way events and chronicles dovetail. Yet why queer, considering

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the world, as I was saying to you this evening, Johnnie, a well planned and plotted book, where people and facts are generally arranged, or can be arranged by those interested enough to stand by and merely stage-manage—helpless people such as I—in a way that adds greatly to the coherence and relevance of the whole book? I was at that sale at Christie's, bidding against Sir Robert Akers and others. At the moment he had a deeper pocket than I, and he outbid me by a thousand or two. We knew each other well enough for him to chaff me on it afterwards. 'Prince,' he says, 'I've got an appetite, though no palate'—he didn't pretend to love like a connoisseur, only wanted to spend good money correctly—'I'm going to hang those in the gallery at Akerston.' 'Akers, you Philistine glutton,' says I, 'you ought to leave *chefs-d'œuvre* to men with palates, whether they've got pockets or not; 'pon my soul, you ought. You'll be sorry for it some day; your conscience will whack you; Nemesis will overtake you.' Dear me, children, I really wanted that Cuyp and that Rembrandt. However, I didn't get them, so *qu'importe?* Philosophy is a grand thing.

"To return to the construction of this chapter of the book. Shortly afterwards the *Artful* published this article, which I put away to look at and keep my memory green—real green, children. Three years elapsed, as the novelists say—or used to say. They've grown too subtle to make simple statements nowadays. Then yesterday I saw Akers' name in the

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paper, and my memory became very green indeed. Yesterday night at Frascati's Mr. James Loulon lost his memory, and I was fated to aid him. I make a point of aiding my neighbours. It would be a sad world if one did not brighten it by a little philanthropy now and again. That in parenthesis.

"The point at which we now arrive is this: in one of my spare bedrooms lies Mr. James Loulon, whose only clue to identity is that handkerchief of John Luck's—presumably, to all logical minds, Mr. James Loulon's own. In Kent is a beautiful place—Akerston—prepared hastily by servants who have never seen him, for the reception of an unexpected tenant. All is ready; to-morrow morning they expect the wire which will instruct them what train to meet; the cook has already planned the dinner; the Cuyp and Rembrandt are among other treasures in the gallery awaiting his enjoyment of them; I assume his palate. All waits for Mr. James Loulon. The only drawback at the moment is that he is in my spare bedroom, suffering from temporary, but total, loss of memory."

Mary glanced at Luck.

"I told you it was business," said she.

"Go on, Nap," said Luck, intent.

Napoleon went on crisply. "Well, Johnnie, surely there remains little more to say? I always like taking what I have made up my mind to have. Wire the Akerston servants to-morrow to meet what train you like. Late as possible, preferably to you. Take

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a bag—luggage following on, and all that—marked only 'J. L.' if anything. Take the all-important handkerchief, and a good, sharp knife. Eat a good dinner there. I leave an interlude to your imagination. To-morrow morning early I picture Akerston as missing you. I picture you as having already flown far away. Get across the Continent, Johnnie. Leave the acquisitions with Ben Sun-Allah, Sirocco Bazaar, Bagdad, in my name, Join us again in a few weeks. Grow a moustache in that time, if you can. And, by the way, Loulon is burnt nearly black; I'll use the walnut stain on you to-morrow morning. Good-night, children."

And he left them, considerately, to say good-night to each other.

Mr. Napoleon Prince's guest awoke early the next morning, and lay watching the winter dawn come in, and considering the lamentable curtailment of his retrospect which did not trouble him so acutely as it had done the night before; he felt fresher and calmer; and, lying there, thought coherently over the whole thing, bringing his mind to bear steadily upon the one clue to identify which he possessed—his name, "John Luck." The repetition of this, though, and the subsequent gazing at it on the handkerchief which he pulled out from beneath his pillow, availed in no way to make any suggestion to his brain. He fell to thinking, therefore, of irrelevancies—chief among them the *Joséphine* girl's entrancing little face—till

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eight o'clock brought Dapper, the dilatory valet of the night before, with tea and bath water.

"I thought you would like to bathe in your room, sir," said this discreet one discreetly, while he arranged things, "not being provided with dressing-gown and so on. By the way, sir, what will you wear this morning?"

"My clothes, I s'pose."

The discreet one glanced regretfully at the dress suit hanging over a chair back.

"Excuse me, sir, it will look rather bad to go out in. At six o'clock you might 'a done it—or even seven; but nine—leastways, it'll be ten when you've done breakfast, sir. Would you like to breakfast in a jacket of mine, sir?"

This offer being accepted, the valet withdrew, and returned again, when Loulon was ready for it, with the jacket. Breakfast was at nine-thirty.

The *Joséphine* girl of the night before was behind the coffee-pot, alone, when the guest entered. She greeted him and inquired anxiously if he had remembered anything. Nothing. Nothing? Dear me! How very trying for Mr. Luck. Nap would be in soon, anxious to hear how their visitor found himself.

As she spoke Napoleon wheeled in with a cheery "Good morning." He fell to with appetite on scrambled eggs, and after a little cheerful talk made inquiry of the guest.

"Well, Luck, how do you find yourself this morning?"

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"Much the same, thanks."

"By Jove!" said the little man, with kind concern, "that's bad. Dapper lent you that jacket, eh? Would you like me to fit you out? Do borrow any little sum you want, there's a good fellow. If you would condescend to a suit of reach-me-downs, Dapper shall have a selection for you sent here."

The guest looked distressed.

"I'd rather not borrow, thanks," he replied apologetically. "You see, I have no bona fides to give you——"

"My dear fellow, nonsense."

"And I may not be 'found' by my friends for an indefinite time."

"But you will find them. Your memory will return to you; I am confident of it. If, then, you won't allow me to fit you up, I'm afraid you are a prisoner here till evening, aren't you? Meanwhile I suggest—I urge you—to let Dapper find a doctor for you. My own medical man, now, if you don't remember yours."

This seemed highly reasonable, and was agreed upon. Goldboys, of Harley Street, who knew Napoleon in his rôle of respectable citizen, was called in. He snatched a hasty lunch with them, examined the tanned young man who had lost his memory, looked at him very keenly, pronounced the case to be not unusual in these ultra-strenuous days, congratulated the tanned stranger—with slight suspicion

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and slight severity—on having fallen into such kind hands and hospitable places, and requested a private word with Napoleon.

Then Dr. Goldboys said that he was a man of the world, which teaches one to be sadly suspicious of one's fellows, and was Mr. Prince sure of the prudence of his generosity? For all he knew, said Dr. Goldboys, looking very shrewd indeed, the fellow was playing tricks for some purpose of his own. The spoons? Or Miss Prince's jewellery? Should we not communicate with the police, and send him to a hospital, say, till his friends found him—if indeed it were other friends than those in the London constabulary who wanted to do anything of the kind? Let Mr. Prince be advised.

The little invalid listened, sorrowfully at first, and silently.

"Doctor," he said, in reply to this, "it is you knowing men who put me out of conceit with my glorious little world. I am not blaming you; I know the attitude of the majority—no doubt an attitude authorised by the experience of the majority. Nobody nowadays hastens to kill the calf and prepare the cakes for a stranger. Everybody, on beholding such a one, cries: 'Here's a stranger; let's kick him till he's justified himself.' And they kick—how they kick! They all want references and birth certificates carried in the hand. Well, doctor, I make a point—simply for the selfish pleasure of it, through no virtue—of aiding my neighbours. It would be a sad world for

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such as I if we could not entertain ourselves thus sometimes."

His brief smile flashed out, and was gone. The little man had a sweet smile, that moved not only his lips, but his eyes to an expression of something high, glowing, exalted.

"I apologise for my sentiment," he added. "I am, as you may have noticed, a dreamer. I dream, and I like to make my dreams come true. And it gives a pleasant sense of power when a helpless man like myself is able to help. To come to the concrete, this John Luck—according to the testimony of the handkerchief—is probably an angel, and I shall entertain him unawares."

"And probably a thief," the doctor persisted, shaking his head.

"I shall, nevertheless, entertain him," the other responded.

"Till when?"

"Till he has recovered, or until I can find his friends for him."

"And when do you suppose you will succeed in finding them?"

"That," replied Napoleon, "depends."

"If there were more like you in the world——" said Dr. Goldboys, shaking himself into his overcoat.

Napoleon eyed him quietly.

"It would be a different place, certainly," said he. "There would be fewer rich men, less treasure heaped up in storehouses and barns—forgive this

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Biblical metaphor I am employing—and much redistribution of property. As it is I dream much, and—accomplish a little sometimes.”

Promising to look in on the patient—who meanwhile was to be kept very quiet—in the morning, the doctor departed, leaving the little man looking rather saintly and thoughtful, sitting in his invalid chair. Mary came in.

“Nap,” she asked, “how long are you going to keep Mr. Loulon?”

“That,” replied Napoleon, “depends.”

“On what?”

“On the evening, or the morning papers, I should say, dear.”

He would tell her no more, but wheeled into the adjoining room, to talk kindly to his guest, and endeavour to rouse him from his very natural depression.

They were beginning tea when a wire was brought to Napoleon. It was addressed from Paris, and ran:

“All right. John.”

He tossed it into the fire after reading. “From our young friend, dear,” he mentioned to Mary. For half an hour or so more he talked ethics—contemporary topics being presumably unfamiliar to the man who had lost his memory—so brilliantly and amusingly that they were a gay trio. They were still lingering over the teacups in the firelight when the first evening paper was cried in the street outside.

The little man stopped his talk to his sister.

“What’s that?” exclaimed he.

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And it was:

"Evenin'—pi—per! Burgl'ry at S'Robertakers! Dispe—rence of Mr. James Lou—lon! Evenin' pi—per! Burgl'ry——"

"Sounds as though something's happened," said the little man, sipping tea, "Mary dear, will you ring and send someone out for a paper?" She complied. "I thought I heard Robert Akers' name," he added. "Old acquaintance of mine—charming fellow! What?"

The visitor had put his cup down and his hand to his head.

"Akers!" he repeated. "Sir Robert Akers! Sir Robert——"

He was still murmuring it, they at once plying him with questions—inquiry led by Napoleon and followed by Mary—when the paper was brought. The invalid turned his attention to its news. Soon he was giving them a brief, interested summary.

"Queer story this. Listen, Mary. Listen, Luck. James Loulon, the young explorer, who landed about two days ago, has disappeared. Missed this morning from his hotel. Was to have gone down to Akerston as temporary tenant yesterday. M', m', let's see. Oh! had taken the place from Sir Robert. Arrangements made a day or two ago when meeting on the Continent. Surely I saw that in the day before yesterday's paper—extraordinary thing! Listen, here! A stranger arrived at Akerston purporting to be Loulon. Dined. Slept—or at least went to bed.

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In the morning the servants found him gone, and two pictures—Akers' Cuyp and Rembrandt—cut clean out of their frames. Nothing else touched, though quantities of valuables about. M'. Fellow was gourmet, not gourmand, evidently." He crackled the paper together, and looked at the flushed, bewildered man opposite. "And I remember," he remarked, "bidding against Akers for those very two pictures three or four years ago at Christie's. And I said to him: 'Akers, you Philistine glutton! You ought to leave *chefs-d'œuvre* to men with palates, even if they've no pockets. You'll be sorry for it one day, Akers! Your conscience will whack you! Nemesis will overtake you!' I dunno about conscience, but Nemesis—what? Poor old Bob Akers! Rough, very rough! I'm no end sorry! This will be a blow to him. Paper says they've cabled him about it. He'll rush home like mad, poor old Akers will. Dear me! Dear me! And what can have happened to James Loulon?"

The other man was sitting very still, his breath coming in deep gasps.

"Loulon!" he cried, gripping his forehead. "Loulon? Akerston! Loulon! Explorer! Prince, I—I remember something. I——"

The little man glanced at him, startled, questioning, doubtful; then was seized by a great inspiration. Leaning forward, he gripped the other's arm.

"James Loulon!" he cried.

It was a dramatic moment. The other trembled,

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and the sweat rolled down his forehead with his efforts to force his brain to master the past. After a few minutes, whose silence seemed like hours:

"God!" he nearly whispered, "yes, I am James Loulon. I——"

"Should have gone down to Akerston yesterday? You remember that?"

"Yes, I—I—think so—I——"

"Took the place from Sir Robert when you met him on the Continent? Remember that?"

"Yes—I—I am sure—I remember—it is coming. How can I prove——"

"That you are Loulon? If you are convinced of it you and I will go out now—find men who know you, to identify you. You've been away two years or so. What clubs do you belong to?"

"I don't—can't remember——"

Her brother turned to Mary.

"Mary, my dear, the Green Book, please."

She brought it. He read out a list of clubs, pausing after each name to give Loulon time for thought. At length the young explorer fixed, hesitantly, on two.

"There is no time to be lost," said Napoleon promptly, closing the book. "We must see the members' books at the 'Hunt Members' Town and Country' and the 'Progress.' Then wire to Akerston, and you must go down early to-morrow morning."

"You speak," breathed Loulon dazedly, "as if you have no doubt of my identity."

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"I have none," replied Napoleon with confidence.

"But—that handkerchief?"

"Is merely a bit of circumstantial evidence. We must get better."

They went out. The evening was taken up by visits to the clubs aforementioned, and thence to the private addresses of the members who were Loulon's particular friends, they not happening to be on the club premises. Identity, of course, was established with not a second's hesitation; the extraordinary story told; wild surmises made by every one except the invalid in the wheel-chair; and a wire sent to Akerston, too late to get through that night.

Loulon, re-established, slept again at the Victoria flat, after a pæan of congratulation from his host and his lovely sister. There remained the serious loss of the pictures to be dealt with.

"Another favour," he craved of Napoleon at breakfast the next morning.

"Ask," said the kind little philanthropist.

"For Heaven's sake come down with me to Akers-ton, and make good my story to Sir Robert."

The favour was granted. Mary was left in possession of the flat to inform Dr. Goldboys that his services were not required again for yesterday's patient, while her brother journeyed down into Kent with the anxious young explorer. It was late afternoon, and Sir Robert Akers had already arrived from Sicily, having travelled day and night. He tried to

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hide his chagrin, his immense consternation, while he listened to an extraordinary story. There remained little to be done at present, he told them. The local police had already been advised, Scotland Yard informed, and though the new fact of James Loulon's temporary illness might be handed on to both, it did not seem to shed much light upon the matter. With light or no light they discussed it long, however, sitting over the walnuts and wine that evening in a mellow old dining-room with the light from candles in great silver sconces falling on the intent faces of the three of them—Akers' stout, ruddy, unimaginative; Loulon's burnt, eager, bewildered; Napoleon Prince's high-browed, aquiline-nosed, curious-lipped, very thoughtful.

The thing was discussed from all sides. Each of the three had theories to advance. Conclusions, however, pointed to very little. It was, all agreed, obvious that the thief had either got wind, somehow, of Loulon's derangement through tracing his movements ("Though," all asked, "how was it possible?"), or that he had thought the new tenant would go down to Akerston the day after that arranged for, and so wired the servants, intending to forestall him. The thing seemed a big mystery all round.

It was equally obvious that James Loulon's recovery of memory was retarded by the misleading fact that he believed his name to be John Luck. By the way, had anybody ever heard of anybody named John Luck? No, nobody had. Meanwhile, where were the

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Cuyp and Rembrandt? In Amsterdam, was hazarded; they came from there, anyway. Napoleon merely smiled, nodded, and said: "Maybe—I should say," having in his mind's eye a picture of a dry old brown devil of a merchant in the Bagdad bazaar.

He added a reminiscence, though: "Remember, Akers, how we bid against each other for those very two? Must have been three years ago—what? I told you Nemesis would overtake you for despoiling my soul."

"I was a first-prize noodle," said Akers, very sore, "to buy them at all. Eight—five—O lor'!"

Napoleon smiled sympathetically.

"And as prophesied," he remarked, "Nemesis has overtaken the noodle. Very sorry indeed, Bob. And what'll you do?"

"What I can," replied Akers, "and precious little."

Loulon put a problem, leaning eagerly over the dinner-table.

"Supposing I'd only had my own handkerchief, don't you know, with my own name on, wouldn't I have remembered everything, probably, in time? Or wouldn't Prince here have known the name and restored me to where I belonged?"

"Ah! that's so, old man."

"All that confounded handkerchief," said Akers gloomily.

"Blasted thing!" said the explorer.

The little man had his elbow on the table, and his fine face leaning on his hand.

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"And about that handkerchief," he propounded, "don't you both think there's a big mystery there?"

"None at all," Loulon replied.

Napoleon looked extremely interested.

"I had my last washing done in Paris on my way home," said Loulon, "and it was merely a laundry mistake. Quite simple, you see."

"Nothing very mysterious there, Prince," Akers added.

"I'm not satisfied," said the little man, with pensive obstinacy, "that it is as simple as you fellows think."

Chapter VI

The Fardi Miniature

THE very heavily insured postal packet had been delivered at the finest hotel in Rome, and was carried at once to the occupiers of the best suite of apartments, the Prince and Princess di Tolemo, recently arrived in the city from their home in the extreme south. They were drinking tea *à la Russe*, with delicate sandwiches of fresh dates, it being almost four o'clock in the afternoon, and the Prince having acquired the English tea habit and, having acquired, liking it, as everyone does.

"Your portrait, *bella carissima*," he observed, tapping the packet with a gouty ringed forefinger.

She betrayed little interest, and that little was spasmodic.

Then he was petulant. "You might care a trifle, wife, where I care so much," rather pathetically.

The Princess put down her tea, and leaned forward to look as he opened the packet, her long slender hands twining and untwining on her knee. The sealed paper and string were tossed aside, the little wood casing prised open, and from a wrapping of cotton-wool was drawn a miniature of rather large size, of supreme workmanship and beauty, set round

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with flawless diamonds that scintillated like lightning flashes in the old Prince's hand. The Princess's young face was sombre. She leaned her elbow on her knee, put her perfect chin in her perfect palm, and looked at the portrait with black eyes which still held the wonder of girlhood.

"The beautiful setting dims me, quite," she said at last, as if trying to show appreciation of something.

"You dim the setting, love," said the Prince; "I had the diamonds purely as a foil. You like it?"

"It is wonderful; exquisitely done! Fardi is a great artist."

"I should have allowed no one but Giulio Fardi to try to do you justice. We will keep this a few days to show to our friends here; then I will send it to our bankers in Naples, my child, to be in safe custody till we return home. I do not care to travel with surplus valuables."

"Am I a surplus 'valuable'?" the Princess asked, as if remembering suddenly to please this old husband by a little languid coquetry.

"Your duplicate is, *carissima*, while I retain the original," said he laying the portrait down again on its cotton-wool. "We will show the miniature this evening to the little English invalid, who had heard I had commissioned Fardi, and who was interested. You remember? But half Europe, no doubt, knows of the commission, too. Fardi talks—over some sitters."

He was a very vain old man.

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"Who is this Englishman?" the Princess asked.

"Merely a visitor to Rome, like ourselves, I gather. His sister is with him. They appear to be charming, rich as English people usually are, and quite possible in every way. This Signor Prince has friends at the Embassy, I believe."

"I must meet them," said the Princess; "it is dull here."

He scowled at that, and flushed, his aged vanity being pricked. She got up and walked slowly to the door.

"I shall rest, Carlos," she informed him over her shoulder, "until dinner."

The Prince's dull old eyes followed her graceful movement across the room. What lines she had, long, sweeping, clear! Fardi had raved over her, and wept at being allowed only the head. What hair, heavy and dark—not entirely black, but with the duskiest chestnut tinge! What youth! What verve! What vitality! He beamed again with restored happiness and vanity in possession of such a jewel. When she had left him he rang to order the servant who answered the summons to bring fresh tea, with cream and sugar, English fashion; to bear his master's compliments to Mr. Napoleon Prince, and to ask him if he would do di Tolemo the honour of paying a call. These things being done, soon Napoleon Prince was ushered in, seated in his invalid chair, his fine face expressive of much pleasure.

Di Tolemo received him warmly and offered tea.

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"Thank you, Prince," said the small man, "but I have just had a cup with my sister, whom I hope you will allow me to present to the Princess some time."

"It will be the greatest pleasure," said di Tolemo. "The Princess had gone to her room before I sent you the message, or she would, of course, have stayed to see you. Meanwhile, I wanted to show you what has just arrived from Venice, where it has been, I think I may say, appropriately set."

And he displayed the Fardi miniature.

Napoleon examined it minutely, and with much admiration, listening the while to di Tolemo's old wheezing voice running on. They were keeping it to show their friends on the morrow, but after that were sending it to his bankers in Naples until their return to the Casa Tolemo. It was good, was it not? A great workman, Giulio Fardi? The artist, having painted half the crowned and noble heads in Europe, had passionately declared, on beholding her, that of all his sitters, he longed most to immortalise the Princess Bice di Tolemo. Note the turn of the head; note the ear—Fardi would not allow an earring to mar the line to the chin; note the eye-brow; the colouring with no flattery in it, where no flattery could better the truth. Did not the Signor think——?

"English husbands," replied the Signor, who had at all times the habit of quite charming frankness, "are not given to discussing their wives unreservedly

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with a stranger, much as the stranger appreciates the privilege."

The Prince stared, looked dully puzzled, and finally laughed.

"Ah! you Inglese!" he said comfortably, dismissing it. "But the portrait—it is superb, Signor? You think so? Fardi is the greatest modern in Italy. I must show this to my friend Xanos when we dine with him to-morrow. The Signor is acquainted with Anton Xanos?"

The Signor had not that pleasure.

"He has a house west of Villa Doria," said the Prince, "a beautiful house, full of beautiful things. You, being a connoisseur, would appreciate them. I thought everyone in Rome, and most people outside, knew of Xanos. He has invented—I do not know what he has not invented! Wonderful things emanate from Xanos's brain—wonderful! A young man, too, not over thirty, and rich—I do not know how rich!" The Prince sighed, looked peevishly envious, and added after a moment: "What do young men want with so much money? To be young is to be rich enough. But there! One does not grudge it! He is a charming fellow, Xanos, and a friend of my wife's, and mine."

Napoleon said "*Addio*," and brought his visit to a close, leaving the stout old Italian gloating again over the miniature. The Englishman wheeled himself to the lift, and, entering it, chair and all, was swiftly carried up to his suite of rooms on the floor

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above. In the drawing-room he found Mary, who was entertaining a caller, a tall, bronzed young man, and none other than John Luck. They were sitting very close together on a couch when the invalid wheeled in, and were apparently deaf to the sound he considerably made on his entry. He came up beside them, smiling.

"Well, children?"

"Well, Nap?" replied Mary.

"Afternoon, Nap," said Luck.

"When did you arrive in Rome, Johnnie?" asked Napoleon.

"Yesterday evening," answered Luck.

"I told you to keep away from us," said Napoleon.

John Luck laughed, and Mary laughed with him. She was fragilely and expensively dainty this hot spring afternoon, in a Paris frock of flowered ninon, demure, high-waisted; and her brown hair was bound with a gold fillet. After looking at her thoughtfully and appreciatively, Napoleon laughed too.

"Well, well, children," said he, "but you know it's impracticable."

There were shadows on her face and repressed storm on Luck's at this reminder, and he went on speaking as if he had not noticed either. "I have just left the Prince di Tolemo. The Princess had gone to her room, being tired—of his society. He wanted to show me the Fardi miniature."

Mary and Luck glanced instinctively at each other.

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"The miniature which brought us to Rome," said Napoleon.

"Well?" they asked.

"Well, children, it is all that was rumoured and more. Set so gorgeously as to be barbarous; I would have had a delicate enamel, or plain Venetian gold, or old paste, myself, and very little of any. But the Prince—fortunately, of course, for me"—he said this with the quiet certainty in his fortunes that was his prevailing characteristic—"chose diamonds of the finest water. I value the setting at about five thousand pounds, and the painting itself should be worth, I should imagine, about half of that, seeing that the Prince, who knows nothing about painting, paid Fardi three thousand."

"And is seven and a half worth your while, Nap?"

"My dear bloated emperor, certainly. Moreover, a Fardi miniature is something which many dealers would give the last farthing of their uttermost limit to possess. Fardi has, at present, done twenty miniatures, of royal heads, and of the Princess Bice, and he talks of doing no more, but of returning to a big canvas. Anyway, Johnnie, I have made up my mind."

"You see," said Mary, appealing to Luck.

"I see," he replied, "there is no more to be said. Command me, Nap."

"Look after my sister for me," said the little man philanthropically. "Chaperon her; show her the beastly sights; take her among the tombs and urns,

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and temples, and galleries, and gardens. Do what you like, both of you, and leave me to amuse myself by playing my own particular little game."

"We are not required?"

The invalid shook his head, smiling. "Haven't any use for either of you, as far as I can see. I can run myself about, and if I want anyone I have Dapper. I shall run myself, by the way, into the Villa Doria gardens to-morrow morning, and breathe the pines, and hear the spring birds, and criticise the gardeners. Leave me the Villa Doria, children, and breathe pines and listen to the spring birds elsewhere."

"You have spent three mornings out of the six we have been here in the Villa Doria gardens," said Mary curiously.

"I am reading a story there," said Napoleon, "out of the Book of the World. It is not a new story, of course, but one of the kind most frequent in the book." He glanced at the pair on the sofa, left them suddenly blushing, and wheeled out.

"Dapper," said he to his blank-faced valet during the dinner toilet, "have you heard anything since we have been here of a Mr. Anton Xanos, who is, I believe, of Greek nationality, an inventor, an art collector, a very rich man, and who has a house west of the Villa Doria?"

"Nothing at all, sir," replied the blank one.

"You may go out for a walk, Dapper," said his master; "eat your dinner at a café, and gossip. A pleasant evening to you."

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The valet may have been a fool, but he was a well-trained fool, which species is far more serviceable on occasion than born talent for performing to order; for it rarely asks the why and wherefore. Returning about eleven o'clock from a presumably pleasant evening out, the valet prepared his paralytic master for bed, having found wine "wonderful cheap, sir; these Italian girls tol-lol, and the gardens of the French Villa Medici better than 'Yde Park to take 'em in"; also having heard from a soldier that Mr. Xanos was a wonderful electrical inventor, a very eccentric gentleman, an acquaintance of the Prince di Tolemo and a friend of his wife. So they said. Said the old man didn't know half nor a quarter of what went on.

"Good night, Dapper," replied his master.

The valet went out and the little man lay back on his pillows, looking weird and wan in the flicker of the night-light, gazing into space. He was always very sensitive in the discussion of a woman, and if only the tip of Dapper's tongue—loosened excusably by his pleasant evening—had thrust itself slyly into his cheek, the valet would have probably found himself without a situation within the next five minutes. That insufferability had, however, been checked. The little man knew already much of what Rome had begun to say, and a deal more, being the great reader that he was. He had not perambulated those gardens early every morning solely for the pine odours and the spring birds. He was very interested

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indeed in the page; though, not being his business, and concerning a woman, he might make no audible comment upon it. Mere interest—rather sad and very kind—in the development of the tale prompted him to continue his morning excursions. He fell dreamlessly asleep.

He saw, about half-past eight the next morning, as he wheeled soundlessly about on pneumatic tyres, the spectacle that he had beheld for three mornings past; a lovely dark young woman meeting a very fine dark young man. He came from west of the Villa Doria, she from the same direction from which Napoleon had come. She came hastily, too—sur-reptitiously; there were few people in the gardens at that hour, except market-women hurrying through, and picturesque workmen lazily watering the flower-beds. It was a warm, still, spring morning; the distant mountains plainly to be seen; not a ripple disturbing the placid lakes; the fountains plashing gold in the sunlight; birds chirping about the pines and the cactus-trees. The young man and woman walked quickly off to a remote part of the wooded grounds, and the invalid in his chair did not follow. There was plenty written to be read, and plenty more, for insertion between the lines. Their mere presence was another paragraph in the story. He wheeled about, and chatted to the gardeners. At nine o'clock the woman hurried back alone, walking very fast, her head down. One of the gardeners said to another:

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"The Princess di Tolemo, who is staying in Rome."

The other checked him with a glance at the little Englishman, who knew more and could see farther than both of them put together. He smiled, and went leisurely back to his hotel for breakfast, and ahead of him hurried the white figure of Bice di Tolemo.

"Mary, my dear," he observed at breakfast to his pretty *vis-d-vis*. "I have an observation to make to the Prince di Tolemo, and I wish to find an occasion to make it. I have already said that I shall not trouble you or Johnnie in this little quest of mine, but I should like to ask your services, as the occasion, for a few minutes."

"Anything you like, Nap."

"When you have finished breakfast, my dear, come down with me to the di Tolemos."

When they had finished the sort of breakfast that you can get in Italy, but nowhere else, they descended in the lift to the floor below, and went to the di Tolemos' apartments. On the announcement of their names to the Prince and Princess, who were at breakfast, said the servant, they were at once shown in. The little man wheeled forward, smiling, with his pretty sister beside him.

"Prince, a thousand apologies," he began, "but——"

The Prince introduced the Englishman to his wife, who, lovely, languid and pale, sat at the head

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of the table, not at all interested in her breakfast, hardly interested in the very unceremonious advent of her visitors. She bowed very graciously, however, and smiled with her red lips, while the shadows stayed in her eyes.

"But my sister," Napoleon pursued, after Mary had been presented to husband and wife, "was very interested in the Princess's portrait, about which I told her last night, and was anxious that I should beg you to let her see it before you dispatch it to your bankers."

"That will not be till to-morrow," said the Prince comfortably.

"So I remember you told me. But I am off to Naples this morning, and shall not be back till to-morrow night, I expect. Therefore I had no choice but to trouble you so early. Is it unpardonable?"

"Not at all, Signor," the Princess replied for her husband. "Carlos will have great pleasure in showing the Signorina."

"To Naples?" said the Prince, as if vaguely struck by the coincidence.

"I go, like the miniature," said Napoleon lightly, "to Naples, to see my cousin—who is passing through—on wretched family affairs. I am recuperating after illness, and here comes business intruding. Unpardonable of business, is it not, Princess?"

She smiled languidly.

"So," the Prince observed inquisitively, "you

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go to see your cousin, Signor?" He paused, expectant.

"My cousin Braceland," Napoleon explained.

The Prince looked very cordial.

"The Duke of Braceland? We had, of course, heard he was in Italy."

"He is coming to Rome in a week."

"I hope we shall have the pleasure——"

"Most certainly, I hope you will accord him the pleasure," replied the Englishman. "Meanwhile, I must go to Naples, insist on Braceland doing what he does not want to do"—enigma came glibly—"and cable the result of my insistence home. And meanwhile, also, I have to beg you to let my sister see the Fardi masterpiece."

It was brought, examined, admired, and packed again into its box. The visitors made to depart.

"You will trust it to the post?" Napoleon asked.

"Heavily insured, of course," said the Prince.

"A thing of that value, one might think, would be sufficient to tempt any poor postal clerk to throw up his post to run away with it," said Napoleon. "But forgive me. I don't want to foretell misfortune which is not only improbable, but quite ludicrous in its improbability. Good morning, Prince. Good morning, Princess. A thousand thanks, and may I hope that next week, when Braceland is in Rome, you will do me the honour of dining one evening?"

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Brother and sister went out, she slightly breathless.

"Is the Duke of Braceland in Italy, Nap?" she asked, when they found themselves once more in their own apartments.

"He is announced in the society papers, Polly. The adoption is very temporary, of course. We shall have left Rome next week. Meanwhile, I go to Naples this morning."

"What for?"

"On a bona fide errand, if the observations which I made just now to di Tolemo fructify. My train, I believe, starts in an hour."

He sat and read the morning paper with no apparent anxiety as to the fructifying of observations. Barely a quarter of an hour elapsed before the Prince appeared, carrying a little packet in his hand.

"Signor," he began, "it has occurred to me that here is a most excellent opportunity of sending the Fardi miniature to my bankers, if you would be so obliging. On reflection, certainly, I do not trust the post, insurance or no. Of what use would insurance money be to me, should some postal thief get this into his hands? Probably no money ever minted would induce Fardi to do it again. They are erratic, these geniuses. Would you, therefore, Signor——"

The invalid looked somewhat dismayed, spoke of the responsibility; and had not the Prince wished to keep the miniature for a day or two to show to his friends in Rome?

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The objections were waved aside. The opportunity was certainly too good to miss, if the Signor would be persuaded to undertake the little errand, which need cause him no anxiety at all. No one, owing to these hasty arrangements, would know the valuable was already travelling to Naples. Would not the Signor be kind enough?

The Signor was sufficiently kind at length, promising to go to di Tolemo's bankers immediately on arrival, leave the valuable in their care, and instruct them to wire receipt, and then write receipt to the Prince. Meanwhile he would ask a favour in turn. He was leaving his sister alone for two days. If the Prince and Princess would be so kind? They would, with all the pleasure and gratification possible, see that she suffered no inconvenience or annoyance. And so off went the Prince, and off went the little man to his bedroom, hastily to prepare for his journey. Mary followed him in.

"My dear," he said, "you observe my tactics. You stay till I return. You are a bona fide, a hostage, a proof of purity. Are you curious, though, about anything? If so——"

He produced something carelessly from his waistcoat pocket. It was a miniature of the Princess Bice, set around with diamonds. She gave a little cry, took it into her hands, examined it intently, and then, from training, knew it for what it was.

"Done in Paris, on our way here, from a photograph of the Princess I saw in a photographer's

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show-case," he explained. "Bad workmanship, shoddy production—cut-glass rubbish—but there wasn't time to do the thing well, as I'd have liked. Good enough for a bourgeois banker who is probably also a Philistine. Have a cab called quickly, child."

He sat looking very disappointed.

"Lord!" said he wearily. "What child's play! What rubbish! I had hoped for intricacies. If it wasn't for my artistic interest in my work we'd just bolt with this right now." He regarded the packet sombrely. "Here it is in our hands, and here it will remain, in our hands. But no! we won't be crude. We want to produce bankers' receipts, and have cut-glass locked into an official safe, and insured for thousands of pounds. We must get an element of subtlety into this farce. But really, saving your presence, Mary—how damn easy!"

Arriving back in Rome after killing a day in Naples, and lunching with di Tolemo's banker, who was delighted with the condescension of the cousin (german) of the Duke of Braceland, Napoleon was truly startled and horrified by the news which was running through the city—of the sudden death of the Princess di Tolemo, which had occurred late the evening before.

Procuring a paper which furnished details of the tragedy, he shut himself up in his room to read and meditate. The reading gave him to understand that the Princess and her husband were dining with their mutual friend, Signor Anton Xanos. That after

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dinner, during which meal the lady appeared in her usual health and spirits, their host, an accomplished pianist and amateur composer, had, by their request, played to his guests. While listening to a composition of Xanos's own, which was a special favourite of hers, the Princess had died suddenly in her chair. The Prince, addressing her at the close of the piece, had met with no answer, and, hastening over to her side, had found her dead. The paper furnished many other details of the Princess's ancestry, her girlhood, her marriage, and other things irrelevant to the problem in hand, and which the little man ignored.

For that there was a mystery surrounding this sudden death—attributed, said the paper, by the doctors to heart failure—he had no doubt.

"Anton, my friend," said he, sitting there, "you are at the bottom of this. Well, the story is ended abruptly. I come to the writing of 'Finis.' But I will not turn the page until I can add an 'Epilogue.' And with the 'Epilogue' you, Anton Xanos, inventor, musician, and composer, must supply me."

He laid the paper down, and went in to his dinner. A man of fixed determination, his mind was always made up irrevocably, remorselessly, and with exceeding swiftness. Therefore: "I am going out to pay a call, my dear, after dinner," said he to Mary; the sad occurrence of yesterday evening having been commented on between them. "You will not be lonely?"

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"Certainly not. But you must be tired——"

"My dear Polly, I have something absorbing to do, and cannot possibly be tired. Thanks for your solicitude. No doubt Luck will be dropping in?"

"It is possible," she acknowledged.

Napoleon went out, into a night of stars, of softness, of spring. He refused Dapper's escort, and wheeled himself alone through the streets to the walled-in house west of the Villa Doria. He rang at a garden door, asked with his quiet arrogance that was seldom denied, for Signor Xanos, and was escorted up a short pathway, on either side of which lay a moon-silvered wonder of Italian garden, to the house. There he was left in a small ante-room while his card was taken to the master. He gazed about him speculatively. The ante-room was a veritable treasure-house of art. In a few minutes the arched door opened to admit Xanos.

He came in with peculiar swiftness and noiselessness—a tall dark man of, perhaps, thirty. His hair and eyes were black, his hands long and sensitive, his face pure Greek, his tailoring excellent English. He looked at the card in his hand, bowed and spoke very coldly.

"To what may I attribute the pleasure, Signor?"

There was a short silence which startled the Greek into minuter attention. The little man looked away, then down, then up, and his gaze fixed, with significance in it.

"I have an errand," he said slowly, "but I hardly

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know whether to rush crudely into it, since it merely hinges on my incorrigible curiosity. Do you ever remember seeing me before?"

"I do," answered the Greek, without hesitation, "in the Villa Doria gardens at half-past eight for the last four mornings."

The little man looked slightly chagrined.

"Do you mean you noticed—I thought I was more delicate."

"Delicate!" said the Greek contemptuously. "You are one of the meddlesome English. You speak of your curiosity being aroused. Well?"

"To what may I attribute the death of the Princess Bice?" said Napoleon quietly.

He liked dramatic moments. They were his great weakness, which was gratified now. The Greek went pale—paler—livid. His eyes stared, and he tore the bit of pasteboard into shreds between his sensitive fingers.

"To — what — may — you — attribute — the — death — of — the — Princess — Bice?" he said in a falling voice.

Napoleon nodded. "Between you and me, Signor, strictly, of course, between you and me. Because I am a reader of life more than an actor, and I am loath to close the book on this story before the curtain has been raised to allow me one little peep at the mystery."

Xanos sat down.

After a long silence he began: "Well, Signor,

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well!" His face settled into a sort of white stillness with all expression dropped out of it. "Supposing I gratified this inordinate curiosity of yours—supposing, that is to say, that I could gratify it—how do you know the price I should exact—which I might consider that you deserved to pay for your intrusion?"

"Gratify me," said his visitor, with supreme carelessness, "then ask what you like."

The Greek looked at him, curling his lips back over his teeth in a sort of smile.

"I have a great mind to do so, since you imagine you know so much. Excuse me a moment or two."

He was absent for about five minutes, during which Napoleon wheeled about looking at bric-à-brac, and feeling for something in his left-hand coat-pocket. When the Greek came back his dark face was quiet and normal.

"There is a mystery, Signor," he said, "a mystery which no one will ever suspect, except you, who seem to possess the gift of second-sight, and I am going to tell you the story frankly, since you suspect it, and afterwards ask for my price. If you will come into the next room——"

He opened the door for the chair to wheel in, and Napoleon uttered an exclamation of appreciation and delight. The room was large, with a high ceiling frescoed with an "Aurora" after Guido in the Rospigliosi Gallery; with tapestried walls and wonderful carved chairs and couches. The floor was

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inlaid in a design, and in the centre of it stood a grand piano. At right angles to the piano was a tall ivory cabinet against the wall; on the top of which cabinet stood a heart-shaped instrument, stringed like a harp, surrounded by carved ornaments and boxes crowded together. Midway between the piano and the cabinet, in a direct line, was a quaint arm-chair, made, all except the cushion in the centre of the seat, of fretted copper. Xanos showed his visitor one or two things, including the heart-shaped instrument.

"It is," he explained, "an invention of my own. No one has ever made the strings of what I have made them. It is not patented, and," he put the instrument slowly back in exact position, "it never will be patented now. It is, you see, a factor in the story for which you so incautiously ask. Should you mind sitting there?"

He indicated the copper chair, burnished like fire, under the electric light.

"Thanks, I will keep my seat," said his visitor. "For one thing, I cannot get out of it without help."

"That is so?" asked the Greek with quiet satisfaction. He came forward, lifted the invalid out like a child, and placed him in the copper chair. "Easily done," he said, smiling again the strange smile which merely curled back his lips, and gave no mirth to his dark face, "and the Signor will get the atmosphere of the story better so, since in that chair Bice died last night."

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Napoleon's face did not change, but, eyeing the Greek and feeling with his left hand in his left-hand pocket, he merely nodded and commented. Xanos sat down in a negligent attitude on the piano-seat.

"The Signor was interested in what he saw in the gardens at half-past eight every morning?" he suggested, striking idly a chord or two.

"I tell you," replied Napoleon, "I am simply a reader of life, and my interest is that of a reader."

"Some pages," said the Greek, flashing a glance full of fury at him, "are too private, too sacred, to be read by strangers. To get to the story for which you are aching, Signor: It is evident to you, so indelicate has been your curiosity, that the Princess and I loved each other. We only met and talked and tried to console each other for the vicissitudes of our fates that we had not met before she married—she being very poor and very young—the Prince di Tolemo. But two hearts are not to be satisfied, Signor, with meeting and talking, and verbal consolation, and the state of affairs was torture for both of us. Yet our love for each other continued solely on those grounds, because there is nothing purer or prouder than a real Italian aristocrat, and Bice di Tolemo was a great lady. I am not going to rant, to rave, to sentimentalize, Signor, although there is no reason why I should be ashamed to do so before you, who will never have power to repeat my sentiment or betray my confidence anywhere. In ten

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minutes, O, prying little Englishman, I shall have exacted my price for the story."

"And that?"

"Life," said the Greek, playing a chord or two again. "Life."

"Indeed, Signor." His left hand sought and rested in his coat-pocket.

"Yes, indeed," said Xanos, nodding. "But before you go—where you will go—wherever your gods call you—you shall have, in full, the story of the Princess Bice's death. I am, as you may have heard, something of a composer, and I wrote a gavotte for her. Its public name was 'Gavotte Italienne,' its pet name was 'Gavotte à Bice.' I used to play it often when her husband brought her here, and it whispered to her all the things that she would not let me say aloud; and she understood. Yesterday morning, in the gardens, she said to me: 'Anton, I want to die; I want to die listening to our gavotte.' And I—I wanted her to die, too. As would you perhaps, prying little Englishman, if you ever loved a woman, and saw her married to a fat wineskin who would not depart this life for another twenty years, being rich enough to prolong senility. We were both mad; I was the madder. I was drunk with jealousy as you will never be drunk with anything in this world. When I got home I played the gavotte. I had just finished the heart," he nodded over at the instrument on the ivory cabinet, "and put it there. In the second

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movement of the piece comes this chord"—he turned as if to strike it, then checked—"no," he said smiling; "not yet; I forgot. A chord in both hands, *fortissimo*, which provokes a sound back from the heart. I did not know till yesterday morning how sensitive the instrument was till, playing that chord, I heard the strings opposite jangle. I got up and went to look. They quivered a little even two or three seconds after.

"I am, as perhaps you know, something of an electrician in an amateur way. It is a hobby of mine. I have my own engine here, and have fitted up my house with improvements that the trade has never dreamt of. You see what is apparently a jade box on the top of that cabinet right against the instrument?"

Glancing in the indicated direction, Napoleon merely replied composedly in the affirmative.

"That is the front of the casing of a very strong electric battery," Xanos continued. "I made the casing, and charged it myself. It can be connected, say, with the chair on which you are now sitting—as a matter of fact, at this moment it *is* connected, by a wire running along the base of the wall, then under the rugs to the centre of the room. Had I struck that chord just now——"

He paused; Napoleon merely nodded.

"I was telling you about my discovery of the instrument's sensibilities this morning," said Xanos; "afterwards the suggestion came to me of—putting

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the Princess in that chair and playing our gavotte to her. She had a weak heart, of which the physicians warned her. In the second movement that chord would thrill the strings on the cabinet, and by tiny pressure on it they would communicate with the electric battery, if it was placed right against them. It can be worked by the pressure of a hair, to such perfection have I brought it. When the idea came, I tried it on my dog. The dog is buried in the garden now.

"You understand the idea, Signor? And so she came, she and the fat wineskin. And, listening to my music, died—full of it, as she had wished to die. I touched her, and the touch reached her heart and stopped its beating. The chair can be impregnated in a moment with electricity. And you have read enough, you poor little Englishman. You are going to die too!"

"Because you dare not trust me with your secret?"

"Dare not? Signor Prince, you are going to die because of your daring—I will not die because of mine. You have dared to intrude into my privacy—my heart! You have put your hand on my wound, you damnable little spy!" He broke off what promised to be a torrent of sheer fury at last, and said: "But why should I lose my temper? Why show you more? You must be wanting to hear this famous gavotte," and he stole softly into it.

The first movement was played through, light, dainty, full of *espièglerie* and sweetness, the Greek's

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beautiful face turned slightly towards the paralytic in the copper chair. On the cabinet stood the responsive heart against what looked like a jade box, but which held death. Napoleon listened to the first movement, hardly paler than his wont, with his left hand in his pocket. A pause heralded the advent of the second movement; the Greek, his hands poised above the keys, stopped to say:

"This is in six-eight time, and the chord is in the fifth bar. I don't suppose you will notice the effect."

"Will you stop playing, Signor?" asked the little man.

For answer, Xanos broke into the second movement. Two bars were played—three—Napoleon counting. Then, drawing his left hand from his pocket like lightning, he shot the Greek's hand, first one, then the other, off the keys. The music stopped, smoke and powder-smell filled the air; the Greek sat with his shattered hands hanging limply at his sides, and Napoleon dropped his pistol into his pocket with an apology.

Xanos looked at him murderously.

"I am not a fool, Signor," said the little man.

Xanos still looked at him.

"You must have those hands dressed," said the other.

Servants, alarmed by the reports, ran to the door, and two footmen hastened in, and stood hesitating.

"Go away," said Xanos to them in a cold voice; "you are not wanted."

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Napoleon stopped their obedient exit.

"Pardon me, Signor, but if your men could assist me into my chair again——"

It was done, and the curious servants withdrew. They were alone once more.

"Signor," said Napoleon, "forgive me if you can."

Xanos merely looked at him, and wetted his lips.

"*Addio*," said Napoleon. He turned his chair about and wheeled to the door, passing the ivory cabinet on his way. He stayed a moment to examine the battery with a brief glance. Xanos had not idly threatened—so much was clear. The little man wheeled out, very pensive, one backward look as he turned from the doorway showing him Xanos still seated before the piano, still staring after him, with his bleeding hands hanging down.

The footmen in the hall let him go—with scared, scowling glances—because their master had given no orders otherwise. So he passed out through the garden to the street, and, sending the chair forward vigorously, in a quarter of an hour found himself at his hotel.

In the drawing-room was Mary, and with her, as anticipated, John Luck.

"Well, children?" he greeted his partners as usual as he wheeled in.

They both sprang up, both flushed and very full of some affair of tremendous importance. On the

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floor lay an English newspaper. Luck picked it up, and pointed out a paragraph to Napoleon in complete silence.

It ran thus:

"We regret to hear of the death of Sir Abel Luckweather, in his fortieth year. He died on Saturday last at Luckweather, his seat in Berkshire, his recent accident thus terminating fatally. He leaves no heir; the title therefore goes to his only brother, at present, it is believed, out of England."

"Yes?" said Napoleon interrogatively, handing this information back.

Luck answered simply: "I am John Luckweather. Poor Old Abel was my only brother."

"So he succeeds——" Mary began.

"To a title and estate," Napoleon finished. "Well, Johnnie—so it's the end of the partnership, eh?"

"Nap, I've got responsibilities, you see. Got to stand, I expect, got to be a magistrate, got to hunt the hounds if they want me, instead of poor old Abel, and keep up the family name. You understand, Nap?"

"Oh! ah!" said Napoleon rather roughly, "I understand."

He could not help the roughness, the dissolving striking him for all his assumption of phlegm, like a hard blow. He sent the chair on to the window, where the blinds were up, and sat looking out at the spangled sky, with the domes and arches and church towers dark against it. Then, a thought

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occurring, he glanced back at the two of them, standing hand in hand.

"And Mary?" he asked.

"Coming with me," said Johnnie steadily.

"Are you, Polly?"

She breathed faintly "Yes."

"It will be a real parting, a final parting," said Napoleon. "Your ways and mine won't lie together for an inch, children."

"Give up the——"

"Games? No, not yet, Mary. But I'll give you up. Yes, I'll give you up. Love's a very queer and dreadful thing, child, and it mustn't be trifled with. I've been seeing a—a striking page to-night. So I'll dig a grave of respectability, and put my little sister cheerfully into it along with my late friend and partner."

He was a terribly lonely little man in that moment, although she clung about him, kissing him, and Johnnie gripped his hand. He freed it to search his waistcoat pocket, and bring out something wrapped in tissue paper. It was the Fardi miniature, carried there with his usual supreme carelessness.

"When you go home to-night, Johnnie, I wish you would leave this, with a note, at the house of Anton Xanos. You may perhaps know it—west of the Villa Doria?"

Johnnie did.

"I will leave you," Napoleon added, "while I

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go to write the note which is to accompany the miniature."

He went, to write:

"Atonement; to Anton Xanos from the prying Englishman, who can understand what he reads."

Chapter VII

The Return of the Woman into the Case

"My word!" said the little man, "this is loneliness!"

Dapper the incomparable was attending him out to the balcony of his hotel. It was his dear Paris, to which he usually returned straight as a homing bird when some ennui, some sickness of soul, fell upon him; his body was always sick, so he counted little of that. He spoke softly, saying: "My word! this is loneliness!" not intending to be heard, more as an observation to himself than a public complaint, not knowing that he said it aloud until the words were uttered. The attentive valet, bending over the back of the chair as he walked behind it, asked:

"Sir?"

"What did I say?" said Napoleon.

Dapper replied discreetly: "I understood you to make some remark about loneliness, sir."

"I have made many remarks about loneliness," said the invalid, "but usually to myself. I am lonely, Dapper."

"Dear me, sir! I am sorry to hear it."

"I am sure you are," replied Napoleon; "I pay

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you to be sorry at the right moments, and you always perform your duties"; adding after a minute, during which the incomparable one raised an air-cushion behind his shoulders: "That's my ill-temper, Dapper. Remember to fine me the usual sovereign when I pay you your next wages."

"Certainly, sir," replied the valet. "Thank you, sir."

The chair was drawn up close to the edge of the balcony, and Napoleon looked over at vibrating Paris. The evening crowds, well-dressed, perfumed, full of light laughter, debonair, gay, irresponsible in the hour of pleasure, drifted by.

"Happy, happy people!" said the little man, watching them fondly. "How I love Frenchmen!"

"And Frenchwomen, sir," said the valet, in perfectly discreet addition.

"Certainly," replied Napoleon. "The Frenchwoman is charming, and who would not love her? Dapper——"

"Sir?"

"Did you get that bracelet for me this afternoon?"

The valet produced a morocco case, and put it on the arm of the chair at his master's left hand. With that nimble left hand Napoleon opened the case, and drew out a gold bracelet with a clasp set with a single diamond.

"You paid three thousand francs?"

"Yes, sir, according to your instructions."

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"Three thousand francs, minus your own commission, of course?"

"Sir—I am, in a sort of way, a man of business."

"Certainly. Take the case away." He slipped the bracelet into his pocket. "And have you looked in the visitors' book for what I want to know?"

"Yes, sir. This morning. The lady is a Mrs. Muswell, sir."

The little man thought a moment or two, looking out over the lambent street, filled with all those plotting, planning, loving, living men and women, his own loving and living being mostly curtailed to affairs of the spirit. He appeared neither surprised nor interested by his valet's information. They were nearly alone on the balcony, other guests drinking their coffee within the hotel, or going out into the fine night. The servant awaited his pleasure and looked at the pale, musing, baffling face which neither he nor any other man had ever been able to read. Napoleon's left hand was in the pocket of his dinner-jacket, fondling the bracelet. Presently he spoke again:

"Has this lady dined?"

"I believe so, sir, and is taking coffee in the *foyer*."

"Ah!" said Napoleon. "Thanks."

"You would like coffee served here now, sir?"

"I shall take coffee in the *foyer*."

He turned the chair, and wheeled slowly in through the window, the servant behind him to proffer any help. Help was not needed, he being an

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adept in governing his own locomotion, but the man attended him to the lift and saw the doors closed upon him before he walked away to his own room to smoke his master's cigarettes and read *Le Souvenir*. Napoleon was carried down to the *foyer* on the ground floor.

Here was a crowd of visitors, both cosmopolitan and the smartest of smart Parisians. Everyone seemed to be talking to someone else, with one exception, and that was the woman of whom it seemed the invalid Englishman was in quest, since his eyes sought her the moment he wheeled into the lounge, with smiles right and left, and graceful: "Pardon, madame! Pardon, monsieur! Excuse my clumsy chair!" And, having found her, his eyes fixed upon her, as he propelled himself across to where she sat alone, smoking a scented cigarette, and drinking coffee and *crème de menthe*. It would seem, perhaps, that it was not all ennui, sickness of soul, which had driven him on this occasion to the refuge of his dear Paris. And it would seem, too, that he was not the only lonely person in the world, since she bore a distinctly sad and solitary air, since her dark eyes looked as if pleasure had long forsaken them, leaving not so much as a latent sparkle, and her red lips drooped as if laughter had long forsaken them too. The invalid in the wheel chair, observing her serenely, made a flank movement, and so came up to her, manœuvring round a group on her right, and, at her elbow, so silently had his tyres

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run over the thick carpet, spoke to her in his pleasant voice to attract her attention:

"Madame!"

She looked round with just a slight movement of her head, saw him, started violently, dropped her cigarette, stammered: "M'sieur—m'sieur!" then drained her liqueur glass and sat playing with its stem. He looked at her appreciatively. She wore an old-gold gown that swathed her slender figure as if it had been built upon it; her black hair shadowed her eyebrows, and was massed into a glorious coil on the nape of her neck, and her eyes were magnificent.

He broke their silence.

"It is very pleasant to find myself remembered. I was not sure if you would acknowledge me."

Caution crept into her eyes, but fight too. "Well, sir, have I acknowledged you?"

"Yes," he nodded, "a woman's nerves——"

After a pause she surrendered. "I gave myself away. Well?" And she was afraid.

"No, no!" said he, with extreme gentleness. "There is nothing to it. What should there be? I should have recognised you anywhere! I have followed you for some years."

She regarded him quietly. He continued, checking the events with the fingers of his left hand on the arm of his chair:

"Some years ago—five—I fell in love with you at the Florence Opera House, and wrote to you,

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hoping for permission to see you. You answered that you were in trouble and wanted money; you—and your confederate—‘touched’ me for five hundred pounds. Such is love, though to this day I cannot understand my own blindness, for in dealing with me you were dealing with probably the cleverest man you ever met.” He made this assertion calmly, looking to her for confirmation, and she nodded acquiescence. “A few months ago I recovered that five hundred pounds from you by a trick ten thousand times better than yours, and—you gave me something else too. Remember?”

She looked mutely.

“A kiss,” said he softly, looking out over the room. “Well, do not let us remember that Judas kiss. Here we are again, meeting under social circumstances. How do you do?”

Her face was full of mute misery.

“Lonely?” the little man hazarded. “So am I. My sister and companion has recently married and left me. I am reduced to talking ethics to my valet. But it is wrong to be lonely.”

“Wrong for an outcast—a thief?”

“Thieving is not really a fit profession for a woman.”

“Or for half a man!” she sneered, sending a glance over his crippled figure. He went red and pale.

“Cruel!” he said quietly. “But you are being hurt yourself, and you want to hurt others. What is it? Where is your husband?”

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"He has left me—for another."

"What a fool!" said Napoleon. "What a thick-head! So you are alone—pitting your wits alone against law and order and the constitution of everything?"

She nodded. A silence that was somehow significantly full and busy fell between them; it was broken by the little man leaning forward and saying:

"I want a partner, someone to join right hand to my left. Will you fill the bill?"

After another silence that was just as significantly full and busy, she answered: "Yes."

He leaned against the air cushion with a flush on his pale face; he turned the face away from her and looked out over the room again. After a moment he heard her asking:

"Did you track me here?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Supposing woman's nerves had not given me away, and I had refused to recognise the acquaintance?"

"I did not claim it until you had, remember," he reminded her, "and I provided myself with an excuse for speaking to you, in case it was necessary—a stale old excuse, but one that serves to satisfy the conventions which, thank God! neither you nor I ever keep." He drew the bracelet from his pocket.

"Madame," he smiled, "my valet picked this up outside the door of your room. Is it yours?"

"Yes," she replied, taking it and putting it on.

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He stared: then "Smart! Smart! Smart! partner!" he cried softly; and they laughed at each other.

A youngish man, hatted and coated, came walking with a kind of quiet hurry through the groups in the *foyer*, making for the outer doors to the street. After him, ere he could gain the exit, darted an hotel servant, and stopped him. The man turned, angry, expostulating, and one of the managers arrived. Some conversation took place quietly and rapidly between manager and guest, manager gesticulating and determined, guest protesting and promising. So much was evident to the invalid and his companion, who, from trained habit of observation, were watching the little scene closely. The little man said to himself: "H'm! h'm!" nodded once or twice, smiled sphinx-like, and started his chair.

"Forgive me if I do not see you again to-night," he said to his companion. "May we talk in the morning, Mrs. Muswell—Gerda? I may call you Gerda?"

"Yes," she said slowly, "because it is really my name. You may call me Gerda, partner."

He smiled hasty thanks, and wheeled on. The manager had drawn the protesting guest into a corner, and held him firmly by the arm, while a waiter hovered near, as if ready to fly for that elusive being a *sergeant de ville* at any moment. The little Englishman ran up on soundless tyres to the pair.

"My dear friend," he said, addressing the young man. "What on earth is the matter?"

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The manager turned, saw the questioner, and became instantly all shrug, smile, and bow. But then, was the gentleman a friend of monsieur? The gentleman was trying to leave without paying for his *appartement*, or such was their impression. If in error——

“My dear sir,” replied Napoleon, with an impatient wave of his hand, “you are certainly in error. I shall be pleased to vouch for my friend to whatever extent is necessary for his convenience. But surely,” he said, addressing the young man, “you are not thinking of leaving to-night?”

“I am afraid I am,” replied the young man, looking hard at Napoleon.

The manager turned to the invalid, shrugging and spreading his hands.

“You see, m’sieur? Desolated as I am to accuse, I fear Monsieur Smith——”

“Smith,” said the little man, “you must allow me to lend you any trifle you want.”

“I should be only too glad,” replied the young man, still gazing fixedly at Napoleon.

“I am going up to my rooms now,” said Napoleon. “Come up and have a drink before you go, and we will arrange the accommodation. Send up Mr. Smith’s account to us, *mon ami*, and it will be settled at once.” The manager bowed them both from the *foyer*, and to the lift, into which the little man wheeled, and the other followed him silently. They ascended to the running accompaniment of Napo-

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leon's cheerful and intimate talk. It would seem that the two were the greatest of friends and had seen many adventures through together. Thus was the lift attendant edified, on the ascent to the fourth floor. Napoleon took his friend into his private salon, and there, when the door had closed behind them he sat and the young man stood regarding each other steadily.

"Who, in Heaven's name, are you, sir?" asked the young man.

"I am a roving Englishman, and my name is Napoleon Prince."

"Do you make a practice of helping paupers to pay their hotel bills?"

"When I know something satisfactory of them and their circumstances, certainly, if they will allow me," said the little man courteously.

The other scrutinised him keenly and uneasily.

"Well, my dear sir, what can you possibly know of one Smith, met promiscuously in a Paris hotel?"

"Tut! Tut!" said Napoleon, smiling. "Between ourselves, now, between ourselves——"

"There is nothing, to my knowledge, between ourselves, sir."

"Now, now, Count!" said Napoleon, smiling again.

The young man started and ejaculated.

"Hear me for a moment," said Napoleon. "I remember your face quite well; we stayed in the same hotel on the Riviera last spring. You are

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Count Bresci, of Chateau Bresci on Lake Geneva and Heinrich Schloss in the Black Forest; you live a somewhat cosmopolitan life, and you and your twin brother, Pietro, are the last of your line. Neither of you is married, which seems a pity on account of the succession. I believe I have these few facts correct?"

"Since you know so much about us," said the young man, biting his nails and eyeing Napoleon, "perhaps you know some more."

This was given as a sneer, but the little man, smiling genially, accepted it literally.

"I do," he acquiesced. "I know that six months ago you and your brother made a certain discovery in a certain wall of the Château Bresci."

He looked Bresci over, and tapped the arm of his chair with the finger-tips of his left hand.

Bresci said slowly, still staring, half suspicious, half furious, at him: "Yes—well, sir—the discovery, for our own reasons, was very private—must be kept peculiarly private. I do not know how you can possibly have heard——"

"I make a hobby of seeing and hearing," said the little man, "since doing is denied to me. I don't read books, but I read lives, and I know more about more people all over the world than perhaps any man living. It is very interesting. Do not grudge it to me."

"Certainly not, sir," said Bresci, more amicably, "but——"

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"Sit down, my friend," said Napoleon—the Count complied—"and listen here. You are at the end of your tether, you and your brother. I spoke of you as of the Château Bresci and the Heinrich Schloss, although I know, as others know, that the schloss was sold to the Crown a year ago for military purposes, and the château was sold to an American four months ago for his little Continental cottage. What I don't understand is that you masquerade here under the name of 'Smith,' when surely your title would secure you some respect, credit, in this hotel. Our friend *le maître* would doubtless have been more accommodating had he known he was dealing with the Count Bresci."

Bresci continued reticent. The little man added: "Shall I declare your station to the management? Or—shall I lend you what you like to pay this bill and others? In the latter case, won't you give me a little explanation that would interest me? Remember, I am a crippled wretch, whose only hobby is reading the book of the world."

"You are quite right," said Bresci. "Seeing you so charitable I, of course, shall take the opportunity to borrow. One does not always find such opportunities to borrow. I am here incognito, owing to that recent discovery you spoke of. Since you know the facts, you may as well have them in order." He regarded Napoleon for a second with new suspicion. "Do you know the facts, or are you bluffing? What was this discovery?"

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"The discovery of the idol stolen in the eighteenth century by an ancestor of yours from a temple in China. The priests followed your ancestor, and hunted him for two years, haunting him like shadows, so that he went in fear of death, and he buried the idol in the wall of the château, unknown to anyone. Then the priests gained access to him and killed him, but could not find the idol. Neither could any of his descendants, though they hunted zealously for it, till you and your brother Pietro discovered it six months ago. The figure is simply the head and shoulders, in jade, of a man with serpents for hair, and two rubies, three-quarters of an inch in diameter, for eyes. The rubies should be worth a hundred thousand livres!"

"Stop!" said Bresci. Napoleon looked at him calmly. "How do you know what it is like? No one has seen it save Pietro and I——"

"That is a misstatement," replied the little man, quite courteously. "You have offered it for sale in Bagdad and Damascus. But the dealers dare not buy."

"How do you know this, sir?"

"I find it on one of the pages of my book of the world, Count. I tell you I am a roving Englishman, wretched cripple, picking up scraps here, scraps there, never forgetting anything, knowing how to link and dovetail. It is my amusement. I was quite recently buying curios in the Bagdad bazaar. But don't be afraid. I don't chatter. I read for my own delecta-

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tion purely. Still, you will allow me to remark that you will find it extremely difficult to dispose of Vrisra."

"Why?"

"Because in the East they know."

"What do they know?"

"Of the pursuit."

Bresci was ghastly, and threw quick glances right and left like a haunted man.

"What do you know of the pursuit?"

"I know that the priests of the temple of Vrisra are hunting you and your brother these last six months, as they hunted your ancestor in the eighteenth century."

Bresci passed his hand over his face, and his forehead was wet. "Yes!" he cried. "Yes! Yes!" Hauteur, reserve, fell from him; he almost appealed.

"Your nerves are going," said the little man, watching him shrewdly. "You are haunted. Count, I sympathise. The Chinese are a terrible people."

"There is no doubt," said Bresci, in a low voice, passing his hands over his face as if to brush off horror, "that sooner or later they will kill the one of us who is in possession of Vrisra at the time, unless we can elude them till we sell it, when—Heaven help the dealer who buys! At present Pietro and I live separately, and pass Vrisra from one to the other. Sometimes I have possession, sometimes he. But—I passed a Chinaman in the

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corridor yesterday. I have not seen him since, but——”

“Then,” Napoleon stated, “you are now in possession of Vrisra.”

Bresci looked at him, and drew himself together. Then he dropped his eyes, and said:

“No—no. Pietro has Vrisra now. If the Chinaman in the corridor had come for it he was on the wrong track. Well, sir, is it all explained why I masquerade as ‘Smith’ from England? You see, it seems to facilitate escape if I am not hall-marked with a title. And, you understand, Pietro has Vrisra.”

“And where is your brother?”

“In our houseboat.”

“Ah! on the Danube. The houseboat you tried to sell to the Duke of Messina a little while ago.”

“What! you know that too?”

“Count, I like to have a complete drawing of the characters in my book. She is a very fine houseboat, I believe, but the Duke did not want her lying always in the Danube, and there is no way of getting her out short of breaking her up like firewood. But I always heard she was a fine boat.”

“Would you care to buy——”

Napoleon laughed.

“No, thanks, Count. But about the matter of this loan?”

“May it be a hundred livres just for a few weeks? I am indeed grateful.”

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"Tut, tut, my friend! Between you and me——"
He stretched out a friendly hand to the other. "Call yourself Smith, or anything but Bresci. An alias will always defer finalities, anyhow. And so you are leaving Paris to-night?"

"I am going to London for awhile, to apartments."

"I will get the notes for you. And the loan is for as long as you like."

Bresci drew himself up.

"Many thanks, sir. I will leave you my London address, and keep you informed of my whereabouts."

The little man wheeled over to his *escritoire*.

"The simplicity of pride, that!" he smiled to himself. "There's nothing in the world more simple than pride, after all! And he has a hundred Brescis behind him, each prouder than the other. And he would rather steal a kingdom than those few livres!"

He came back with the notes, pressed them on Bresci with his graceful and trustful friendliness, received the address of the Count's London rooms, rang for Dapper to bring drinks, and, when they had drunk, bid Bresci "*Au revoir*" and "*Bon voyage*."

So Mr. Smith from London paid his bill, and left Paris.

Napoleon sought Gerda the next morning at *déjeuner*. She looked very dear and dainty—even to him, who knew something of her record—sitting at her table in the *salle-à-manger*.

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"May I eat at your table?" he asked, wheeling up to join her.

She looked at him with her dark eyes and smiled. It seemed as if laughter now lurked again within possible distance of her cameo face.

Over the meal he talked to her of his plans for the new partnership.

"I wish to pay you a fixed salary, dear Gerda, of fifty English pounds per month, and any commission arranged between us at the time of—negotiation."

She protested. "Ah! too much!"

"No," he said with extreme gentleness, "not so. I want you to hold yourself entirely at my service—to come when called for. I may often need your collaboration—again, I may not. Where I am, there it will be necessary that you are. When in London I have my flat; you shall choose your hotel. Does the arrangement please?"

"Exceedingly," she replied, with evident wonder. He saw the wonder.

"When you know me better," he answered to it, "you will realise, dear Gerda, that my methods and principles are peculiarly my own."

Napoleon left for Munich that evening, leaving her in Paris.

The houseboat lay on the river about two miles up from the little fishing village of Ohlbaden. The invalid Englishman had hired a carriage to drive him out from Munich, with the inestimable Dapper;

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the wheel-chair was hoisted to the top of the vehicle. It was a delightful drive along the south bank of the river, and the paralytic was in one of the moods of quiet exhilaration which always fell upon him during an enterprise. He may have talked ethics to Dapper on the journey, but he was not bored, and he was not lonely, because there is no loneliness on a battlefield.

Arriving at Ohlbaden, then, they learned that the Count Bresci's houseboat lay about two miles up-river, and that any fisherman they sighted on the way would gladly row them to her—that was, if the Englishman had permission to view the boat, which was probably empty and under the care of the shopkeeper in the village. The shopkeeper walked down to her once a day to inspect, when not too busy. Yesterday, there had been no one on the boat, and the cabins were locked, so that the brother of the Count, who certainly had been there a few days ago, must have gone without leaving word.

"Was my friend alone?" said the little man with concerned surprise.

He heard that Pietro Bresci had been alone; a queer, brave man, unlike his brother the Count, who had the reputation of being somewhat of a coward.

The Englishman thanked his informant, bestowed a handsome coin upon him, and drove on. Soon they came in sight of the boat, moored lonely on a desolate stretch of the river. They had passed fishermen, and hailing the one nearest the boat engaged

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him to row them to her side. Her deck was deserted, her cabins closed, her silence profound. The valet boarded first, then assisted his master, and the fisherman was sent off to resume his occupation within hail. The wheel-chair had been brought across too, and the inestimable one, once his master was seated in it, to tour the boat, withdrew to the rail and became interested in the vegetation on the Danube's banks. Either he was born without the human vice of curiosity or he had mastered it.

She was a fine boat, built with a long saloon running up one side, a row of cabins on the other, quite a sizable promenade between, and good space fore and aft. Napoleon wheeled between the saloon and the cabins, tried the doors on one side as he proceeded up, tried the doors on the other as he came down. He tried the cabins first, found them locked, and the windows shrouded against prying eyes; then the saloon door, and that was locked; he moved on a yard, and found the window curtained. Obviously the boat was deserted, but he never judged by the obvious. Dapper, fore, presented a discreet back. The little man took a diamond, set roughly in a tiny plate of silver, from his pocket, and cut a large square of glass. As he pressed it inward, he looked at Dapper. Dapper presented a discreet back. The glass fell into the saloon with a little crash and shiver. His master knew the valet's trained obtuseness, his whole admirability. He inserted his left hand into the aperture, pulled the

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curtain aside with a jerk, sending the rings sliding along the top pole, and looked in.

He drew a very long breath.

"So?" he asked himself. "So?"

Locked together, wedged between one of the fixed seats and the heavy table, were two stiff men, a European and a Chinese. The European's face and head were caked with some horrid darkness that must be dried blood; his hands were twisted in, and tugged back from, the handkerchief or scarf with which he had strangled the Chinese, whose face was swollen, distorted, and blue. Both were terrible, stiff carcasses, fixed between the table and the seat. So much the little man observed, with an eye accustomed to the horrors as well as the comedies of this world, before he dropped the curtain, and wheeled forward.

"Dapper," said he.

The valet turned and found his master—pale, composed, and a little irritable—beside him.

"Call our man, Dapper."

The fisherman was hailed, and rowed up.

"I thought there would have been a caretaker at hand," said Napoleon, as they settled him in the boat; "I understood from the Count that I might see everything! Why can there not be someone to show the boat to possible purchasers? As it is I am very annoyed. I have wasted time. We shall return to Munich to-night, and to London to-morrow, Dapper."

"Very good, sir," replied the smooth valet.

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They slept in Munich. The little man lay awake thinking. He was always prepared for everything and everybody, and his philosophy minimised shock. He had assured himself of the whereabouts of Pietro Bresci—queer and brave, presumably clever man and fighting man. So far, so good. He reckoned little of the young Count in London. The whereabouts of Vrisa—

But that had puzzled him little since Bresci's glib, "Pietro has Vrisa now . . . you understand, Pietro has Vrisa."

"Indeed, *mon ami*," said he, lying in his bed, "indeed? We shall see. Two eyes, three-quarters of an inch in diameter, worth one hundred thousand livres, and only one putrid coward between them and me."

He slept.

Two evenings after found Mr. Napoleon Prince dining with Count Bresci at charming rooms near Wardour Street. Gerda was staying in an hotel in one of the quieter streets off the Strand. Yesterday the little man had arrived in Paris, sphinx-like as ever, and joined her at afternoon tea, saying:

"Although no woman can pack a needle and cotton in less than a whole week, I want you to be ready to cross with me to-night."

She was ready.

She asked him one question as they enjoyed the pleasure of a smooth crossing together, under a fine sky.

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"You need me now? There will be something for me to do?"

"I do not think," he replied slowly, "that you need soil your hands this time."

Surprised, she protested faintly her readiness and unscrupulousness.

"Be a woman for a bit now," he answered her, "a pretty, cared-for woman, petted with the luxuries and safety of life as a woman, should be. Believe me, I shall ask for you when I want you."

She went to her chosen hotel on landing; he to his flat near Victoria, to rest and to dress for dinner with Bresci, who was apprised of his coming by telephone. The Count was disarmed and friendly, the dinner good. Bresci's nervousness had increased and his eyes watched everything, but he strove to play the efficient host, pointing out the treasures of the small room, *chefs-d'œuvre* saved from the sale of the Château Bresci and Heinrich Schloss. A Rubens, a Van Dyck, a Lorenzi; lacquered things from the East: these his guest could discuss with him. His eyes roamed the room.

"A room," he said, "is so much the expression of its owner. That is an old truism. Forgive all my curiosity. Remember, I like complete character sketches in the book. Everything delights me, except, perhaps, the gilt busts on the mantelpiece. A pair of gilt busts! Barbarous! Forgive my frankness."

The Count glanced carelessly.

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"They were—a present from a dear relation."

"Ah! we can accept much from dear relations. I understand. But they do not interest me. I dislike a pair of gilt busts here."

They talked of many things.

Coffee came, and liqueurs. They took out cigar-cases.

"Ah!" said the little man suddenly. "What is that ivory over there? Will you show me? It is exactly like——"

Bresci rose, attentive host, and turned to bring the ivory. The little man's left hand was in the pocket of his dinner-jacket; a tiny folded paper came out; a film of powder shook into Bresci's coffee-cup, and was absorbed. The invalid was much interested in the ivory.

They drank their coffee and excellent Benedictine. The little man talked; Bresci's answers became fewer and fewer. He slept, suddenly and soundly.

Napoleon smiled and toured the room, touching this and that. A locked drawer attracted him. It was an ordinary lock in an ordinary cabinet, and his bunch of skeleton keys came out. In the drawer were the remains of gilt paint in a bottle, and a lump of modelling wax.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" smiled Napoleon, and wheeled himself before the mantelpiece, before the gilded atrocities, the phial and the wax in his jacket pocket. He stared at the busts attentively. "Ah!" said he within himself leisurely, "now which is dummy?"

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He took one and weighed it in his hand. It was light, just a plaster cast, imitating the other and gilded over. He took the other, and it was heavy enough to be part jade. Then he guessed that the Count had disguised Virsra by a plaster base, adding height, and had gilded the idol. He wedged the thing firmly between his sound knee and his chair, and, using his penknife with delicate leverage, worked out one by one two lumps which he knew must be the ruby eyes. He dropped them into his pocket as a boy may drop marbles.

He rolled two more eyes of wax, fitted them into the sockets, painted them quite leisurely, restored the bust to its place, the bottle and remainder of wax to theirs, locked the drawer, and took up his position again at the table. Bresci slept heavily. Napoleon glanced at the clock and gave him another two hours, judging by the strength of the dose.

"Dear, dear me!" sighed the little man; "it will be a very slow evening."

It was a very slow evening, considering that he might not even allow himself another cigar, to leave a betraying stump. He watched the clock and Bresci patiently; at length the sleeper twitched slightly.

"All nerves; all horrors," the little man mused interestedly, as he took another tiny paper from his pocket, and shook a mere speck or two into the dregs in his own cup. He sank back in his chair, breathed heavily, closed his eyes, and to all appearances was lost in profound slumber.

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Presently Bresci awoke.

He half awoke slowly; then he awoke fully; then horror and fear leapt into his eyes, and he started, gripping the arms of his chair, staring and realising. He twitched all over. Then he saw Napoleon sunk into sleep so heavy as to be unnatural. He looked round wildly; the gilt busts were on the mantel-piece; the door was closed, the room decorous, the liqueur-glasses and coffee-cups emptied. He staggered up, clutched the sleeper by his shoulder, and tried to shake him awake. Napoleon's head rolled; his eyes were fast shut; his breathing came stertorously. Bresci shook him and shook him, and called upon his name. Æons rolled by to the terrorised man before Napoleon slowly awoke, and looking round stupidly, began to stammer some question. Bresci cried:

"My God! My God! We've been drugged! We've been drugged!"

"Wha's say?" said the little man drowsily and thickly.

"We've been drugged!" cried Bresci, gripping him.

"Drugged?" repeated Napoleon, awaking.

"We've been asleep," faltered Bresci.

The little man sat up and looked full at him.

"Jove!" he said "so we have. What is the matter?"

He looked piercingly at Bresci.

"It must have been the coffee." said Bresci. "I

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know nothing of it. I swear to you I know nothing of it. What should I wish to gain from you? I know nothing."

The little man appeared now fully awake, and replied coldly:

"Sit down, Count. Pray sit down."

"How can I sit down," raved Bresci, stamping in front of him, "when all this spells cursed Chinese conspiracy? Had we slept longer who knows what might have happened? As it is, we're awake and can fight. At least, I can fight, but you——"

He cast a bitter glance at the paralytic, who smiled. "I will fight by you, Count," said he, "but remember this is our trusty London, with our good police."

"I can't make it public," stormed Bresci, "calling attention to my identity. These Chinese, they track you and trap you—they're devils—they're ghosts with the power of killing—they can trick any police force ever trained. They're at me now! And after I'd——"

"Go on, my friend," said Napoleon.

"They were tracking me," said Bresci, beside himself. "My nerve went; my heart went; my head went. I was afraid, afraid, afraid! And I——" he failed.

"How many are after Vrisra?"

"Two lay brothers, I think."

The little man had seen one dead in the house-boat on the Danube.

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"And so I suppose they think you have Vrisra in your keeping now, instead of your brother Pietro?" And he looked very steadily at Bresci.

"I—I—I——" faltered Bresci. "No—they knew Pietro——"

"You coward! You low liar! You traitor!" said the little man in his heart, which was ever fierce to cowards, low liars, and traitors to kith and kin. Aloud he encouraged: "Go on, my friend. You must be frank, if I am to set my wits to your assistance."

"I will be frank," said Bresci, trembling. "I will be entirely frank. They were hunting me. I escaped them—met them again—escaped them again—in the public streets—everywhere, it seemed. I dropped a letter addressed to Pietro on my way to a post-office in Paris. One of the dogs was following me——"

"You dropped the letter so that it might be picked up, Count?"

"You understand so quickly."

"What was in the letter, Count?"

"I told Pietro to take care of Vrisra on the house-boat, and said something else about a dealer in Constantinople——"

"In short, Count, to synopsis, you put your pursuers for the moment off your track, and put them on your brother's."

"Merely trying to—to cross the scent, as you English say."

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"You coward! You low liar! You traitor!" the little man's heart sang. Aloud he proceeded:

"Well, it seems that they have returned to you——"

"My God!" whispered Bresci, passing his hand over his forehead, and wiping off trickles of sweat.

"I see no way in which to assist you," said Napoleon. "I should have those coffee-dregs analysed, were I you. But as you like. Meanwhile the stuff has made my head ache, and I'll telephone my man to fetch me now instead of at 11.30, with your permission."

And he did this while Bresci sat shaking and smelling at the coffee-cups, and making incoherent guesses at things. When Napoleon had laid down the receiver the Count said:

"Don't desert me. Come again. Come to-morrow. I shall stay in all day. They think it is my turn to guard Vrisra, whereas, you understand, Pietro has him. I told you that, did I not?"

Napoleon nodded. "You told me that."

"Pietro is not afraid of anything," said the Count. "He is a lion. Now, my nerves—you understand?"

Again Napoleon nodded, looking at the man steadily and with ironic interest.

"Come to-morrow," Bresci besought again. "I dare not go out. Come and eat dinner with me. You know the bazaars, you say. You might tell me of some likely buyer."

"But your brother Pietro has Vrisra."

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"That is true," Bresci lied.

"I hope he will meet with no accident owing to that letter of yours! Surely you were careless of Vrisra to write it?"

The Count was silent, and his eyelids drooped over his flickering light eyes.

"Well," said Napoleon, "I must go."

"But you will come to-morrow—talk to me—stay all the evening?"

"We will make our own coffee then, if you please," replied Napoleon, in a cold voice, that held a touch of inquiry.

"Heavens, yes! and cook our own food, preferably," and he tried to laugh.

"Get a dinner sent in from a restaurant."

"I will. So you have promised to come?"

Napoleon thought. "Now I've remembered," said he, "that I was dining a lady."

"Will not the lady come too? Bring her too. Help me. I am all on edge, as you say."

"Thank you, my friend," said Napoleon. "I will bring the lady too. I am sure she will accept such little explanation of the circumstances as I can offer."

Dapper was announced to be waiting.

"Are you really going?" said the Count, with chattering teeth. "What shall I do all night?"

"Lock yourself in and sleep," replied Napoleon.

He left the man, and wheeled himself, escorted by Dapper, all the way to the flat. The night air, cold

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and fresh, helped in the fitting together of the whole affair. When he arrived home, he ordered whisky and sandwiches, had a plain deal box brought to him from his bedroom, said he should be sitting up all night, and sent Dapper to bed. When he opened the box there was revealed an array of jewellers' tools.

He was an expert and delicate workman.

The little plan that had crossed his mind when Bresci extended his invitation to the lady entertained and pleased him—appealed to his sense for risk, for sport, for pure brazen insolence.

He took the gilt from the stones, smiling and sighing a little over them, ruminative. Then: "Her hair!" he murmured. "Her black hair!"

Morning saw the rubies cut into twenty stones, and the little man still at work upon them, polishing and finishing.

Dapper knocked, and, opening the door an inch, asked, without looking in, if his master wished breakfast.

"What is the time?" said Napoleon, weary.

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"Take breakfast into my bedroom. Do not come in here at all. And when breakfast is served, go out and buy a lady's tortoiseshell back-hair comb, mounted in heavy gold. Understand?"

"Absolutely; thank you, sir."

Breakfast was eaten, the comb—a fine specimen—brought in, and Napoleon resumed his labours in

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his dining-room. He had all accessories at hand, and he was a marvellously quick and inventive workman, considering his hampered state, to which, however, his tools had been specially suited. Four o'clock that afternoon saw the comb's gold rim set with two rows of glorious rubies, and Gerda's answer to the note he had dispatched after breakfast arrived.

"Am, of course, at your disposal, to dine where you like. I will come to your flat.—G."

At four-thirty, he having refreshed himself with tea, Dapper assisted him to bath and to bed. He slept till seven, awoke precisely, was quickly dressed, and ready for Gerda when she entered in a long black sequined frock and wonderful shoes.

"You are very tired," she commented at once.

"I am very tired," he replied, "so you must be indulgent."

He handed her the comb.

"Wear that to-night, to please me. I see you adorn the bracelet."

She gave a little cry of pleasure, and put the comb in her hair.

"Does it look nice?" she asked, vain as men love women to be vain.

"Superb," said Napoleon. "I knew it would. May we go at once?"

They went in a taxi-cab, Dapper with them, of necessity, and the wheel-chair on the roof.

"I am taking you to dine with the young man

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I had the pleasure of helping in Paris," he explained on the way.

"Poor Smith from England?"

"Poor Smith from England."

They arrived at the Wardour Street rooms; were met by a *mêlée*, of which the police were assuming management. The proprietor and servants stood gasping on the landings and stairs. An inspector of police met the guests as they entered the hall.

"You are expecting to dine with a Mr. Smith, sir?"

Napoleon assented.

"I fear I have bad news, sir."

Napoleon motioned him aside. "Remember the lady, officer. What is it?"

The inspector gave it in a low voice:

"Found murdered, sir, at seven o'clock. I am sorry to give you a shock. They say you were with him yesterday. Can you throw any light on matters?"

"Good heavens! No! He was merely someone I met in Paris, and struck up an acquaintance with. Have you no theory?"

For a moment he was genuinely shocked, horrified, amazed, and his words were almost gasped. So the coward had deferred finalities neither by his alias nor by the dropped letter which had brought death to Pietro Bresci in the houseboat on the Danube. The inspector was saying sympathetically:

"We believe him to be a Count Bresci, sir, though he passed here as Smith."

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"Ah! I met him as Smith. How very shocking! How—what can one say?"

"The landlord tells me he let out this morning some craze about being followed by Chinamen."

"I know nothing of that. Have you no idea about the murder?"

"There has been a Chinaman blacking boots here for a week, and he has disappeared. That, of course, is our man. There's a big mystery as to motive."

"I suppose you will have to follow up the Bresci history?"

"We shall do all we can, sir. But these foreigners—it's a tough job following up their feuds, and you never can catch a Chinaman. They're devils. Meanwhile I shall have to ask you to step upstairs to look at the body. I am sorry, sir."

"I will come," replied Napoleon, "if these people will accommodate the lady with a chair for a moment. Gerda, I will take you away directly."

The chair was brought, and she waited, asking no questions, while the policeman and Dapper half carried the little man upstairs between them.

He saw the littered room; Bresci's body, with blue face and protruding eyes, breath strangled from him, lying on the couch; and one corner of the mantelpiece bare. Vrisra had been taken again by the priests of Vrisra.

They helped Napoleon over to identify the coward who had died many times before his death, and they took him downstairs again between them, where the

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lady waited, in anxious horror, in the hall. The inspector spoke to her soothingly, was distressed at her distress, eager to help her crippled escort to take her away with all dispatch. He could not but admire her in her long, loose cloak, her magnificent eyes big with shock, the red flame of rubies swimming in her hair.

Chapter VIII

Attar of Grandfather

It was some while after the events narrated in the last chapter that Napoleon met Mr. Henry Macwhinnie.

They met first in the lift of the block of Victoria Street flats, and eyed each other. Napoleon was being carried down in his wheel-chair for his morning promenade, his attentive valet squeezed into a corner behind him; the sandy-haired young man was, presumably, also going out merely for a morning constitutional, from his leisurely air. "Good-mor-r-ning, sir," he said affably to Napoleon. The little man, always genial, responded.

After hesitating preliminaries of acquaintance-ship they proceeded together. Inquiry elicited that the young man was now renting one of the flats in the Victoria Street block, and that his name was Henry Macwhinnie. They went by way of Grosvenor Place and through the Arch into the Green Park, the invalid's favourite promenade. It was a fresh spring morning, early frost already dispelled by sun, and presently, finding himself near a seat, the young man sat down, and the wheel-chair was brought to a standstill by him. "Dapper," said his master to the valet, "you take a nice little walk on your own."

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They were alone together.

Always interested in studying everyone, Napoleon found himself much diverted by examining his new acquaintance's rather unusual cast of feature. A little gentle questioning elicited the fact that Mr. Macwhinnie had a story. When he spoke of it his eyes twinkled and round his mouth appeared little pits and hollows that in a woman this author would designate as dimples. He was perfectly ready, over-ready, to impart his story; his kind acquaintance equally ready to hear. He began, Napoleon listening with his air of interest and simplicity.

"I have not long returned from South America," said Mr. Macwhinnie. "I must tell you, briefly, the reason for my journey there. My grandmother, a most charming and good woman, at present in Scotland, was suddenly deserted, after forty happy years of married life, by her husband. She couldn't fix any reason for his heartlessness; no one could fix any reason. He had been perfectly at peace with her, perfectly contented to all appearances with their life together. It happened on a Sunday. He ate his porridge with a good appetite; wore his black coat; went with her to the kirk; assisted the minister by taking the collection. Then my grandfather disappeared."

"Taking the collection?"

"Sir!" said Mr. Macwhinnie, "my grandfather was a Scots gentleman."

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"I beg your pardon, sir."

"That's all right," replied Mr. Macwhinnie heartily. "To resume. My grandmother was distracted. Search was made. Three weeks went by. No tidings. Then, looking through some papers of his, she thought she found a clue worth following. It seemed evident that he had gone to South America, where, in the Tabatinga district, a distant relation of his lived. My grandparent had brought me up; she had a right to look to me for assistance. She looked. 'Henry,' she said, 'you must go to Tabatinga, and bring your grandfather home with you.'

" 'Grandma, must I go so far from home?'

" 'Henry, you have always obeyed me.'

" 'Grandma, I will go.'

"As soon as the question of supplies from her bank could be arranged, I went.

"I went to the relation's house at Tabatinga, but no one had seen or heard of grandfather; they were most astonished. I consulted the police in Peru, but, as everyone said, you might as well look for the proverbial needle in the haystack as look for one aged Scotsman in South America. I searched for a month, then thought of returning home. First, though, I thought I would like to see something of the beauties of the forest land along the banks of the Amazon. It was in the middle of a tropical summer and those forests, sir, were too beautiful for my poor description. I had a chart and a compass, and firearms, and felt quite safe in wandering there, and sleeping at night

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in some tree, out of reach of any nocturnal beasts. The only creatures I could hear were the pumas, but, as luck had it, I did not see one. The third day of my wandering, fire broke out in the forest five miles or so behind me. I smelt it, and I could hear the screams of the animals and the crackle of the burning wood as the flames swept on, enclosing me. I knew that my only chance was the river and I had two miles to run to reach that. I ran, steering by that blessed compass, and the fire came roaring along behind me, till at last it looked at me through the trees, and the redness of the sky paled before the dreadful red on earth all around. The heat was terrific. As I ran, breathing hard, I sucked in the hottest air I have ever felt. I was at the last gasp, and the flames were licking the trees not a hundred yards behind, when I saw ahead of me a gleam of that blessed water. The forest ran down sheer to its edge and the river was low, for it was the dry season. I tumbled down the bank, ran straight into the water, and stood; and down the bank after me rushed the fire, and stopped, and roared.

"I stood there for some hours; I could not swim and the river was too deep to wade, even in the dry season, of course. The heat was dreadful. The water warmed and I wondered what would happen if it rose to boiling-point. 'But any way,' I said to myself, 'Henry Macwhinnie, you'd better boil than fry. It's less mess and sputter so.' I stayed, and the smoke rolled down over the river so thick that one could not

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see from bank to bank. As the day wore on the fire travelled on too, and the smoke gradually grew thinner, until the haze was quite transparent and drifting. Then I saw, standing up to his neck in the water like myself, a white-haired man. Who was it? Guess!"

"An entire stranger," Napoleon hazarded.

"No, no," said Mr. Macwhinnie thoughtfully, "you are wrong. It was my grandfather."

"Marvellous!" replied Napoleon warmly.

"Marvellous, indeed," Mr. Macwhinnie assented. "We looked at each other speechlessly for a moment. Then we pushed to each other through that hot water. He wept and expressed his contrition at his late conduct. 'Henry, lad,' he said, 'I have seen nothing more beautiful than your face, singed as it is, since, in a fit of madness, I left home.' I told him I had come to take him home. He knew the way to the ford, and presently, as the heat on shore died down somewhat, we walked up-stream to it, and crossed, and managed to find our way to Tabatinga. I cabled the glad news to my grandmother in Scotland, but half an hour after that cable went my poor grandfather died in his relation's house. I cabled again, and asked:

" 'What shall I do with the body?'

"She answered: 'Cremate and bring home.'

"We cremated him.

"The crematorium sent him back in a very nice urn to the relation's house, but four days after, just

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before I was about to start, I received a long, strange letter from my grandmother, of which I will merely give you a quick extract. She reminded me that he had been very fond of the scent of Phul-nāna, and that she should like his ashes placed at the bottom of the largest cut-glass scent-bottle I could procure, the very finest possible sieve—so fine that the purest liquid could scarcely filter through, so that it would, as it were, let in hardly more than a smell—placed above the ashes, and the bottle filled up with essence of Phul-nāna. Mad as it seemed, sir, I did it. Why not humour that poor distracted widow, and help her to what pleasure remained in life?

"She added that, this disposal made, she could then keep him on her dressing-table in familiar surroundings.

"Then I started home with my grandfather. I used to show the bottle and tell its history to my fellow-passengers on board. They were all immensely interested. One American young lady, in particular, never tired of looking at him through the cut-glass. 'Land,' she would exclaim, 'you have re-fined him!'

"I have a friend in Balukia, and, wanting to see him, I left the boat at the nearest point, intending to cross Europe and take one of the Channel steamers over as soon as I could. But when I arrived in Balukia I found that my poor friend was in the State prison on an islet in the Black Sea, on a charge of having stolen a blue pearl from the royal treasury, and was condemned to death.

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"Under the circumstances I did not let it leak out in the capital that I was a friend of his, for they are a vindictive people. But I came under the notice of King Ranald, who, it seems, cherishes a great affection for all Britishers, because two helped him regain his throne on the occasion of the last Revolution. He and the Court were as interested as the people on board when I showed them my scent-bottle and told them my strange story. And he told me all about the theft of the blue pearl, and added that the death-warrant only awaited his signature and the Government seal, which would be appended the next morning. Then Cado, my poor friend, would die. The two warrants, one for death, one for release—they always draw up two in Balukia for the King's latest consideration, in case he should change his mind at the last moment—were already drawn up.

"But, strangely enough, the next morning the Government seal and the release-warrant had disappeared.

"It takes them three days to cast a new seal, so the death-warrant had to be delayed.

"Meanwhile they searched everyone in and about the Palace. Ranald said he would not wish to search a Britisher, but I demanded it as a point of honour, 'although,' I said to him, 'I know nothing of your foolish seal.'

"They all begged my pardon humbly.

"The day after, I left, and, by the way, it is rather an interesting sequel to these happenings to note

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that the prison authorities on the little island had meanwhile received the release-warrant signed all in order with the Government seal and a signature which, for all they dared say, was the King's, and had let Cado go. You can imagine how pleased I felt at this delightful and surprising news."

"Yours is a remarkably interesting story," said Napoleon when the young man had stopped, and, with twinkles in his eyes and pits and hollows in his cheeks, was admiring a pretty passing nursemaid.

Mr. Macwhinnie turned from the nursemaid.

"Most dull people with no imagination would say a story like that was all their grandmother," he replied, "but it isn't. It is my grandfather."

"And the blue pearl? I suppose they got that back when they caught Cado?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Macwhinnie.

"Then where is it?"

"Who knows?" said Mr. Macwhinnie. "There is no doubt poor Cado had been keeping bad company, and of course had an accomplice, to whom, probably, the jewel was somehow transferred. I fear he was one of a set of thieves. Even good boys fall into bad times."

Dapper re-approached them, and, seeing his time was not yet, retreated.

"You are a most interesting neighbour," said the invalid to Mr. Macwhinnie. "I hope you are not making just a temporary sojourn in your flat; and

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that we shall see more of each other. Are you a stranger to London?"

"Yes," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "and when one is as young as I am, there's nothing more appalling than the loneliness of a city. I have been accustomed to living with my grandparents in a little Scottish town where everybody knew and liked everybody."

"My dear boy, you must dine with me whenever you like; make use of me. I'm a lonely bachelor with a great deal more money than he needs"—here Mr. Macwhinnie dimpled to himself—"and you see my condition? The ordinary enjoyments of life are denied me. Would you like to dine to-night?"

"Oh, pray," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "dine with me to-night, sir. Then, if you would care for it, I will show you my grandfather's ashes."

"Why do you not send them to his widow?"

"Because she is closing her house in Scotland, and coming to stay with me here awhile," explained Mr. Macwhinnie. "I thought it would be better for her poor mind to see a little life about her. Meanwhile I am keeping the treasure."

"When is she coming?"

"That is not quite decided."

"How I should like the honour of her acquaintance!" said Napoleon feelingly. "Meanwhile, I hope her grandson will make a friend of me. Here's my man. Au revoir. Then at——"

"Eight to-night, sir."

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Napoleon left him, sitting very neat and pleasant, upon the seat.

Napoleon took tea with Gerda that afternoon in her hotel in one of the quiet streets off the Strand. They were on terms of the happiest intimacy by now, and her pretty care of him was worth noting. She asked, looking at him across the tea-tray, with her elbows on the table and her chin in her palms—than in which attitude a charming woman never, perhaps, looks more sweetly domestic—"When am I to join you in a little enterprise, partner?"

"I have been singularly idle lately, have I not?" he said.

She considered him.

"No," she replied, "you have undertaken the enterprises—but without my help. That is not in our bond."

"Our bond is that your assistance should be given at any moment I ask for it. You are, so far, the sleeping partner."

"I share profits."

"Sleeping partners do, madam."

"But what have I brought into the business?"

He was probably unconscious of the glow that came into his eyes at this, or, at any rate, powerless to hide it.

"If you ask these questions, dear Gerda, I shall in the pursuit of truth have to tell you some very pretty things."

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The lady passed him sweets, smiled, and blushed in the same involuntary manner that his eyes had glowed.

"Let us talk about my frock for a few minutes. It is new. Do you like it?"

It was a dull delicate blue, smoke blue; and it left her throat bare, being of the order of gowns classed as "afternoon."

He regarded it.

"I should like a pendant to match it; then I think the *ensemble* would be perfect."

She mused: "What could I wear, now? A turquoise is too light. Better a contrast than a bad match. Emerald, ruby, sapphire—I think it will have to be diamonds, unless enamel——"

"Why should it be any?" replied Napoleon. "Why not a blue pearl set in old paste?"

She clapped her hands. "One may as well ask for the Koh-i-noor!"

"Of course," he replied, "I know. I was merely imagining."

But he smiled at her; then she opened her eyes at him, and gasped tinily.

"Dear Gerda," he implored, before inquiry could be spoken, "check yourself of the feminine habit of asking questions."

And she, extraordinary woman, asked none.

There is no doubt that he enjoyed that afternoon-tea hour. At five-thirty they parted, having made assignation for later in the week. Dapper was in

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waiting, and the invalid wheeled back to Victoria Street. He had ample time to dress for the eight o'clock dinner in the flat above his own, and to think before dressing time. He thought, pulled up to a moderate wood fire suitable to the spring evening. His thoughts made him smile a good deal. At seven-thirty he rang for the valet, and went to his toilet.

He found Mr. Macwhinnie all agog to receive him, and to do him honour. Mr. Macwhinnie gave a great impression of unsullied youth, hospitality, and gratitude. The dinner was a good one, and lively, he being apparently bursting with plots for rattling good stories which he wove extempore as he went on. Nothing more interesting or unusual than the morning's tale, however, could have been unfolded, and when dinner was over the visitor reminded him of this. Mr. Macwhinnie was all readiness to fulfil his promise.

"If you come this way, my dear sir, you shall see the tomb of my ancestor."

He led the way into a bedroom, "which," said he, "is dedicated to the use of my grandmother. Look at the dressing-table."

Napoleon looked and beheld an enormous scent-bottle of cut glass, with contents as per description.

"Handle it," said Mr. Macwhinnie proudly. Napoleon handled it.

"Do you observe the fineness of the sieve?" said Mr. Macwhinnie.

"No," replied Napoleon, eyeing it closely, "my

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eyesight is so bad that, unfortunately, with this light——”

“I will put on the other switch,” said Mr. Macwhinnie turning to walk to the electric buttons.

The little man raised the bottle swiftly, and dashed it with the whole strength of his left arm on the floor. At the sound of the crash Macwhinnie jumped round, and leapt with an oath back to the invalid-chair. The bottle lay smashed into fragments; the sieve lay among them; the ancestor was scattered broadcast over his tomb. Among his ashes gleamed up a blood-red seal with arms upon it. “Heavens!” cried the little man, pointing with much show of amazement, “there, as I live, is the Government seal of Balukia!”

Mr. Macwhinnie regarded him with no twinkle of the eye, no pits and hollows of the cheeks.

“So it is,” he replied steadily.†

“How clumsy I am!” repented the little man, sincerely, “I have broken your bottle. It is all owing to my awkward condition. Trying to hold it in my left hand, heavy as it is, it slipped, and—there you are!”

“There my grandfather is!” said Mr. Macwhinnie, a pit suddenly appearing in his left cheek. “As for slipping—that is the most deter-r-mined bottle I ever met yet. If ever a bottle committed wilful suicide that one did.”

† “The point is,” said Napoleon, with interest, “there is the seal of Balukia.”

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The young man picked it up, and brushed the ashes from it irreverently.

"Sir," said he frankly to Napoleon, "you are not what I took you for."

They regarded each other amiably, but with some understanding. Mr. Macwhinnie proceeded:

"You see what I dared for my dear friend Cado."

"It was you who took the seal and signed the release-warrant?"

"Sir, your conclusion is correct. And I carried the seal away to give Cado time to get clear off from that island, before they signed the other warrant. Well, well," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "I was ready and willing to risk my life to save my old friend, thief though he was."

"Ah! the blue pearl"—Napoleon remembered.

"Ah!" Henry sighed, "the blue pearl."

"You will accept my very humble apologies for the breakage and the desecration, my dear boy?"

"Don't think of it further, sir. I will get the housemaid to sweep up my grandfather. I see the stopper is intact." He stooped, picked up the heavy stopper, and slipped it into his tail-pocket.

"And you have my warmest admiration for your pluck and your loyalty to your friend."

"Sir, may we shake hands?"

But the little man's available hand—the left—was in his hip-pocket feeling something.

"Ah!" he exclaimed annoyedly, "I thought there was something uncomfortable."

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"May I help you, sir?" said Henry, advancing.

"No, thanks, dear boy," replied Napoleon, pulling out his left hand with something pretty and polished in it; "this is all."

Mr. Macwhinnie stepped back.

"My revolver," Napoleon explained, "left in by my stupid man. I carried it the other day when I had a large sum of money on me."

"Loaded?" asked Mr. Macwhinnie.

"Loaded," replied Napoleon.

"No doubt you make a practice of target shooting with your left hand."

"More than a practice, dear boy. A cult, a hobby. It is a passion with me."

"Shall we go back to the drawing-room and smoke?" said Mr. Macwhinnie, after a little thought.

Napoleon assented. "After you, Macwhinnie. I forget which is the drawing-room door."

Mr. Macwhinnie preceded him, still thoughtfully, to the drawing-room. Here they smoked and each looked at the other with no little admiration.

"You were very modest over the story of that Balukian escapade, my young friend," said the little man with a fatherly air.

Mr. Macwhinnie's gaze pierced him, but found nothing.

"Even had that bottle not fallen," said Napoleon, "I should have guessed, from your story, that you played the hero. I knew it this morning. Hence

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my perhaps officious interest in you. I am not interested at all in the ruck of people. I admire, too, your ingenuity in placing the seal where they would not think of searching, after hearing from you what the bottle contained."

"You are more than kind," said Mr. Macwhinnie mildly. "I foresaw the search; or, if I had not insisted on search, suspicion and pursuit."

The little man's brain power all beat upon that tail-pocket.

"Tell me," he said with cordial interest, "are you going to send the seal back to Balukia?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Macwhinnie, turning upon him gently, "am I a thief? The seal will be restored as soon as I feel Cado has had time to get clear away from the country. I shall send it anonymously, of course."

"Of course, that. I think I shall say good night," said Napoleon, "and thanks for a remarkably pleasant and interesting evening. I shall be leaving town to-morrow afternoon for a couple of weeks; my first address will be care of Mr. James Loulon—the explorer, you know—Birchtown, Sussex; then I shall be with my sister, Lady Luckweather, at Luckweather. If you care to come and see me at either place—each being within such an easy run of town—I, and they, would be charmed. My dear boy, call upon me for anything I can do."

Mr. Macwhinnie had listened to this at first shrewdly, then with increasing confidence. Then a

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pit in his left cheek would have betrayed, to anyone who could read him, his amusement at his own suspicion, and that he saw he was still dealing with one of those delightful fools. He thanked Napoleon warmly.

"And," said the invalid, "you have forgiven my clumsiness?"

"We will not mention it again, sir, if you please."

"And your poor grandmother—what will she say?"

"She shall never know. I shall procure a fresh bottle, and restore everything as before."

With renewed regrets the little man wished him good night, and left for his own flat.

Dapper was waiting for him.

"Dapper," said his master, "you remember that when the flat above—where I have been dining—was vacant, I asked the landlord for the key, so that I could look over it with a view to exchanging?"

"I remember perfectly, sir."

"And after looking over it, and deciding against it, unfortunately I lost the key."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is the key?"

The valet brought it with entire lack of expression in his admirable face.

"I am sitting up to-night, Dapper, to do some reading. Bring sandwiches and a drink to the dining-room, make up the fire and go to bed. I may call you during the night."

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It was three o'clock in the morning when Napoleon left the dining-room and wheeled into Dapper's room, where the admirable one was sleeping in his clothes, anticipating a call. A light touch awoke him, and he rose, seeming to gather all his faculties on the instant.

"Dapper," said the little man *sotto voce*, "get me up to the flat above without noise if you can. Then get the chair up after me. It is only a short flight, after all."

The valet took his master on his disabled right side, and they progressed with infinite caution up the stairs. Then the chair was brought up, half carried, half drawn on its pneumatic tyres. Napoleon was placed in it and wheeled silently to the door of Macwhinnie's flat.

"I am going to play a trick on Mr. Macwhinnie," he whispered to Dapper.

The valet's discretion was such that he accepted this extraordinary statement as correct matter of form to cover the enterprise.

"You will wait here," said Napoleon.

The door being locked from inside, there was the inner key to be worked out before another was inserted. With infinite care and patience the little man did this and heard it drop on the floor within, the sound muffled by the mat on which it fell. He opened the door, switched on the light, wheeled to Macwhinnie's room, and listened.

Total silence; except for, in a moment or two, the welcome sound of a snore. He turned the handle,

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wheeled in, switched on one light, and, fearful that it would awaken the sleeper, proceeded straight to the bed. He drew from under his chair-cushions a handkerchief impregnated with a faint sickly odour, and laid it on Macwhinnie's pillow.

Mr. Macwhinnie breathed in chloroform, and slept securely on.

The little man looked round. The dress-clothes were lying, tossed carelessly, on a chair. He made for them and inserted a hand in the tail-pocket. The scent-stopper was still there.

It called for examination, the stem of the stopper being very thick and cased curiously in silver so that it was not transparent. The little man turned and tried it attentively. Then he found the tiniest of tiny excrescences below, pressed that, and a plate flew open, revealing, in the hollow, a blue pearl that would tone superbly with a certain smoke-blue gown. He restored the stopper to the tail-pocket, minus its treasure.

Macwhinnie lay motionless. The little man removed the handkerchief, and left the flat, leaving all as he found it, and locking the outer door again behind him. The valet waited outside, leaning up against the wall. They descended silently by the methods with which they came up. Dapper undressed his master, all discretion, all respect. Napoleon's only words to him as he was helped into bed were: "We are going down to Birchtown early to-morrow. Call me at eight."

"Very good, sir," replied Dapper prosaically.

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The little man slept with his usual repose.

The post, brought to his bed at eight, contained a letter from a lady, written from that quiet hotel off the Strand at which he had drunk tea the previous afternoon.

The letter said:

"NAPOLEON, DEAR FRIEND,

"I feel sure that you are, with your insatiable appetite, adventuring again, and I am, as ever, anxious for you. Doesn't that wonderful psychology of yours show you that a woman gets far more scared waiting for vague issues than in joining in the fight with you, and taking the risks with you?

"Anyway; can't you rest in harbour for awhile, unless we may go out together? Must you be for ever taking chances with that juggernaut the Law? You frightened me again yesterday. Send me a line to say you will be good for at least a fortnight.

"GERDA."

He found that a very dear letter, dearer than its writer knew.

"Dapper," he said, "a messenger boy. I'll bath when I've written a note." And he wrote:

"MADAM,

"My humble apologies. Did I frighten you yesterday? But how sweet and kind of you to be frightened! I will be good for a fortnight, because I am going to stay first with James Loulon, then with my sister Mary. As a souvenir during my absence I send you the pearl which will please your blue frock.

"N. P."

She had the letter and a tiny cardboard box while she breakfasted.

Half-past nine found him hatted and coated, in his chair, calling upon Mr. Henry Macwhinnie.

It caused him some little surprise to see that young gentleman, shirt-sleeved, thoughtfully pack-

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ing a kit-bag. He was in the act of folding his dress-suit in as talented a manner as the most exigent of tailors could wish, when Napoleon guided himself by the sound of Mr. Macwhinnie's shouted invitation into his bedroom.

The invalid said: "I just looked in to wish you good-bye before I go to Birchtown to stay with Loulon. But it looks as if you were going out visiting too."

"I have had a sudden call," said Mr. Macwhinnie cheerfully, "and am leaving hurriedly."

"Leaving your flat?"

"Well," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "I took it furnished indefinitely. I haven't told any lie over it. Far be it from me. And I haven't hurt the flat."

"But, my dear boy, your grandmother is expecting to stay here."

"She may expect," replied Mr. Macwhinnie; "but to tell you the truth she is a depressing old lady. If she was a heath she would be a blasted heath, and if she was a Macedonian she would be a Macedonian outrage, and if she was a Bulgarian she would be a Bulgarian atrocity."

"I am sorry," said the invalid with concern, "that we shall see no more of each other. I am lonely, and I was beginning to take more than a passing interest in you."

Mr. Macwhinnie was feeling in the tail-pocket of the folded dress-coat. He brought out a large scent-stopper.

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"I had better pack that more carefully," said he; "it is a very beautiful and valuable stopper."

"May I examine it?" asked the little man.

"I am sorry to say no," replied Mr. Macwhinnie firmly; "it is too sacred to me to be passed to stranger hands."

He wrapped it about in tissue-paper and tucked it into a corner of the bag. The little man was filled through with an exquisite enjoyment.

"There's one thing I should like to say to you," he said. Henry listened attentively. "I have, as I intimated before, begun to take rather more than a passing interest in you, and it is evident to me that, besides being a most estimable fellow, you possess capability. I am sufficiently in sympathy with you, I feel, to see that. Our outlook on life, I imagine, is much the same, though mine is naturally maturer. Our methods of attaining any ends we have in view would, I imagine, be greatly alike. But the one warning I have for you, on your onward path, is this: do not allow your sense of humour to override your judgment. Some day your sense of humour will give you a nasty shock."

Pits and hollows appeared in Mr. Macwhinnie's young cheeks.

"Also you are rash," said the invalid severely. "You were rash in Balukia. And really it was rash of you—though I appreciate your confidence—to give a stranger like myself your amazing story. This fatal facility for narration should, in

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your own interests, be carefully checked. No doubt you will in a very short time learn that. As it is, your confidence yesterday might easily have been abused."

Pits and hollows played in Mr. Macwhinnie's cheeks.

"But I saw at once, sir," said he demurely, "that you were not capable of abusing my confidence."

The invalid was, as we have noted, enjoying himself exquisitely.

"At least remember, dear boy, my warning about your fatal humoristic tendency."

"À propos of nothing at all," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "have you ever thought that, fact being stranger than fiction, if you wish to be plausible, you should tell fiction?"

"I have not," replied the little man admiringly, "but it sounds clever, and it will give me something to think upon."

"Don't think upon it till to-morrow," said Mr. Macwhinnie, "or it might prevent your catching your train."

"Nothing now would prevent my catching my train, dear boy."

They shook hands.

"I have just time to get to the station," said the invalid; "good-bye, my boy, and all success for your future."

"It will be built upon the foundation-stone of strict integrity," said Mr. Macwhinnie uprightly.

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"Than which a young man could have no better. Good-bye."

The little man gave himself the entertainment, during his rail journey, of sifting the facts, veracious and otherwise, of Mr. Macwhinnie's history, but even he could arrive at no very clear conclusion.

But the blue pearl remained to substantiate the story.

Chapter IX

The Lambskin

NAPOLEON was drinking his four o'clock tea, of which he always partook with almost feminine pleasure. Masculine pleasure was no doubt present too, owing to the fact that Gerda Muswell sat behind the tea-tray. The drawing-room of the Victoria flat was in firelight, which cast gleams and shadows over her cameo face. That her *vis-à-vis* across the little table looked rather long and often at the face was but natural, and she took it as the homage to which she was accustomed. They chattered like happy children, abandoning serious topics for the nonsensical nothings which mean more than all the ponderousness in the world, when talked by two people of their respective ages of discretion. Hers may have been twenty-nine; his, no doubt, was well past thirty; but together they were boy and girl for all that. She said presently: "I have done no work since we joined hands."

To which he answered: "Must you work, then, to be happy?" She shook her head, laughing.

"Be a butterfly while the summer lasts, Gerda," said he.

The admirable Dapper brought in two visiting-

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cards. "This is abominable of you, Dapper," said his master, taking them. "You should know I am at home to nobody when Mrs. Muswell is here."

But, looking at the cards, his annoyance faded, and his face became blandly speculative. The cards were printed in England, probably, but they bore these names: "Effendi Lakka Hafiz" and "His Highness Prince Muscepha."

Napoleon looked at the lady.

"Gerda," he said tapping the cards, "I am afraid"—his voice apologised. She nodded, and began to gather her furs. He added: "Bring the gentlemen in here in three minutes, Dapper."

The servant disappeared, and he passed the visiting-cards to her. She read them and looked at him, but there was little expression in his face. Hers interrogated, and he replied: "They are strangers; but I rather think I met them in the Green Park this morning."

Gerda rose, drawing her furs close to her throat, Napoleon watching as if he loved to watch her grace and the slow swallowing up of her white neck in the luxury of the black-fox stole. She regarded him keenly.

"Napoleon——"

He looked back. "Well, dear child?"

"If—you will call for me whenever you need me. I don't care about the butterfly business so much. And I like to earn my salary."

"How principled we are!" he mused; "how

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extraordinarily principled considering our entire lack of principle. My dear Gerda, please run away."

"I see you are going to tell me nothing."

"There is nothing to tell."

"Yet——"

"Go away," replied Napoleon. She went, blowing him a kiss from the tips of her fingers, while he bowed good-bye from his invalid-chair.

The visitors were shown into the drawing-room as soon as Dapper had closed the outer door behind her. They saw an invalid with a wonderful pale face, which his eyes, like jet stars, illumined, seated in an invalid-chair, from which it was apparent that he could not move, though he did them the courtesy of a motion to rise. They advanced, bowing—two swarthy Asiatics Europeanised by a tailor and circumstance.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said the invalid courteously. "You see my condition? And let me hear why you honour me with a call."

"The Prince will explain," said the elder of the two, who remained standing. He bowed towards his companion. The Prince had thrown a swift glance round the firelit room. "You are alone, sir?" he questioned, speaking English with a good accent.

The little man showed no excess of caution but answered carelessly: "We are alone."

"You live, perhaps, by yourself in this charming house?"

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"I live alone in this flat, Prince." And he added, laughing: "Prince, what suspicious questions from two strangers!"

His visitor smiled too, but with dignity.

"Sir," he said simply, "I am a Prince of the Royal House of Persia, and Hafiz here is the Chancellor of the Shah."

Napoleon bowed. "But you must admit, Prince," he said, "that to a conventional British citizen like myself——"

"Our visit needs explanation. I propose to explain, after one or two necessary questions. You are a rich private citizen?"

After a slight pause, Napoleon assented to the description.

"We met you in one of your parks this morning," said the Prince, "and came to the conclusion."

"Why do you say I am rich?"

"Your air," said the Prince simply, "your arrogance, the fur coat you wore—these are all guides to your circumstances surely, and I have followed the most simple and direct method possible of communicating with you. You appear rich. I hardly know what your English conventions are, but in Persia we might make and pursue such deductions. Seeing you in that park Hafiz said to me—what did you say, Hafiz?"

"‘Highness,’ I said, ‘there is one of these rich Englishmen!’"

"And so," said the Prince, "we followed you home

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to note your address, and the hall porter gave us your name."

"The hall porter has no business to give my name to inquiring strangers, royal or commoner."

"We represented ourselves to him," said the Prince with a smile, "as two travelling Persians who, having seen you, were convinced you were some great public man, and wished to know your name. We regarded you, we told the porter, as one of the sights of your London. So he told us. Hence our visit this afternoon."

"Gentlemen," said Napoleon, looking from one to the other, "suppose we come to your business."

"We are negotiating for private loans to the Shah," the Persian replied.

Napoleon nodded, and said: "Kindly go on. Why privacy?"

"For political and international reasons, sir, which I will explain to you as far as possible, should you press for them, if we can negotiate," the Persian replied. "The loans are to be made secretly, and the matter must not leak out either in Persia or in Europe. I am not approaching any of your public men on the matter, for the simple reason that your public men must not know of the Shah's temporary need. Had we found you were a public man we should not be approaching you this afternoon. I am here thus quietly, with no suite save Hafiz and my body-servant, to arrange the matter for my cousin. We have, so far, been singularly successful."

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Napoleon looked extreme interest.

Prince Muscepha proceeded: "As some sort of guarantee, or precedent, Mr. Prince, I may tell you that we have arranged considerable loans with Lord Wrothman and the Duke of Sleetshire."

"Indeed!" cried Napoleon, leaning forward. The names of those two multi-millionaires were certainly a guarantee and precedent. The Prince looked at him quietly and with some haughtiness.

"Twenty thousand pounds from Lord Wrothman and forty thousand from his Grace," he said; "I will show you any proofs you require of the truth of what I say. I am, of course, prepared to meet with suspicion."

"Your Highness, have I shown suspicion?"

"Sir, you have received me as I would have been received."

They bowed to each other. After these grave courtesies, Napoleon asked:

"Will you tell me now the security for these loans?"

"Willingly," said the Prince. "A mortgage, actually, on the Shah's winter palace in the Duke's case, a mortgage on a fruit estate west of the capital in Lord Wrothman's; and for a third loan, according to the amount, we offer a mortgage on a second estate, south of the capital, or on the Shah's residence in the harbour town of Bushire. The interest would be five per cent."

"Paid by whom, your Highness? From the Shah's privy purse?"

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The Prince paused. "As a Prince of the Royal House," he said, "I am rather ashamed. By the Chancellor out of the public moneys."

"Privately distorted for the purpose?"

"I hardly care for your manner of putting it, sir. The Shah finds himself in straits, or he would not——"

"I apologise. I understand."

"Lord Wrothman, as I say, has lent the Shah twenty thousand pounds. We hardly need better guarantee of his confidence and his recognition of the honour."

"Hardly, indeed! I think the Shah dined at Wrothman Hall when staying at Sleet?"

"That is quite correct," said the Persian, "and we were the bearers of many messages to Lord Wrothman recalling that pleasant entertainment."

"Wrothman would be pleased."

The Prince waved a hand as one who would say, "But, of course!" and turned to more direct business.

He delivered himself of a short speech:

"I think you will agree with me, sir, that it is hardly necessary to go into the purposes of the loan, which are the private purposes of the Shah. I think I may tell you, in confidence, that His Majesty, at this immediate juncture, finds himself unable to go to the nation for the money of which he is temporarily in need. He is, of course, as you English say, a despotic ruler, but such is the unrest simmering in and around Teheran that it would not

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be advisable to press for money just now. Every ruler, I suppose, understands the need of a policy at times."

"Just so," answered Napoleon.

"Lord Wrothman and the Duke of Sleetshire were quite satisfied with the terms his Majesty offers. As you are aware, the Shah stayed three days at Sleet when in England last year, and he speaks in very happy terms of his reception there. We brought the Duke a gift from his Majesty when we came over: a horse, a pure Arab from the plains."

"The Duke is very favoured."

"The Duke is a dear friend of his Majesty."

"And Wrothman—who is a friend of mine?"

The Prince darted a quick look at his interlocutor.

"Will you ask me any questions you think fit, Mr. Prince," he said, "and I will answer them, unless they clash with my duty of privacy?"

The little man thought for a while, regarding his visitors with polite but steadfast scrutiny. During his consideration of the matter he roused himself to the neglected hospitalities. "You would like tea? I will ring for a fresh brew to be made." He was touching the bell near his chair when they declined the offer with effusive thanks.

"I do not know exactly what I want to ask," he said, settling back into his chair, "but I suppose your object in visiting me this afternoon is to propose

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that I should accommodate his Majesty with a third loan."

The Prince assented briefly; the Chancellor bowed. Napoleon tapped his finger-tips on the arm of his chair and smiled.

"Well," he mused aloud, "I do not say but what I should be willing, your Highness—more than willing—pleased to invest any sum. I could lay hands on in such a way. It is so infinitely more interesting than the ordinary market business. You have, no doubt, photographs and plans of the palace and estates to be mortgaged?"

"At our hotel," the Persian replied.

"Where are you staying, Prince?"

"At the Hotel Cecil."

"Thanks. And you would, no doubt, be perfectly willing to show me the photographs?"

"Absolutely willing. It would give us great pleasure to do so."

"Again thanks. And—you must not be offended—proofs of the Wrothman and Sleetshire loans?"

The Prince assented with some haughtiness. When he spoke his voice held a touch of outrage. "I will show you the actual money, sir."

"What, do you mean the loans were paid down in cash?"

"I mean that I hold the full amount of the respective loans in bank-notes of a thousand pounds each. We could, owing to the strict privacy necessary, accept neither cheque nor transfer of any

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kind. Lord Wrothman and the Duke of Sleetshire realised that."

"When were the loans made?"

"Yesterday morning. But I fail to understand——"

"My unpardonable curiosity. Forgive me, and see that I am a wretched invalid whose only amusement is to catch bits of gossip about his neighbours. Wrothman is a personal friend of mine, as I say, and I have no hesitation in following his lead."

Quiet gladness shone into the Persian's face.

"To what amount should you be prepared to oblige his Majesty, Mr. Prince?"

Napoleon appeared to weigh this, and replied slowly:

"Not to the extent of either Wrothman's or the Duke's accommodation. But I could lay hands at once on, say, ten thousand pounds, if such a trifle——"

The Prince glanced disappointedly at the Chancellor. Hafiz raised his eyebrows and spread his hands like a Frenchman. It was evident that they had expected much more from him of the arrogance and the fur coat.

"It is of course a bagatelle," said Napoleon apologetically, "but it is all I could lay hands on at the moment. I am not a millionaire. If you think the sum not worth adding to what you have already obtained I will not press it on you, though, as I say, the investment appeals, provided that, as a

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matter of business form, you satisfy me with the proofs you speak of."

"It certainly is not a great sum to offer as a loan to a crowned head," said the Prince. The invalid bowed resignedly.

"Perhaps, gentlemen, as you infer, it is hardly worthy. In that case, I regret to say that, as I cannot increase it, there can be no business between us. I am sorry."

They were all suavity, all protest.

"Our instructions are," said Muscepha, "to obtain such moneys as possible within the short time limit. If you will invest your ten thousand pounds in this manner his Majesty will be delighted to accept such obligation from you. As for the *bona fides*, if you will dine with us to-morrow evening at our hotel we will give you every satisfaction. I need not say more now; you shall gather all the satisfaction you need, and the matter of your own loan can be left open till then."

"I shall certainly make the investment, Highness, the satisfaction provided."

"At eight to-morrow evening, then?"

"Thanks. At eight. Shall I bring notes?"

"I leave that to your inclination, sir."

"You do not press me to bring them?"

"I press you to do nothing, sir," replied the Persian proudly; "the Shah offers you this honour, that is all."

"I am conscious of the honour," said Napoleon,

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"but one moment before you go. You spoke of the short time limit. When do you leave England?"

"At midday the day after to-morrow."

"I shall bring the notes," said Napoleon, "anticipating 'the satisfaction.'"

They rose to go. The Prince shook hands cordially, though with something of condescension, and the Chancellor followed suit. The invalid could only offer his left, but his patient smile apologised for that. "Au revoir," he said, pressing the bell for Dapper to attend them. So they passed out of the flat, and left him smiling patiently. But when the door had closed behind them his smile flashed into the grin of exhilaration which boded one of the enterprises he loved.

Gerda, fresh as a rose and clear-cut as a cameo, was at the Victoria flat at nine-thirty the next morning. She wore a tailor-built coat and skirt, a hat that seemed composed of nothing but velvet and soft curve and line, used as a picture-frame, and the black-fox stole about her shoulders. Napoleon was at breakfast.

She sat down, saying: "What laziness!"

He smiled, and appreciated her in the fur and the soft hat.

"What are your frivols to-day, madam?" he asked.

She became serious and said, "I don't want to be frivolous. I have come to ask questions about

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your visitors yesterday, because I am sure there is some work to do. Is there not?"

"Not for you," said Napoleon.

"But don't you see that I am not earning the share you pay me as your partner? I have done nothing at all so far. You take all the risks. I believe you do not want me, after all."

The little man stared at her, and looked away.

"Never believe that," he said. "There will come a time when I shall 'want' you. Meanwhile I only require you to be ready and willing for a call."

"Which never comes."

"The call will come one day, be sure."

"But is there not some work to do now? Those visitors of yours——"

"My work, thanks, dear Gerda."

She leaned forward eagerly.

"Then there is something on hand? I knew."

"Women always do know." And he asked, somewhat abruptly: "Is there anything you want, in the shape of furs—or a jewel—or—I don't know?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"How delightful to want nothing!" said he quizzically. "Now, my ruling passion is acquisitiveness. But I shall wish very much to give you a present within the next week, just to mark an episode in my memory—and yours. For I will tell you about the episode when it is over."

"What is my salary but a present?"

"Child, don't harp on that dreadful little salary.

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Shall it be a pearl, a diamond, an emerald, a—what?"

"Since you insist"—she mentioned diamond earrings. He wheeled himself back from the breakfast-table.

"Now run away and play," said he.

"And mayn't I know what it is you are going to do?"

"I? I shall run away and play too. Oh! it's a great game!"

As he seemed suffering from politely restrained desire to read the morning paper, she left him. But when she had gone the paper was cast to the floor, and he brushed his left hand over his face as if to brush off agony. There is no doubt that her beautiful presence often caused him agony. Presently he rang.

"Dapper, get me ready to go out. And I shall need you. I am going to the bank this morning."

He was made ready.

It was a fine fresh morning and the City looked happy when the invalid was lifted out of his taxicab in Gracechurch Street by Dapper and a sympathising policeman, and, supported still by Dapper on one side and a stick on the other, progressed slowly into his bank. He looked happy too, and he drew out ten thousand pounds in notes, causing some mild interest.

"We're worth something as we stand," he said, tapping the leather case in which he enclosed the notes; "we're worth quite a bit."

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"It isn't safe, Mr. Prince," replied the counter-clerk.

Napoleon smiled, and said: "A fellow like me likes courting risks, my boy. I shall go home hoping for brigands. Well, well, there isn't much spice in life for one of my sort, is there? I can only get it by pulling ten thousand pounds out of my bank and going through the streets with it in broad daylight."

"It's a lot of money," said the wise clerk.

"It is all to lend to someone too," replied the little man, beaming charity and benevolence.

He was helped out, leaving an impression of pathos behind him; Dapper and the driver hoisted him into the taxi-cab, where he sat, still beaming charity and benevolence. †

"Why, Dapper," he said, turning to the valet, as they hummed along through the traffic in Cannon Street, "you could rob me this minute. Hang it, man! So you could."

"Could I, sir?" replied the valet discreetly. "I think not."

"No," said Napoleon grinning.

He slid his left hand a moment into his inner breast-pocket, and fondled the hard butt of a tried friend.

"No, no," said he, "I agree with you—it's there all right."

He laughed at Dapper sitting smug and discreet on the opposite seat; then lapsed into thought, having a plan of some intricacy in drawing for the

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rest of the day. The afternoon found him at the Cecil, calling upon the Shah's private ambassadors.

They were both in, lingering over after-lunch coffee in their private sitting-room, although it was nearly four o'clock; lingering over the coffee, and talking with much absorption together. When the invalid was shown in, and wheeled forward, they received him with dignified cordiality.

After the preliminaries of greeting, they did not press for business, but left him to explain his early visit, as was compatible with their dignity.

"I am coming again," said the little man merrily. "Oh! I am coming again this evening to eat a good dinner with you, Highness, and I shall bring you ten thousand pounds in notes if you will let me, just as a matter of business form, examine your *bona fides* this afternoon. It occurred to me that I would prefer it so, if your Highness does not object."

"I could not possibly object, sir," said the Prince, when he had listened kindly to this; "Hafiz, will you get the strong box from the management?" When the Chancellor had departed he added: "I would hardly send a servant on that errand. Our strong box is lodged in the hotel safe."

"Very necessary precaution, Highness."

The Prince went on: "I am glad that you have called on this errand before bringing the notes. You can examine my documents, go away, form your unbiased opinion by yourself, and bring the

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money or not, as you choose. I understand that it is not on your person at the present moment."

"It is not, Highness."

Napoleon slid his hand into his breast-pocket and brought out a pretty little pocket-pistol.

"Look at that," said he, laughing. "So nervous was I returning from my bank this morning with such a sum of money that I prepared for brigands as if our good London were not protected by splendid police. I forgot to disarm myself before coming here. It is amusing, eh?"

"Most amusing, sir," said the Prince attentively.

Napoleon slipped the pistol back as Hafiz returned carrying a small iron-bound box, padlocked. The box unlocked, maps and several documents purporting to be deeds of mortgage were produced. Two rolls of bank-notes lay there too, but it was the deeds which the little man examined with minute attention. The Prince explained: "You have your choice, sir. You see? But if you limit your loan to ten thousand pounds we could only suggest a mortgage on the Shah's comparatively small residence at Bushire. The deeds were drawn up by his Majesty's private legal advisers, and Hafiz carries the Government seal with which to stamp anything you should decide to sign. Mark, I press you to nothing."

Having examined the deed of mortgage on the Bushire royal residence, and seen it to be absolutely correct in form and technicalities, Napoleon asked

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for photographs. These were produced, both of the exterior and the interiors of the state rooms. Napoleon admired them, much. The Prince described the tapestries and carpets. Hafiz extolled the silver-work and the ivories. The little man laid the photographs down and said with a great air of satisfaction:

"I am quite willing to lend his Majesty ten thousand pounds on a mortgage of the Bushire palace at five per cent. interest."

He looked pleasantly at his hosts, and found their attentive faces carefully devoid of any sign of gladness. They treated him somewhat haughtily, as one upon whom they had conferred much honour. He proceeded: "So I shall have pleasure in dining with you to-night, Prince, and in signing that pretty document. May I examine the other *bona fides*?"

"The bank-notes, sir?" said the Persian with some coldness. "Certainly; pray gratify yourself."

The little man slipped the elastic rings off the rolls, and looked them through quickly. His mind was at tremendous strain now, but his trained memory was such that he could commit most of the numbers to its keeping. He put back the notes, smiled, and bade them good afternoon.

"We shall see you at eight?"

"At eight, Highness; and I appreciate the honour."

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From five till seven-thirty he was busy in his dining-room at the Victoria flat. He was at home to no one, and Dapper might not enter. He had before him on a table a pile of counterfeit thousand-pound notes, minus only their numbers, also he had his stamps, inks, and block. At seven-thirty the numbers had been transmitted from his memory to the notes, and the notes themselves elastic-banded into two rolls of, respectively, twenty and forty. At seven-thirty he wheeled into his bedroom, calling Dapper. The valet rushed from the kitchen and dressed him by a quarter to eight. During the business of the toilet he gave orders. "I shall drive alone to the Cecil, Dapper, but you are to fetch me at 10.30 sharp. Mind that. Insist on getting access to me at 10.30. You are not to be put off with any message through servants should any be brought to you. I shall not have sent the message. At 10.30 sharp. That's all you need understand." Soon after eight he was greeting his hosts in their private sitting-room at the Cecil. He glowed with the goodly satisfaction of one who has not been idle for some nine hours.

The dinner was good; the talk pleasant; they spoke of Persia's outlok; her policy at home and abroad; showed mutual acquaintance with many countries. Prince Muscepha and the Chancellor were regretful at leaving London to-morrow. They all toasted each other, the visitor drinking only water, which they had to send for, so that he saw

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it brought, above suspicion, into the room by an hotel servant. He explained that this abstemiousness was ordered by his doctors. "A man in my state of health learns obedience," he remarked; "but how illness destroys the vital interest in life! I have little interest left in anything but gambling. I love speculation of all kinds, hence my extreme willingness to invest some part of my money in Persia. I am grateful to you, Highness, for bringing me this new interest. I am positively excited."

The Prince smiled calmly, and examined the little man with a penetrating glance. Napoleon was all pleasant exhilaration, unsuspecting ardour.

"And do you still go armed, sir?"

Napoleon brought the butt of the pistol from his hip pocket, and fondled it.

"Yes, Highness, for I carried ten thousand pounds in a taxi-cab through the streets."

"How amusing!" said the Prince.

"And do you find yourself able to shoot with your left hand, sir?" inquired the Chancellor with much admiration.

"I am a dead shot with my left hand," replied Napoleon, beaming; "it is, indeed, amusing."

They lingered through dinner to dessert. Lingered over grapes and peaches, developing much good feeling for each other; lingered yet over coffee and golden liqueurs. The little man displayed much simplicity of outlook and aim and understanding. Several times he caused them amusement by his

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naïve remarks. When they smiled and glanced at each other he would say: "There, remember I'm a drone, and my wits rust. Besides, I have never had any need of wits. I am one of those unfortunate beings, a man who was born sufficiently rich."

"You call that misfortune?"

"Yes, for it makes such helpless fools of us."

They politely negatived this, but as his simplicity displayed itself more and more divertingly they scarcely troubled to hide their amusement and led him on to babble. He babbled till his coffee was cold, and so he could not drink it. When they would have poured him more—from an equipage on a tray which they had caused to be placed on the side-board behind him—he refused it, saying that after all the cold coffee was a blessing in disguise, because in his poor state of health it would have kept him awake all night had he drunk it at this hour. "I am afraid I am a poor sort of guest," he said, "to decline your wine and your coffee, but I am obliged to do so, with your permission."

They watched him a little, but it was evident that he was a harmless person, crazed with health fads, and possessed of a hobby for carrying fire-arms.

A quarter past ten. He broke his flow of conversation—which had been obviously trying their patience for the past hour—and appeared conscience-stricken. "But our business!" he said. "I told my servant to come for me at half-past ten. My doctor orders me to be in bed at half-past eleven

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always. And I have been thinking things over since this afternoon."

They glanced swiftly at one another, and a veiled something in each face nearly leapt out. He knew it for baffled fury, and caressed his pistol butt.

"You have—perhaps altered your mind about the loan—you have not brought the ten thousand pounds——"

"I have brought the ten thousand pounds."

They gave the impression of drawing nearer, though neither moved from his seat.

"Then you have—not—altered——"

He replied easily: "Heavens, no, gentlemen. I only thought of increasing the loan to twenty instead of ten. May I just examine the photographs of that second fruit estate again? I am not certain, of course; the idea merely crossed my mind."

They looked at each other. Muscepha requested Hafiz to obtain the strong box from the management, and became condescending.

"As you like, Mr. Prince, of course. We shall not press you to anything."

The box was brought, and given into his hand. He spread the papers pell-mell upon his knees as he sat in the invalid chair, the rolls of notes being tumbled out among them. He became very interested in the photographs; hesitated over them; compared them with the pictures of the Bushire palace; decided at length on his first choice, the palace. The sort of veil was on both the Persians'

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faces again at this. Napoleon said: "I only brought ten thousand with me."

The atmosphere became less electric.

"May I have pen and ink?" he asked. Hafiz turned to procure them; Muscepha turned his head a moment to direct him. Two rolls of notes were pulled from beneath the cushions of the invalid's chair, and handed to Muscepha on the instant he looked round again. "Will you pack your box, Highness?" said the little man, handing the box after the rolls, and collecting one by one, with his industrious left hand, the deeds which lay on the light rug that covered his knees. Below the rug now were the two similar bundles of notes which had been guarded so carefully by the management of the Cecil.

Pen and ink had been brought; the deed of mortgage on the Bushire palace was spread, and the invalid signed. The Shah's signature was already written, and now Muscepha and Hafiz appended theirs, and the seal of the Persian Government was produced. It was an imposing document when finished, and given into Napoleon's keeping in exchange for ten thousand-pound notes which he handed over. They were locked into the strong box with the rest of the papers.

The announcement that Mr. Prince's servant was waiting cut short the negotiations here. The necessary business, however, was finished, and neither of the hosts pressed their guest to stay. He held

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the right hand of each for some time in his left, while he made a farewell of sincere cordiality, and protested his enjoyment of the evening.

"It is not often," he said, "that I have found a business dinner fraught with such pleasure."

"Do not let us call it a business dinner," said the Prince gracefully. "We have entertained a delightful guest. I hope you will be satisfied with the profits of your investment."

"I am sure I shall, Highness," replied the little man, beaming, "and then, the honour of lending money to a crowned head——"

"I rejoice that you appreciate it."

"Good evening, Highness."

"Good evening, Mr. Prince."

"You will not think it an impertinence were I to say that I hope I may have the honour of meeting your Highness again."

"It gratifies me, sir."

"Still," continued Napoleon, "I suppose the chance is a remote one?"

"I fear it is very remote."

They bowed him out. In the corridor Dapper waited, having obeyed instructions to the letter, as was his valuable wont.

"I insisted on coming up, sir," said this sentinel.

His admirable face lacked any expression whatever.

"Ah!" replied his master. "I think the lift is farther down the corridor."

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Wheeling down, with the valet walking behind the chair, he confronted three men unmistakable as plain-clothes officers, accompanied by the manager, just stepping out of the lift. He was on guard instantly, quiet and ready for the unexpected play. With a word to one of the police, the manager respectfully stopped the progress of the wheel chair.

"You are the gentleman who has been dining with the Persians, sir?"

Napoleon acquiesced, looking his bland astonishment. A police officer addressed him.

"I hope they have not swindled you of anything, sir? We have only just got wind of them. They are well known on the Continent, and have come over here with an extraordinary yarn about the Shah of Persia; and they have already obtained large sums from certain gentlemen——"

The little man gasped:

"Officer, I have just given them ten thousand pounds."

"How, sir?"

"In notes. Good God, have I been swindled out of ten thousand pounds?" They looked at him with kindly pity for his gullibility, but with respect for his evident social position. One of the police officers endeavoured to soothe the agitation which he was, very naturally, feeling.

"No, no, sir, we are in time to save that for you. The other robberies I don't feel so sure about." A flash of illumination spread over Napoleon's face.

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"Officer, were they sums of twenty thousand and thirty thousand respectively from Lord Wrothman and the Duke of Sleetshire? Because they quoted those names and showed me the notes as *bona fides*. How extraordinarily stupid of them to keep money on them like this! How—but probably they were counterfeit?"

And he looked to the police officers for confirmation of this suspicion.

"It is more than likely, sir."

"And the genuine notes are most probably out of the country! Poor Wrothman! He is a friend of mine."

Increased respect for him was visible on every face.

"No doubt," said the invalid, as if appalled "they were counterfeit notes."

"That we shall know when we see them, sir."

"How was it *I* was gulled? How was it *I* was incredible ass enough not to tell them at a glance?"

"Lor', sir, to a lay mind these things aren't obvious. It takes an expert, often, to tell a false note."

"Good heavens!" said the little man, pulling out his deed of mortgage to show them, "*how* I have been gulled! What a fool I must be!"

"Sir, your sort has no chance dealing with these gentry. You're a lamb among wolves, as it were, sir."

They examined the pretty document, and took

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possession of it. The manager hastened matters, reluctant to have a fuss raised in his corridor.

"Sir," he addressed Napoleon, "I am exceedingly sorry you should have met with this experience in this hotel. I think you might save yourself all further annoyance and proceed home now, and let the police take this matter in hand as quietly as possible. I see you are angry, sir——"

"Justly so," said Napoleon, almost foaming. "I hate being made a fool of."

"In consideration of the other guests, sir," begged the manager.

"Well," said the little man, "I will go home. You will send me word in the morning, officer?"

"Most certainly, sir. The address? Thank you, sir."

"And that ten thousand in notes? I tell you the money is in their room with them now——"

"It will be restored to you in the course of to-morrow, sir, if you can give me the numbers of the notes just as a matter of form."

He quoted them. Then added further his social references.

"You will find me at my own address to-morrow; the week-end I am spending with Sir Robert Akers, Akerston, Kent. The rest of the week with my sister, Lady Luckweather. I suppose I must appear in this case?"

"I am afraid so, sir."

"I shall go home then, now. It is an extraor-

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dinary affair! Good-night." He vanished, much perturbed, in the downward lift. The police went on to their work.

And the next day he lunched a lady at the big restaurant in Piccadilly Circus, and afterwards took her to Cartier's to choose diamond ear-drops.

Chapter X

The Purple Clue

ALMOST the first words his sister said to Napoleon, after she had received him in the drawing-room at Luckweather one early summer afternoon, were: "You will notice I have had your lovely mirror moved from this room."

One of his wedding presents to her had been a mirror set in a frame made by a Venetian silversmith in the sixteenth century. Napoleon glanced round for confirmation of her remark.

"It is, incongruously, in the box-room," said Mary, "in company with all the portable looking-glasses from the lower part of the house. The large ones I have had draped over *pro tem.*: we have staying with us a man who is afraid of a looking-glass."

"My dear Mary!"

"Hush!" said Lady Luckweather.

A tall man of middle age entered the room. She introduced him as Mr. Reginald Llantillet. Napoleon, who knew his Debrett, mentally registered him as the brother of the present Earl of Llanruddock. Tea came in. They talked; Mary was a charming hostess, and it was pretty to see her doing the honours of Luckweather. When the guests dropped in and

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she turned to them, her brother was able to give his attention to Mr. Llantillet, who was afraid of looking-glasses.

He observed that, while there seemed no personal reason for this specified antipathy, the fear—of something—was a very real one. The man's thoughts wandered instantly when not engaged by conversation; when so engaged his answers were at times vague and wide of the mark; his eyes, with a blaze in them, darted to each new arrival, and scrutinised him with an intensity that denoted some painful stress of the brain. Napoleon had met the blaze for a moment as they were introduced, and he had registered the observation that Mr. Llantillet was expecting an apparition. After ten minutes' talk with the man, during which they ate cake and drank tea and waited on the women, he had gathered sufficient impression to be saying to himself:

"What outsiders, or the doctor, would call a nerve case, and liable to end in lunacy if not cured. But there's something big behind, driving him to lunacy. What is the something big?"

His invariable interest in his Book of Life prompted him to a guess.

He asked his sister when the guests had dispersed to their rooms:

"Mary, how is Mr. Llantillet's case diagnosed?"

"His case!" said Mary inquiringly.

"It must be a very serious case," her brother replied.

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"Interesting rather than serious," said Mary.

Napoleon persisted. "That also. But I take it seriously."

"*You* take it——"

He looked away a moment, while his smile flickered to the corners of his fine lips, and was banished again. She, who knew him well, contemplated that flicker with unveiled anxiety, which he dispelled.

"My dear Polly," said he, "I include myself in the matter simply because I love to have my fingers in the printing of all possible pages of that great Book of the World, as you know. Such a fine, endless book! To return to Llanruddock's brother. It seems such a curious thing to come out visiting and ask one's hostess to remove all her looking-glasses. How is it done?"

"In this case, his man asked the housekeeper to ask me to move them."

"His valet asked your housekeeper to ask you?"

"Yes, Nap, my dear. Are you satisfied?"

"If you are. It is not my business."

"Nap, my dear, do you always restrict yourself to your own business?"

They both laughed.

"But you will behave nicely," coaxed little Lady Luckweather, walking beside his chair as he wheeled to the door; "you will be good while you are staying with Johnnie and me?"

"Mary, my child, never try to dam the ocean,

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make silk purses out of sows' ears, or remould your fellows. It's all impossible. Dinner at half-past eight? Au revoir."

He went to rest in his room, where his admirable man was unpacking.

"Don't go," said Napoleon as the servant would have retired, with an apology for not having finished; "I feel inclined to ask questions. Unpack while I indulge myself."

He looked out of the window down to a lawn where Sir John Luckweather and a male guest were playing tennis. He waved to Johnnie. Then he began to ask his questions.

"All the rooms down this corridor occupied, Dapper?"

"Most of them, I believe, sir."

"Who are my next-door neighbours?"

"Room on the right empty at present, sir; on the left we have Mr. Llantillet, the Earl of Llanrud-dock's brother."

"Never mind the peerage, Dapper. So Mr. Llantillet sleeps on my left? His health is bad—no doubt he is resting like I am before dinner."

"He is watching Sir John play tennis, sir."

"So he is," said Napoleon, looking from the window again.

"Seeing he was not in his room and his man was unpacking there, I went to see if I could borrow an extra coat-hanger just now, sir. I am sorry to find I have not packed enough."

THE PURPLE CLUE

"No doubt Mr. Llantillet's servant is something of a nurse as well, Dapper?"

"I hope," replied the discreet one, "that he is *some*think, sir, for he ain't no valet."

"How do you discover that?"

"He was brushing a dress-coat wrong way, sir," replied Dapper, "and he'd put a pair of trousers to press quite a good 'alf-inch out of the crease."

"Dear me, Dapper!"

The discreet one looked at him very thoughtfully indeed, and as thoughtfully resumed information unsolicited as far as words went, but which long habit and careful observation of his master had taught him was required.

"He's a German named Berner, sir—the valet. Very close and secret about his affairs."

"That means his master's affairs."

"He lent us the coat-hanger, sir."

"Ah! that was very kind of him, Dapper."

"I only saw him for a few minutes, sir."

"No doubt you'll soon get better acquainted downstairs."

"No doubt of it, sir."

"Come back to dress me at eight."

The valet went softly out.

The little 'man sat by the window, looking out into the garden; the tennis-players were coming in; summer gloaming fell over Luckweather. Napoleon made a brief summary: "Mr. Reginald Llantillet, in a state of severe nervous tension, comes

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to stay with John and Mary, accompanied by a singularly inefficient valet, who asks Mary to remove all her looking-glasses——”

After dinner, when most of them had turned out into the garden, he wheeled for a few moments beside Mary, who looked, as usual, like a First Empire impersonation, in one of the slim high-waisted frocks she invariably affected, with her brown hair dressed *à la Joséphine*.

“Llantillet looks solitary,” he observed, indicating a lone figure on a distant garden-seat, which was shown clearly in the white moonlight.

“He is solitary,” said Mary; “he insists on being solitary. He says it is his nerves. I wish we had not asked him to stay. He ought to be in a nursing home.”

“My dear Polly, it is purely mental. The man is in a state of terror.”

“At Luckweather! Of what?”

“I think it must be my business to find out.”

She looked at him hard.

“Can you not believe in my philanthropy?” said the little man plaintively.

She shook her head.

“Let me see,” said he. “Llantillet has been travelling in Asia?”

“Yes. He has only just arrived home.”

“With this incompetent valet.”

“How do you know of the incompetency of his valet?”

THE PURPLE CLUE

"He brushes coats and presses trousers by the wrong method," Napoleon explained. "Dapper saw him. And what did Llantillet do in Asia?"

"Among other places he went to Persia." She looked at him hard again in the moonlight. "You know about the casket!"

He knew nothing of any casket.

"Why not?" he replied. "I suppose it is no secret."

"Nap, you have promised to be good."

"My darling child, I will be good."

"It is the most ducky casket," said Mary. "He brought it to show me because I specially asked. Do you know why the Shah gave it him?"

He regarded her with much quiet amusement.

"I don't believe you knew anything about it at all!" she cried.

"Dear child, I may as well hear all now."

"Nap, you beast!" said Lady Luckweather. "Well, the Shah gave it to him for rescuing the Prime Minister or somebody from two brigands in a pass in the Kuh Rud mountains. It is filled with uncut turquoises straight from the Nishapur mines. They are worth a fortune, of course, and he's going to have them cut and set for his brother's wife."

"Why not keep them for his own when he marries her?"

"He will not speak about his future."

"Because he thinks the end so near, poor devil."

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She shuddered and exclaimed: "I wish he'd go——"

"Child, trust to me. Your house-party shan't be spoilt. Go and talk to someone else, and I'll go and talk to Llantillet."

And he wheeled across the lawn to the solitary figure on the seat; Llantillet received him with the sort of veiled caution with which he seemed to regard everyone save his host and hostess, and the moonlight found the blaze in his eye. The invalid spoke interestingly of much; talked especially of Asia, and her wonders and her mysteries and her fanatic peoples.

"I hate Asia," said Llantillet; "curse Asia!"

"You have just returned from Persia?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Azerbaijan?"

"No, I do not know Azerbaijan. No."

"He knows Azerbaijan," Napoleon registered to himself. Aloud he added: "My sister has been telling me of your turquoises."

"The Shah's gift? I will show them to you if you like. They are in the rough, from the Nishapur mines."

"I should like to see the casket immensely. I think you are sleeping next me. Shall I call in on my way upstairs?"

"With pleasure," said Llantillet.

"Or will you call on me?"

"No, no, come to my room."

THE PURPLE CLUE

After a slight pause, during which he may have communed with himself, the invalid said quietly: "Ah! I had forgotten. Of course I have a glass in mine."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Llantillet chokingly.

"My dear Llantillet, my sister mentioned the state of your nerves to me. No harm done, I think?"

"No harm done, of course. You must excuse me. You must——"

"Nerves are an explanation of everything," replied the little man sympathetically.

"Yes," said Llantillet.

"Are you being treated?"

"Any treatment would be wasted," replied Llantillet.

"You speak fatefully."

"I speak as I feel," said Llantillet, brushing a hand over his forehead. Napoleon guessed the forehead to be wet. When ten o'clock struck from a tower in the garden, and they went indoors together to the smoke-room for a drink and a cigar, Napoleon had added the casket of turquoises to his former summary of the situation.

At about eleven he knocked lightly on his neighbour's door, and Llantillet answered the knock. His eyes were quieter here in the solitude of his bedroom, and his face wore a curious relieved expression of security. The invalid wheeled in.

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"I have come for a look at the treasure."

"I keep it in this trunk," said Llantillet, indicating a cabin-trunk in a corner. He was turning to open it when he suddenly stopped, arrested by an action of Napoleon. The invalid's hands were lying on his knee, and he had placed the first and second fingers of the left exactly at the extreme point of the index-finger of his helpless right hand. He sat thus a moment or two looking placidly at Llantillet, waiting for the other man to scream, cry, curse, or leap upon him. Llantillet put his hands over his face for a moment—and again Napoleon guessed the face to be wet with sweat—and stood rocking. Then he lifted his head, and there was the blaze in his eye, and the instinct of mad self-preservation fighting in his face.

"So it's *you!*" he said, advancing with infinite cunning and caution, crouched. His lips were strained over his teeth and all the sinews in his hands worked. "So it's come!" His blazing eyes searched the invalid in his chair; he crept up closer and closer till there was barely two yards between them, and in another moment he would have had those hands working on Napoleon's throat, when:

"Stop!" said the little man quietly and compassionately. "Stop! Don't you see I couldn't hurt you, if I would?" Llantillet relaxed and stood staring. "I haven't a weapon of any kind, and I'm paralysed all down my right side."

THE PURPLE CLUE

Llantillet sat down heavily and rubbed his hands over his face.

"But you made the sign," he whispered.

"Yes," said the little man.

"Are you one of—*them*?"

"No."

"Then how——"

"My dear fellow, I run about in this chair all over the world, reading books, and making stories, and picking up scraps here and bits there, and piecing them together, and looking into other people's business generally. I need not tell you how I learned the sign of the Azerbaijan Twelve. I know it. That's enough."

"What more do you know—of me?"

"I guessed that you belonged to the Twelve."

"That's it. I tumbled in on one of their meetings once and was——"

"Enrolled, at a heavy premium, to save your life? And have, for some breach, been condemned by them now?"

"That's it."

"When is the sentence to be carried out?"

"I don't know. That's the devilish part. It hangs and hangs. But it's close now, very close, because——"

"Because they have removed looking-glasses from your vicinity. That's one of their fantastic ideas, isn't it? How do they work it?"

"The Twelve have a great many members. It is

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only called the Twelve from the twelve heads. When you're condemned they send someone in charge of you as a friend or a valet or a nurse or a doctor, and take away all your looking-glasses. I cut off to Luckweather and told John as soon as I knew, but they sent a German after me to valet me. It was done very cleverly. He told Lady Luckweather I was in a great state of nerves—so I was, by God!—and that I had told him to ask her to remove the looking-glasses. He pitched up a yarn to account for my fears of them. She did it. I daren't talk. You don't know how the business gets on your nerves. If I told John, and he tried to help, they'd get him too. They're simply spread about like an underground net, or the tentacles of a sucking-plant, or the fibres of a cancer."

"Why remove looking-glasses, though?"

"So that you shan't see when your time comes, or how. When the command goes out from headquarters they send a man to kill you. You don't know him and very often he doesn't know you, so your valet or nurse or doctor, whichever rôle may be played, gives you a mark on the day he hears you're to be put out. Berner will give me a purple necktie, I think. I saw he'd got a new one for me, and I've worn all my others. It will be a small bow-tie so that I can't see it except in a glass."

"You'll see it when he puts it on."

"He bandages my eyes for five minutes while I dress."

THE PURPLE CLUE

"You sound like a fool."

"To allow this? My God, it's no use fighting. He's armed. And if I killed him there'd be half a dozen others in his shoes directly. In England it seems simply a tale of goblins and madness, but in Asia—you know." He shuddered and shuddered until Napoleon touched his arm.

"It has taken hold of you," he said kindly.

"Yes," said Llantillet in a hopeless voice.

"Ring for him, and let me look at him," commanded the little man.

The German came, was inspected under pretence of giving an order, and went. Napoleon held out his left hand thoughtfully, and gripped Llantillet's.

"Good-night. You're not afraid to sleep alone then."

"I'm less afraid of being alone than with other people. I suspect every fresh arrival."

"You suspected even me!"

Llantillet laughed bitterly, shook hands, and said good-night. The little man went back to his room, and smoked two pipes over the very amazing story. When he had smoked the second pipe out, he extracted from his dressing-case a folded piece of newspaper a month old. It recorded the kind of thing which always appealed to his imagination. He had quite a collection of such records waiting for sequels to be fitted. It ran:

"Mr. Gregory Kersham, the eminent scientist, has been the victim of a rather unusual robbery. A box of powder was stolen

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from his laboratory on the 18th instant, and he is offering one hundred pounds for its return. The box is a Chinese one about four inches square, and the powder is white. Mr. Kersham is very reticent about the properties of this powder—which is the second quantity he has managed to obtain during an expedition to China—but we think we are justified in stating that it is a peculiar poison hitherto unknown to science, with which Mr. Kersham was experimenting, and is only deadly when used in conjunction with one colour. The name of the colour is not known to us. Considering the dangerous nature of the contents of the box, it certainly seems desirable that it be found without delay."

The little man read this through, and smoked a third pipe. When Dapper knocked, weary but respectful, he said peevishly:

"I am making a story, Dapper. Go away for an hour."

When he was alone again he wrote out two telegrams. Then he wrote a letter to Gerda. It said:—

"DEAR GERDA,—I promised you to be good for a fortnight while I stayed with my sister, but will you repeal the sentence? A fortnight is altogether too long, my very dear Gerda. . . ."

And when the valet returned in an hour to put him to bed—it being then nearly two o'clock—he said: "Directly the office in the village is open to-morrow morning have those sent. One is a cable to Azerbaijan. And post that letter."

He slept as if his brain intrigued no further than a baby's.

The following morning brought him an answer to his telegram running: "Colour is purple.—Kersham." The evening post yielded him a letter from Gerda. She scolded him dreadfully, but, though he

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was very pensive over the letter, his mind was not moved a jot. It was beginning to enjoy itself exquisitely, being enmeshed in such a web as it loved. He had to wait till the following morning for an answer to his Azerbaijan cable, but the answer seemed to satisfy him highly: "Azerbaijan Twelve disbanded two months ago; ringleaders executed; many banished." The cable was from the chief of the Azerbaijan police.

He put each wire carefully away and wrote again to Gerda. He said:

"Dare I disobey you? I think so, Gerda, since I have never found anything yet in this old universe which I dared not do. Such an experience should be too thrilling—when it comes. *If* it comes. Please, you must not be too hard upon a poor, bored cripple-man, who has his hobbies. . . ."

Most of that day he spent in the company of Mr. Llantillet. The man's nervousness increased pitifully; he heard of new visitors expected—was twitching with tremors until he saw them to be indubitably very stolid members indeed of British Society; he talked at frequent intervals to Berner, the German servant, in his room, and came from such conversations more pallid than before, and with the blaze in his eye. Napoleon took him aside and said seriously:

"You must kick against this."

"Kick! How can I kick against a human centipede?"

"You are worse than ever to-day."

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"I am worse than ever. Tell me, have I the least touch of anything unusual about me?"

He was asking in effect: "Do I carry the sign now?" Napoleon looked at the poor creature, and would have marvelled had he not known something of the inevitableness, the secrecy, the sureness of the decrees of the disbanded Azerbaijan Twelve.

"You are just as usual," the little man replied.

"No touch of—of——"

"No purple."

"I keep wondering when—and watching—I have not slept for three nights."

"Do you know that you are bordering on mania?"

"My God!" said Llantillet, brushing his forehead with his hands. "If only I could go mad!"

The little man looked at him thoughtfully. "No, no. Rely on me for some little help."

"You!" His voice intoned what he did not put into words: "A cripple!"

"I'll sit up with you to-night, and you shall sleep. I'll give you veronal."

"I dare not sleep."

But when night came he was only too glad to be dosed. He had made a fairly good show; talked as naturally as might be through dinner; remained with the others as long as he could bear them afterwards; kept a stiff lip till in his room with Napoleon. There he broke down and cried. He was naturally weak in spite of the spurt of pluck shown on the Kuh Rud occasion, and terror was destroying him. He

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took veronal and went to bed, Napoleon waiting while the German valet attended him. The man hovered about the room while Llantillet grew drowsier and drowsier, and finally interrogated the visitor, respectfully but unmistakably, with raised eyebrows.

"I am staying with Mr. Llantillet to-night," replied Napoleon; "you may go."

The German looked at him for a moment with a tightening mouth.

"Go," said the visitor placidly.

The valet bowed and went. The invalid wheeled after him, locked the door noiselessly, and blocked the keyhole. Llantillet had begun to sleep. The little man tried the cabin-trunk, and it was locked.

He guessed that the sleeping man always carried and hid the key, and that its whereabouts were probably unknown even to the valet while the Shah's casket remained there. The haunted man still kept, no doubt, his ingrained habit of carefulness. He examined the locks with his left hand, and found them of a usual pattern; he took his clever tools from the pocket of his dinner-jacket, and delicately picked off, one by one, the two locks. It was the work of some hours; once while he noiselessly drove his tools he heard a slight shuffle outside the door, and the handle cautiously turned. He smiled to himself "Ah—h—h!" and he knew it was the German coming to see if, Llantillet being thus watched, the door had not been, for one night, left unlocked.

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"My friend! My friend!" the little man mused, à propos of Berner, disappointed, without. "You're slow, you're deuced slow."

Morning stole in through the curtains, the cabin-trunk was locked again, and a casket filled with uncut turquoise was in the cavity beneath the seat of the invalid's chair. A panel, turning on a pivot, disguised all.

Llantillet awoke to find him, vigilant and weary, beside his bed. It was then nearly eight o'clock.

"Feeling better?" asked the little man.

"A thousand times better."

"The veronal will have made you a bit heavy."

"Not at all. I shall get up early."

"Shall I ring for your man?"

"If you don't mind. And a thousand thanks."

The bell rung, the kind little man wheeled out. In the corridor he met the German, and he looked at him like lightning. The man's uneasiness was perceptible, and he hurried on to his master's room. Napoleon, turning into his, hummed a fragment of song. Dapper was preparing the bath, with an air of remonstrance.

"I have been sitting up with poor Mr. Llantillet," his master explained.

"Will you not go to bed now, sir?"

Refusing, the invalid bathed and dressed, and wheeled out into the corridor again, with Dapper behind him, ready to get the chair and its occupant downstairs for breakfast with the help of a footman.

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As they came out, Llantillet left his room, and advanced towards them.

He wore a purple bow-tie.

Napoleon's face underwent a swift change of expression, and an exclamation escaped him.

"What?" said Llantillet. Then: "Heavens! Is it? Is it? Is it?" He became a maniac; he rushed through the open door into Napoleon's room, and straight to the mirror on the dressing-table. There he saw—— Even as they turned after him they heard him scream. Then he choked, wheeled round, stumbled and fell, with his hands tearing at the purple tie, and his breath wheezing in his throat. Berner was first by his side, but on his heels were Napoleon and Dapper, and when he would have kept them away the little man commanded him furiously to stand aside. A powerful choking odour arose about them. "Hold your handkerchief to your face, Dapper, and take off his tie."

Dapper took it off and cast it aside. Napoleon held the German with a steady eye. "Stay where you are," said he, while Dapper ministered to the unconscious man. A Luckweather servant ran in, and out again to bring restoratives; Llantillet was carried back to his own bed, several people round him. Behind them all the invalid lingered, and said quietly to the German, "Stay where you are."

He stayed, gnawing his lips. They were alone in the room. "Where is the box of powder?" said Napoleon.

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The German stood and shook. His hands began to fumble at his hip. "Put your hands over your head," said Napoleon. He had his pretty polished thing in his left. The German threw them up.

"Pretty doings for a quiet country house!" mused the little man. "Where is the box of powder?"

"I do not know what you mean, sare."

"Damn fool! Own when you're beat. The Chinese box four inches square, stolen from the laboratory of one Mr. Gregory Kersham for the sole purpose of killing Mr. Llantillet and enabling you to steal the Shah's turquoises."

"It is in my bag—in—the servants' quarters."

Napoleon nodded, looking very eagle-eyed, his pale face paler after the sleepless night.

"Now, answer everything sharp, while they're busy in there. It's your best policy. I ask questions from an overwhelming curiosity about the business. The Azerbaijan Twelve being disbanded, ringleaders executed, and many banished two months ago, you were not an emissary of theirs; neither is Mr. Llantillet under a sentence of death. You were originally a member of the society?"

"Yes, sare"—at the point of the little man's pistol.

"You obtained possession of this powder, a sure, quick way of killing a man, leaving no traces. I assume it gives out an overpowering smell for perhaps three or four minutes when allied to the colour purple. In short it is the strongest and deadliest

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anæsthetic in the world. Why did you wait till this morning to use it?"

"Because——"

"No lies. Answer quick."

"Another ex-member of the society——"

"Had come to receive the casket from you. That was it? You waited for him?"

The German's stout white face bore witness of the truth of this, though he did not answer.

"Where is this confederate of yours?" But without waiting he went on: "Not that it matters. The game's up. I do not know that I want him."

"You are one of the English detectives," said Berner swiftly and fearfully.

Without pause the invalid answered. "I am sent by Scotland Yard. Pick that necktie up and throw it to me."

The German obeyed. The tie fell on Napoleon's knees. He picked it up to smell it; all odour had faded. He gave the German ample opportunity to gain the door. The door was reached and he had shot through it into the corridor before the little man seemed aware of his intentions. He wheeled out quickly after him, and—took up a position on Llantillet's door-mat. The first person who came out found him there waiting for news of the patient. It was a Luckweather servant who gave it, added that the doctor would soon arrive, and asked if Mr. Prince had seen the German valet.

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Mr. Prince had seen the German valet run downstairs just after they carried Mr. Llantillet to his bed; he supposed that Berner had gone to fetch something.

It was later in the day when Llantillet sent for Napoleon. The little man, all kindness, wheeled to his bedside.

"How are you?"

"Better, curse it! I wish I was dead. *It* has still to come."

Napoleon laid his left hand on his arm. "My dear fellow, a cablegram came for me yesterday, and was brought to my man Dapper. He laid it aside with inexcusable carelessness, and I have therefore only just received and read it. Here it is."

Llantillet read: "Azerbaijan Twelve disbanded two months ago; ringleaders executed; many banished."

"Oh, God!" he whispered. "Then I——" He nearly wept.

"You are not under sentence of death at all." Napoleon gave his rapid ideas of the case.

Llantillet sat up in bed staring. "You think Berner wanted to steal the casket?"

"No doubt. Luckily we have frustrated him. And he never knew where you kept the key of that trunk."

But Llantillet leapt out of bed, found the key, and opened the trunk.

"Prince, the casket is gone!"

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Napoleon was at his side instantly with exclamations of wonder.

"It is a case for the police. I should wire Scotland Yard. You know that nothing has been seen of your precious Berner since he ran downstairs this morning?"

"How on earth did he get it?"

"He must have known, somehow, where the key was."

"Prince, not a word to the police, of course, of the Azerbaijan business."

"Certainly not. You must only give them half the story. I am safe."

Llantillet sat down on the trunk and racked his brains. The little man looked at him with his accustomed intended simplicity.

"Prince, I swear it was not a fainting fit this morning. I am sure there was something overpowering me, like chloroform."

Napoleon had many theories. The right one was found when they searched for the casket in the German's bags, and found a Chinese box four inches square filled with a white powder that a Scotland Yard man instantly suggested was the box stolen from Mr. Gregory Kersham's laboratory. A formal search was made in the house for the turquoises, but it was, of course, clear to the meanest intelligence that the absconding valet had taken the Shah's present.

Altogether it made an interesting story. Na-

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poleon returned, after protracting his visit to his sister some days—during which a very real and pleasant friendship formed between Mr. Reginald Llantillet and himself—to London. When he went, making it his first business, to take tea with charming Gerda, staying in her quiet hotel near the Strand, she noted his ever-recurring private amusement at some mysterious events. He had a mental view of the fat German rogue flying before a weak-bodied little brother-thief; of the smart police round Luckweather; of the scientists from Scotland Yard; of much that went to make up the sum total of an unusually interesting experience.

The charming woman asked charmingly: "Have you been good?"

He answered, "I tried," and laughed.

There was always much laughter in his world.

Chapter XI

The Whipping of Friedrich]

"NEVER was a man yet who honestly wished he wasn't a sinner," said the invalid in the wheel-chair.

"Given——" replied Johnnie Luckweather.

Napoleon went on:

"Life? It's just a competition to get to the devil and the Lord has the hindermost."

"'M," replied Johnnie.

"Johnnie, you're dubious over it."

"So are you," replied Johnnie.

The little man sighed.

"I wonder," mused he, "if I shall ever be a respectable member of society?"

"What are you doing now?" said Sir John Luckweather curiously.

The little man laughed.

"I don't know that it is for you to hear, now you are a pillar of the British Constitution, a master of foxhounds, which implies respect earned, and a magistrate."

"But I'm up on the bust," said Johnnie, "without even Mary."

Napoleon shook his head.

"We've parted, Johnnie, and, seeing what you are

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now, I'd better run my course in silence I won't unbosom myself, old pardner. Only——"

It was the inimitable Café Royal; they, having dined at Romano's, looked in at the Empire, and left it, with the dexterity of long practice, without collecting a self-asked supper-party; now, about twelve, were seated here, garbed each in his morning tweeds, and with tongue pleasantly loosened, taking a keen interest in the women who entered, but, for the most part, reminiscencing. Napoleon now repeated his "Only——"

Johnnie followed the direction of his eyes, and jerked violently.

"Good God, Nap!" said he.

"I see you have him."

"The tall dark chap—sitting over in the corner alone——"

"Ah!"

"Nap, I don't like this. He knows too much about us both. And in my present position——"

"Johnnie, all right. Sit still. Reflect that we know just as much about him. And in that little transaction a year or so ago *you* were merely a passer-by, a looker-on."

After a pause Luckweather said: "You're following this chap up?"

"Ah!"

"Why? He's an adventuring cad. Gets a woman to do his work for him. We were adventurers, but we weren't cads."

THE WHIPPING OF FRIEDRICH

"I'm following him up because he let a woman do his dirty work for him for years, and then left her."

After hesitation Johnnie allowed himself to remember:

"She was a ripping pretty woman. Called herself Mrs. Muswell. Christian name was Gerda; was an old—you had met her before, and they fleeced you then. I suppose she was——?"

"She *is* his wife."

"And he left her? Brute!" And he thought of his Mary.

"I've always wanted to hit the chap," said the invalid, regarding his right hand with a sigh. "À propos of nothing at all, of course, I have been cultivating the acquaintance of his aunt, who is staying at the Grosvenor for some weeks. Lord! how I should like to hit him!"

Luckweather kept shrewd silence, knowing that the little man never felt the want of hands when his time came to strike.

Napoleon said: "It is always amusing running something or somebody to earth. I've got a strong hunting instinct. After all, Johnnie, what is a fellow like me to do with his life if he doesn't play the only games in his scope?"

Johnnie nodded, but answered: "Some day, old man, you will get the hankering to be good, and when you're good you'll be damned good. I know it. Since I took Mary away from you you've had no

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particular aim in life. What you want is something to look to—some star.”

Having uttered this he became horribly ashamed of himself, and took a gulp of champagne, and made some profane remark. All of which Napoleon waved aside.

“Stars, Johnnie? Perhaps I see stars shining.”

“I mean a fixed star. I have Mary.”

“Perhaps I have a fixed star too, Johnnie. Fixed jolly well out of reach. And I’m not built for climbing.”

He indicated his paralysed condition, laughing. The dark man at whom they had looked rose and went out.

“He did not notice either of us,” said Napoleon.

They, too, left the Café Royal.

The Countess Bergalovich had a small suite of rooms at the Grosvenor Hotel. She was playing the weirdest of weird Hungarian melodies when Mr. Napoleon Prince was shown in at lunch-time the next day. When she took her skinny hands from the piano and rose from it to meet her visitor, one saw how old, how shrunk, brown and frail she was. She was dying, and she knew it, and it is probable that the hotel authorities suspected it also, from the uneasy glances they gave her. She was very gracious to Napoleon, and she had ordered an epicurean lunch for him. On the mantelpiece was a photograph of a spruce dark man with an upturned moustache. It

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was a portrait of the dark diner who had been in the Café Royal the night before.

During lunch she waved a skinny hand at it and said:

"My nephew Friedrich gave me his latest photo yesterday afternoon. He came to tea with me. Ah! he is very attentive now, is Friedrich! It is time for him to be attentive. But if he thinks that I don't see through his affection he is very much mistaken. I shall have to leave him something, nevertheless, because he is the last of the line."

She looked at the invalid in the wheel-chair ruminatively.

"You are quite a young man," she said; "it is very sad to see you like this."

"Countess, it often makes me sad."

"You are a very nice young man, too," said she approvingly. "You have shown me the greatest attention since we met a fortnight ago, though you know I am as poor as a rat."

He looked respectfully amused.

"Countess, your income has nothing to do with my regard."

"Nothing left but the sapphires and the castle," she went on, "and they must both come to that wretched Friedrich. He is even afraid to be candid with me. I provoke him all I know, and he dare not be candid for the sake of the Bergalovich sapphires and the castle. But I made him swear over chess yesterday—kept him playing for three hours, and then

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cheated him to beat him, and I heard him swear. I hope he will like my legacies when he gets them. The castle is mortgaged to the last stone, and I've let it to an American millionaire for a rent of twenty thousand a year; but it takes three-quarters of the rent to pay the mortgage."

"I hope I am going to have the pleasure of meeting Lieutenant Heine."

"Oh, you shall have the pleasure, my dear sir, you shall have the pleasure. I suppose you know that he was drummed out of the Austrian Army, although he still calls himself Lieutenant? He is a wretched person, this nephew of mine."

She was a dreary old woman. He had made her acquaintance and followed it up with his customary talent simply and solely by reason of the relationship he had discovered between her and Gerda's Friedrich, though how he was to use the aunt as a stick to beat the nephew with he had yet to decide. Meanwhile he was a charming guest. All through lunch the senile old lady babbled on of family affairs, and of Friedrich. How she hated the last of the Bergalovich line! She said presently:

"I pity the woman he induces to marry him."

"Perhaps he is already married, Countess."

"He is not, Mr. Prince. But his *affaires*, of course, are too numerous to chronicle."

And she laughed, for she was a scandalous old person. When the meal was over and they smoked—she helped herself to one of his Russian cigarettes

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with all the coquettishness in the world—she offered to show him the Bergalovich sapphires.

They proved to be a veritable connoisseur's delight; collar, earrings, and armlets made in the twelfth century. The collar and earrings had been re-set, but the armlets retained their primitive beauty. He admired them much, greatly to her unconcealed delight. In addition to her other characteristics vanity still burned in her. She put them all on, so that he might judge of the effect, and began reminiscences.

He stayed, indulging her, till four o'clock, when her nephew was announced. He came forward, spruce, smart, with the grace of a soldier, to greet her; then saw a pale little invalid man in a wheel-chair, and caught his breath, almost imperceptibly—but not quite. Napoleon was watching for the catch in the breath.

"An old acquaintance of yours, Friedrich," said the Countess Bergalovich.

They bowed to each other. She added: "I have been showing him my sapphires—shortly to be your sapphires, I suppose. Ugh!" She made no concealment of her distaste.

"My dearest aunt, I hope that will not be for a great many years."

"You're a liar!" replied the Countess Bergalovich, collecting the sapphires.

He bowed deprecatingly, spread his hands, and twisted his moustache.

"I am going to take them back to my bedroom

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before those prying waiters come in with tea. I wouldn't have a waiter see my sapphires."

When the tail of her old silk gown had vanished round the door, the Lieutenant turned to the other visitor.

"Sir, we have met before."

"I have had the pleasure, Lieutenant."

"I do not remember anything very reputable about you. Are you after the sapphires this time?"

"I do not understand you, sir," replied Napoleon coldly.

"The only time we met, sir, you handed a lady false notes to the amount of £3,000."

"I think the transaction was pretty level on either side, Lieutenant."

The Austrian was silent.

"I committed absolutely no fraud," Napoleon continued, "but merely reimbursed myself for what had been taken from me by the lady and yourself on a former occasion."

"You were possessed of false notes——"

"I grant that," said the little man with his customary quiet glibness that carried conviction even among his peers, "and if you care to call the police, I can satisfy them as to my possession of the notes." There is no doubt that he would, too. "Will you ring for the police?"

"Impossible," Friedrich muttered, "but I must know your intentions. Are you going to spoil my chances with my aunt?"

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"I have too much regard for the Countess to enlighten her as to her nephew's past."

Friedrich muttered: "Thank you. Then——"

"You are perfectly safe with me," said the little man with contempt. "I promise you I will be silent. I am an Englishman and am reckoned a gentleman. You will find my social references unimpeachable. I have nothing to hide and wish to hide nothing, should you want to satisfy yourself on any score. As for you, I hope you will decide to run a straight course in the future. I am older than you, and I tell you, Heine, there is nothing so well worth doing as keeping straight with the whole world."

His pale fine face expressed much nobility. Friedrich looked both relieved and satisfied, with slight contempt for this missionising stealing, with the relief and satisfaction, over his face.

"I feel sure you intend to be absolutely silent, sir."

"I regard those little episodes of the past," said Napoleon, smiling, "as rather an excellent joke from my point of view. Working that kind of joke serves to amuse a cripple like myself, who can't see as much of the world's fun as he would like to do."

The Countess rustled back.

She had in her hands the case of jewels, a cardboard box, brown paper and red string, and her card-case. Napoleon assimilated these details with his customary absorption of the relevant or irrelevant.

"I am going to mail these to Vienna," she said, "so after all I may as well pack them now, and Fried-

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rich shall send them for me from Victoria on his way back to his Bayswater den presently. You will insure them, Friedrich?"

"Certainly, my dear aunt."

"You must post me the receipt or bring it back to me at once. I am particular about these little things."

"Certainly, my dear aunt."

The old woman laid the cases in the box, slipped a visiting-card in, and put on the lid. "I like doing everything at once," she explained.

"It is the most excellent plan possible," said Napoleon.

She looked at him very graciously.

"When am I to have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Prince? Will you call the day after tomorrow and take me for a walk?"

"Beside my poor chair?"

"Certainly, my dear man." She took one of her cards, made a pencil note on it, "Wednesday, 3.30," with a gold pencil pendant from her old-fashioned watch-chain, and gave it to him. "Now you cannot forget," coquettishly.

"I assure you, Countess, such a reminder is not necessary," but he tucked that card away into a waistcoat pocket.

"You will both have tea with me?" she asked.

"Countess, with many thanks I must leave you. I have an engagement for which I am already late." Mr. Prince left her scowling at her amiable Friedrich.

His admirable man Dapper awaited him in the

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vestibule, whither he was carried down, chair and all, in the lift, saying to himself:

"So you waxed profane over a game of chess, did you, Friedrich? I will make you very profane indeed over other games than chess——"

He sought an hotel in one of the quiet streets off the Strand, and when he had arrived there he sought in the hotel Gerda. She was drinking tea—provided for two—in a corner of the lounge, and when she saw him wheeling towards her, his pale face smiling, she scolded, and said that she had given him up and had drunk nearly all the tea. Nevertheless, she poured him out a cup, and her eyes and her cheeks were livelier at sight of him.

She asked him where he had been spending an afternoon so attractive that he could forget her.

He replied, "I lunched with the Countess Bergalovich, Gerda."

Her hand stopped, arrested, among her tea-things.

"Your husband's aunt?" he asked, helping himself to bread and butter.

"Yes; Friedrich never——"

"Never introduced you?"

"Well, of course not. I was a thief."

"So is he. You are his wife."

"Yes."

"That's the devil of it all," said Napoleon.

"I don't know—what you mean," she murmured.

"Never mind, anyway," said the little man, "let us have a happy half-hour."

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"I cannot help wondering where Friedrich is."

"Do you want him to find you? Do you want him to come back?"

She considered; then: "No, my dear friend," said she.

An astonishing thing happened the next day, in time to be recorded in the evening papers.

The Countess Bergalovich, who had been staying at the Grosvenor Hotel, had altered the terms of her will. The hotel authorities had been asked to provide her—as if she asked to be provided with breakfast—with a lawyer who knew something of Hungarian law. Some hours of search and inquiry produced such an one, and witnesses were easily forthcoming. The old Countess altered her will in a great tremor and shake, and half an hour after died, from heart failure, brought on by excitement.

She left to Mr. Napoleon Prince—brother, as newspaper readers doubtless knew, of Lady Luckweather—the right of choice between her castle at Cracow and the Bergalovich sapphires. Friedrich was to have which was left to him. Her small personal effects all went to her maid.

Mr. Prince hurried to the hotel with all proper dispatch to make the proper inquiries. As a matter of pure personal sentiment he asked to see the body of his late friend. The hotel authorities complied instantly with this. He left her suite of rooms the possessor of a certain postal receipt bearing the num-

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ber 999, which had lain, among other correspondence, on her desk. Her obedient nephew had posted the receipt as ordered the night before. The little man always linked up the chain of a project with infinite care.

Friedrich, who, hurriedly sent for, had attended her affectionately up to the last moment, foamed.

The lawyer who had altered the will took the news to Mr. Napoleon Prince in his Victoria Street flat. When he had gone the invalid sat long thinking over the unexpected turn of events, and when due consideration had been given, he said: "Friedrich, I shall make you very profane over other games than chess."

The Bergalovich sapphires had been sent, heavily insured, to her bankers by the Countess about two hours before she died. Friedrich had posted them for her; they were therefore on their way, by mail, to Vienna. Friedrich was staying at a Bayswater boarding house commensurate with his means; Napoleon was in his Victoria Street flat; Gerda in her hotel off the Strand. Such were the relative positions of the actors of the drama.

Friedrich called upon Napoleon on the morning after his relative's death, cursing bitterly. The little man, while protesting his own surprise at the bequest, and his sympathy with the aggrieved heir, pointed out that, after all, the loss of the sapphires in their old settings mattered little to a single man. Friedrich broke in: "The sapphires, sir! I must ask you

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to have the decency to choose the castle. That mortgaged old hulk is no good to a poor man like me. I could at least sell the sapphires."

The invalid with pensive obstinacy proclaimed his predilection for the sapphires, and his determination to make them his choice.

The Austrian was white with anger.

"You damnable little rogue!" said he.

The little man's eyes flashed.

"Take care, Lieutenant."

The adventurer remembered that he was insulting an Englishman, a gentleman, and one whose social prestige was of some solidity. He backed to the door.

"I swear," said he, with the utmost vindictiveness, "that you shall never own the Bergalovich sapphires."

"If I do *not*, Lieutenant," replied the invalid, "I shall remember those words of yours against you."

Friedrich left.

Napoleon amused himself by studying a postal time-table. He found that the jewels would reach Vienna in the evening of the following day. It was then about eleven o'clock. He rang for Dapper.

"Dapper, we shall start for Southampton at once. We can get a train in half an hour, I believe."

At the station he sent a wire to the skipper of Johnnie Luckweather's little steam yacht, then lying at Southampton:

"Have all ready to start Calais at three to-day; coming down.
—PRINCE."

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He travelled down to Southampton and told the skipper that the yacht was at his disposal for the next few days. He had been a familiar figure on board during the summer, and his word was not questioned. They steamed out of Southampton Water very shortly after three and headed in a south-easterly direction for Calais. Late that night they caught a train for Paris. He kept Dapper with him—they had the compartment to themselves—and talked to him.

"We'll get what sleep we can, Dapper, presently, but it's a case of travelling all to-night and to-morrow to reach Vienna just before the five o'clock parcel post is delivered at the Rieslander Bank."

"Sir?"

"I hope that you will, as usual, be clever enough to understand nothing, Dapper. I am afraid I have to ask you to take a very played-out part, but I am sure you will play it with all the verve and freshness at your command. Dressed as Englishmen dress on the Continent when they are going to travel, and with a travelling rug over your arm, you will run, as Englishmen run when they wish to catch a train, past the Rieslander Bank just as the postman is about to enter. You will knock the postman down. If he has in his hand something which he is about to deliver, a square parcel in brown paper, registered, and tied up with red string, so much the better, you will the more easily obtain it. You will fall over the postman, your rug will fall over his parcels. You will

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pick up your rug, and with it the brown paper package, leaving on the ground a very similar package which we will now proceed to make. You will give the postman a tip and an apology, and run to catch your train. Please hand me down my small bag."

The valet, who had listened with immobility, lifted the bag from the rack. Napoleon unlocked it, and drew thence a cardboard box, brown paper, red string, a visiting card bearing the name of the late Countess Bergalovich, from which the pencilled note had been carefully erased, and a blue pencil such as is used by post office officials to mark a registered packet. He showed the valet, with his frank smile, that the brown paper already bore stamps and registration label, with the circles and bars, post-office towns and dates accurately and carefully thought out. It bore also a white label with the number 999 in large black letters upon it. He placed a new book in the box to give it weight, laid the card within, too, and proceeded to wrap it up, and, when Dapper had tied the string, to seal and blue line it. He indicated the registration label and the post-office marks with some faint enjoyment.

"Not bad," he said, "not bad. The typewriter did most of it last night, but the parcel label is real genuine post office. You remember the packet I took to the post office at Victoria yesterday morning, and then took back, when they had labelled it, remembering I had forgotten to enclose something. The label was steamed off for this. I don't mind showing you

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these little things. I always preach the most minute attention to detail. The registration number is really good. It is done by an excellent memory for detail, a steady hand, though it is only the left, and printers' ink. The size of those letters is, I believe, judged rather well. Observe the label is somewhat defaced by helpful postal markings."

Dapper had listened respectfully.

"I will give you a hundred-pound note to-morrow as a souvenir of your mishap with the postman."

"Thank you very much indeed, sir," replied the valet.

"You are satisfied?"

"Quite, sir."

"No questions?"

"None, sir."

Napoleon drew himself into his corner of the carriage and slept. Dapper slept too. Very early, while the morning was yet grey, they reached Paris, but without stopping to bath or rest, travelled on. They reached Vienna at 4.30.

The postman proceeding down the Ringstrasse, in which the Rieslander Bank is situated, was unaware of the tall Englishman with the fat fair face and a rug thrown over his arm, who loitered after him up the street. Approaching the bank the official sorted a packet or two from his sack, and was about to ascend the steps of the entrance when he was cannoned from behind so violently that he was thrown to the ground

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and his letters scattered. Over him fell the tall Englishman, swearing volubly, and getting as much verve and freshness as possible into his somewhat hackneyed part. His rug fell upon the packets dropped from the postman's hand and from his sack. They struggled together a moment or two, endeavouring to rise, then the Englishman got up and picked up his rug, the postman got up, dusted his red cap on his blue uniform, and picked up his parcels, the Englishman apologised and proffered a tip, the official, all dignity, nevertheless took it; the Englishman hurried on, as he explained to the few spectators who had gathered, to catch a train; the postman proceeded into the bank, delivered there a brown-paper insured parcel tied with red string, and obtained a receipt for it.

Now about twenty minutes later there drove up to the bank an excited little man, with a wheel-chair on the top of his cab. When he had been helped out and placed in the chair by a discreet-looking attendant—none other than Dapper, who had returned with all possible circumlocution—he demanded to see the manager of the Rieslander Bank, although it was now after business hours. His air of urgency and authority granted him the interview, and he was shown in upon a fat man, very pale, sitting in his private room behind the offices. On the table before him were a cardboard box, a book which had perhaps been in it, and a visiting card bearing the name of the late Countess Bergalovich. As the

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wheel-chair entered he rose and looked dazedly at its occupant.

"Sir, do you speak English?" the visitor asked.

The manager bowed. The little man added: "I have come about the Bergalovich sapphires."

The manager started and cried out; then indicated the box and the book; then sat down and cover his face with his hands.

"Sir, I am a ruined man. The Countess mailed the sapphires to me in that box and I have given the post office a receipt for them. And—when I open the box they are not there. The Countess had sent me a letter saying she had mailed them. I am a ruined man."

"The sapphires are my property, and I demand them."

"Sir—sir——?"

"You have had the news of the Countess's death?"

"This morning, in the papers——"

"She left me the option of choice between the sapphires and her castle at Cracow. I chose the sapphires. But they were mailed to you by her nephew, who swore to me yesterday morning that I should never have them."

"The Lieutenant swore that——?"

"He did, sir. Immediately I guessed that no sapphires would reach you, and I rushed over from London to see what you had received."

"Where can they be?"

"I will find out. I will prosecute the villain if he

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does not give me the sapphires. The Countess entrusted him to mail them——”

“And he kept them. But mailed something to cast this aspersion on me. It seems plain as daylight.”

The fat banker paced up and down.

“It is a case for the police at once,” said the indignant little man.

The banker stopped his walk.

“My dear sir; no, no. Let me plead with you to wait. We will write to Lieutenant Heine and see what can be done. But will you not consider the unkindness of this extraordinary will? I have been connected with the family for so long that I must confess my sympathies go out to the young man, blackguard as they say he is, in the matter of the sapphires. He wants them. The castle is so mortgaged that no Bergalovich can ever hope to live there again, but the jewels—the jewels every heir gave to his bride—there was the sting for this young man—if, as we suspect, he has hidden them——”

“There seems no doubt. But I will give publicity to the whole matter unless they are forthcoming.”

“I entreat you, do not speak of it until we have communicated with the Lieutenant.”

“He will deny all knowledge of them and swear that he posted them to you.”

“I fear his record is such that no one would believe him,” replied the banker sadly.

“Am I, then, to be defrauded of my legacy?”

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"Sir, I merely ask you to wait. And to credit this poor young man with a spark of family affection for family heirlooms. They are all he has, after all, to bestow upon the lady he will marry."

The little man hesitated; bit his lip; frowned; might be seen to be doing inward combat with himself. Then he looked up. Abnegation shone in his mobile face.

"By heaven!" he said, "you're right! I shall choose the castle."

The Viennese could not but admire the generosity of the man.

The sapphires were not to be heard of on application to Friedrich. That hapless one, unable to bear the light of publicity with the police of two continents wide awake over his previous exploits, and unable to convince the fierce little crippled Englishman of his ignorance in the matter, vanished from the Bayswater boarding-house. But a dry old brown merchant in the Bagdad bazaar might, under torture, have admitted certain facts with regard to the Bergalovich jewels. It was not the first link in his connection with our Napoleon.

That little man went to have tea with Gerda Muswell in her hotel off the Strand.

He said to her, "How would you like, one day, to be mistress of an Austrian castle?"

She started and said, "You remind me of Friedrich. His aunt, who died, had a castle——"

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"At Cracow. It is now mine."

"Yours? Did you buy it?"

He had a fairy tale for her. He had elected her a star, and there are things one hides from the light of the stars.

Chapter XII

The Last Game

NAPOLEON put down the paper from which he had been reading an extract aloud, and seemed to invite Gerda's comment. She remarked:

"We are not the only clever people in the world, Napoleon, my dear."

The paralytic in the wheel-chair received this pensively.

"The whole collection of scarabei has disappeared, Gerda. Assuredly, we are not the only clever people in the world."

"Has Professor Munro called Scotland Yard to his assistance?"

"No doubt he has. Poor, poor Professor! The collection of a lifetime! Did you read of the theft of the St. Lewis pearls, too, a week ago?"

The charming woman nodded, becoming thoughtful.

"And of the disappearance of Lord Abercare's two Turners a month ago? Cut clean out of their frames?"

"I think I noticed it in the papers, Napoleon."

"I find these three items of news especially interesting, Gerda."

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"Tell me why."

"Merely because of the coincidence in the fact that each of the victims suffered from paralysis—Munro from threatening symptoms in his left leg; the Duke of St. Lewis from a slight facial distortion; Abercare from his left arm. Queer?"

"Coincidences have merely a kind of childish interest."

He smiled. "Wait a moment. Three people suffering from paralysis in some degree or other were all robbed within a few weeks of one another. The coincidence occurs further; each of the three has now recovered from his infirmity. Understand, Gerda, that I present these facts to you with entire detachment. I do not assume their relevance. They have, of course, no relevance."

"Since you say so—— How were these three cured?"

"By the wonderful person who has come to this country from Germany, and by means of unguents of his own, and an electric machine, professes to work miracles. His name is Kairi."

"Are you thinking of trying him yourself?"

He nodded thoughtfully. "I should like to be a whole man again."

"You believe in magicians?"

He looked at her with diamond lights in his eyes: "Gerda, I am itching for a game."

She started forward: "Nap——"

"No questions there's a dear woman."

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"Only this one. If there's a game, may I play?"

"Not this time."

"Do you remember our compact? I'm a pardner. You have paid me a salary of £50 per month for a year, and I've never yet helped you in anything."

"Our bargain was that I should have your help when I wanted it."

"And don't you want me?"

"Let us waive that point," said he after a long pause, during which he looked away, and tapped the fingers of his left hand on his chair arm. "You are doing exactly what I would have you do. Women are made to be good and sweet and comfortable and to possess homes."

When these strange things had fallen from him, he stopped, smiled, and added:

"You're quite happy?"

"Very happy. Only I fee. that——"

"You are doing your part all right," said he brusquely.

She rose, collecting gloves and sunshade, and stood drawing on the gloves.

"Ever hear of your husband, Gerda?" he asked.

"He wrote to me a month ago for help."

"And?"

"I sent him £50—of your money."

"He left you, absolutely destitute, for the most vulgar little dancer who ever trod boards."

"He is my husband."

"If he came to you, would you receive him again?"

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He watched her face.

"Probably. It's difficult to explain—there are many inexplicable things a woman will do for her husband——"

"Even if she no longer loves him?"

"Yes."

"I never professed to understand women," said Napoleon, smiling somewhat laboriously.

She said good-bye—a good-bye over which both lingered, probably unconsciously—and he rang for his servant to show her out. When the door closed behind her, in her slim muslin frock and cunning Paris hat, he gritted:

"Curse him! Curse him! Curse him!"

It was a very hot day. He picked up the paper again and read once more of the disappearance of Professor Munro's scarabei. Then rang for the servant again.

"Dapper, writing things. And there will be a letter to post in five minutes."

The sleek valet did as required, and waited for the letter, which was written neatly and legibly by Napoleon's left hand. He was told to take it himself to a Regent Street address. When he had gone the little man, alone in his flat, wheeled his chair to the windows and looked out on the afternoon bustle of Victoria Street. He had diamond lights in his eyes and his fingers tapped the chair arm, but his large pale face was serious and serene as ever. He may have been thinking of Gerda, of the vanished scarabei, the

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St. Lewis pearls, the two Turners, or the Kairi, worker of miracles. After a while the lights in his eyes went out, and he said to himself: "Supposing I was made whole again—Lord! It would be difficult then! When one is only half a man one can accept circumstances, but——"

We may assume that he was busy, then, with the racking problem of Gerda and himself.

The following morning, at ten o'clock, he wheeled up Regent Street, with Dapper behind the chair.

Ushered to a handsome suite of rooms over one of the most exclusive tailors' shops in London, he found awaiting him a gentleman most suave, bland and well-liking, but yet, through his smugly prosperous exterior, with the vague impression of mysticism and further sight that emanates from children of the East. He was a Europeanised Egyptian. He wore grey clothes, socks and tie matching to a shade, and patent slippers, and he spoke very perfect English. He was standing by the window with his hands in his trouser pockets as the paralytic entered, and he had the slack easy slouch, half graceful, half lazy, that speaks of Oxford. He turned round quickly, came forward, and gave an adequate greeting. The visitor judged him to be very little over thirty. Brief sympathetic examination made, and the helpless right side tested, Kairi asked:

"How long have you been like this, Mr. Prince?"

"Nearly five years."

"Was it an accident, or constitutional?"

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"An accident I had in Japan." He described it, Kairi listening, smiling and nodding, all sympathetically, but with a kind of deliberate reflectiveness. He eyed the invalid consideringly.

Napoleon asked: "Will you undertake my case?"

"I don't know," the Egyptian replied.

"Good God, man!" said Napoleon, "you *must* undertake it."

The Egyptian smiled. "That is what they all say. I *must*."

The little man looked at him quietly. "Well, sir, by all the recognised canons of decency and humanity, you must."

The miracle-worker sat by his desk in a swing chair, balancing a paper knife on one olive forefinger. The sun came into the room and glanced on his crisp curling hair and white teeth. Napoleon looked at him, saying to himself:

"You're no quack; you're no ordinary sensation monger."

"You cured Munro, the Duke of St. Lewis, and Lord Abercare," he stated aloud.

The Egyptian confirmed this by a smile. "You know any or all of these gentlemen, Mr. Prince?"

"None of them. I was, of course, personally interested in their cases. You stayed at their houses, I suppose, to treat them?"

"Yes. I was with Professor Munro for a week in his Dorset home; at St. Lewis for a few days; at

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Abercare for a few days also. My treatment was wholly successful, I am glad to say."

"Were you at any of these places at the time of those extraordinary robberies?"

Kairi looked up with another of his well-bred smiles. "I was at the Professor's. I heard about the other losses after I had left St. Lewis and Abercare. Strange that your police can neither trace anything nor form any theory!"

"I think it is probable that they have their theories. But I did not come to talk about other people's property, I came to beg you to undertake my case. If you were in my condition you would pay any price to be made whole again."

"Any price?" said Kairi, looking up. "You talk as if——"

"I am a rich man," said Napoleon quietly; "you shall have any fee you care to ask."

"That is business," said Kairi.

"Your business—my life," said Napoleon with a slight laugh. "I have never met a doctor who was so openly and honestly callous."

"I am not a doctor."

"Oxford man?"

"Magdalen."

Napoleon nodded. "But tell me," he asked, "Haven't you studied medicine?"

"No," replied Kairi.

"Then——?"

"You are going to ask how I dare promise to cure

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infirmities which the whole medical profession cannot relieve. Since you are the last cure that I shall undertake——”

“You *will* undertake me then?” Despite his scoffing philosophy, his acquired resignation, he trembled like a child who has been locked in a dark room and hears the hands of release at the door.

“If the fee is big enough. Since, I say, as—in the case of the fee being big enough—you will be the last cure I shall make, I will tell you why I don’t give my ‘discovery’ to the world, don’t set up hospital for paralytics, don’t hand my knowledge down to posterity. The reasons are all simple. I have made no discovery. If I set up hospital to benefit the public I should have no panacea to offer the public. I can hand no knowledge down to posterity because I have none.”

“You are frank.”

“It will not harm me to be frank now, and it amuses me to interest you with a few particulars. See here.”

From a pigeon-hole in the desk he drew out a small horn pot about four inches deep. When the lid was lifted, a brownish ointment with a strong, rank smell was disclosed. “There it is,” said Kairi, showing it.

“It?”

“Your cure. You see there is only a little left. It is all I have, and all I ever shall have. That is why your fee will be big, and why I am careless now about giving away my secret. Do you know, hundreds of

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people who could not afford to pay me a guinea have besieged me for help, and I have refused it because of my limited supply? Professor Munro, the Duke of St. Lewis, and Lord Abercare each paid heavily."

"I have no doubt that they each paid very heavily."

Kairi's gaze caught his for a few moments, but there appeared to be nothing behind the words. He went on:

"I know nothing of the properties of the ointment, and I do not believe any analyst could report on them with reliance either. But if you will come to my terms, and decide to benefit by this," he tapped the horn pot, "I will give you the story of how it came into my possession."

"What are your terms?" said Napoleon, adding, "Not that it matters."

"Five thousand pounds if cured," replied the Egyptian.

"Done," said the little man, holding out his left hand.

The Egyptian shook it, laughing.

"How soon shall I be cured?"

"In three days if you can stand torment like hell-fire. The Professor's case took longer, but then he flinched. You will, of course, feel nothing at first, but when your side begins to wake you will suffer. We could spread the cure out over three months, when it would be far more gentle, only——"

He paused, looking thoughtfully into the horn pot; then resumed:

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"Only I am leaving England within the next week if possible. I should have gone before, but that I waited hoping for another wealthy patient. It seemed a pity to waste this."

"Give me the three days' cure," Napoleon panted. Then he calmed himself and said, "Oh! What a fool I am!"

"No, no," said the Egyptian, "I understand it all. Will you have the first treatment this morning here? The pain will not begin till the end of the second day. At least, that is what my experience has taught me. You must come and undress in my room."

"My man is waiting outside."

"If you would rather have your own man——"

Dapper was rung for. Ten minutes later, when the little man was lying on a couch in the adjoining room being smeared with the brown ointment, Kairi, enveloped in a white apron and rubber gloves, told how the treasure had come into his possession. There was no reason whatever to suppose the tale to be false.

"As you say, I am an Oxford man. My parents live in Cairo. My father is a merchant there, of very high reputation, and he conceived the idea of giving me a really good English education—not a commercial, but a gentleman's education, by which, I suppose, one understands the learning of social and caste traditions—such as would be of a good deal of benefit to me when travelling on his business in three continents. 'Go and learn the ways of English aristocrats,' he

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said to me; 'I can teach you your business afterwards.' When I went home again, four years ago, I travelled in America, Asia, and Europe. But it was at home, travelling through Masr and Bahri, that I met with the adventure in which I obtained this ointment. I had been to Siwah and Thebes, and was intending to show our merchandise to the *fellahin* round about. I was with two servants and four mules, the fourth of which carried baggage. The baggage mule was a very valuable animal, and the samples she carried were too valuable to lose, too.

"One night we lost her, and in the morning separated in search. It was feasible that she had gone back to Thebes, where she had been recently stabled, or to water, which was six miles off, for we had camped on the road away from the villages. The servants rode, one to Thebes, and one to the water, and I, seeing hoofmarks which might be hers, followed them west into the desert. Storms came on and I was lost. I had some food and a little water in my bottle, but after I had shared them with my mule there was nothing else for her, and I left her dying three days after we had separated from my father's servants.

"Where I wandered I don't know, but I was found by a strange tribe, and taken to the extreme west of the desert. What they were I do not know, but I think they were a branch broken from the Copts and they called themselves Aka. They kept me with the caravanserai; they were half-brigands. I pre-

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tended I was delirious most of the time, so that when they asked me for my name I could not divulge it, and they could not send home to make my father pay ransom. It was while I was with them that I saw them cure one of their old women of paralysis with ointment out of this very pot. Well, I have, I suppose, European enterprise with Egyptian brains, and I stole the pot, escaped somehow one night on one of their camels—a white racer—and came without any guidance to a town. It was El Fasher, which is on the old caravan route from Wadai to Egypt, as I dare say you know. I sold the camel, and came to England, with this enterprise in my head: of curing rich men of their infirmities. I knew of Munro, St. Lewis, and Abercare in my Oxford days, and I approached them first. ‘No cure; no pay.’ I cured; they paid.”

All the while he smeared the listener with ointment, kneading it well in with his rubber gloves.

“You must not touch it with bare skin,” he said, “you observe the precaution of my gloves. The Aka rubbed it into the woman, taking turns to massage, until she was well, but I use an electric machine for the massage. It seems *de rigueur*; people always pay a certain respect to electricity. I repeat that I do not know the properties of the ointment, and neither would any analyst know; therefore my exclusive use of it is justifiable.” He produced now a small electric machine provided with circular pads, which he applied, up and down,

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to the whole length of Napoleon's right side. The operations were not over till nearly two o'clock, when the patient Dapper was called in from the adjoining room to dress his master.

"You will come again to-morrow?" said Kairi

"I will come again to-morrow. Will you lunch with me?"

The Egyptian thanked him. "But I do not leave these rooms," said he.

The little man went away smiling.

He spent most of the afternoon, after lunch, in taking tea with Gerda Muswell at her hotel. She looked pale, harassed and distraught, and his observant eyes noted each small sign of distress; the tremor of her hands with the teacups; her twitching eyebrows; tardy smiles. Presently he said: "Gerda, you must allow me a question."

She emanated caution and defiance, but he pressed on.

"Is this Friedrich of yours worrying you to take him back?"

"He is ill," she replied slowly, "and in hiding."

"Where?"

"Must I tell you?"

"No," he replied softly, "no, no."

Chaos reigned in his mind, though, and rage in his heart when he left her to proceed home, to the Victoria Street flat. But he had an absorbing task in the evening to occupy his energies, so that chaos was reduced to something like accustomed order,

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and rage simmered down. The task seemed to be in drawing on two sheets of drawing-paper the plans of two furnished rooms. Completed, the plans bore accurate likeness to Kairi's two Regent Street rooms in which the invalid had spent the morning. The rounds, squares and strokes representing articles of furniture were each labelled, thus: "sideboard," "chair," "table," "desk," "bed," "couch," "cabin trunk," and so on. The absolute accuracy of his observation was marvellous.

Over these plans he passed two hours, and seemed as pleasantly entertained as an intelligent child with puzzles. He murmured aloud to himself now and again, as his habit was when alone, and it seemed that he was pitting against each other comparative theories regarding the different articles of furniture. Whether he came to any conclusions or was any nearer to solving his puzzles than when he began could not have been gathered by an observer, however close, from his serene pale face when at length he put the sheets of paper away, and, wheeling into his bedroom, rang for Dapper to undress him. Later, in the darkness, he did not need the plans to keep the Regent Street rooms in his brain. They were there, clear and precise. It is to be supposed that he continued his puzzles thus. And again the accuracy of his memory was marvellous.

In the morning, waking early, the first thing he did was to stretch out his left hand to the bedside table, find the sheets of drawing-paper, and add to

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the inventory of the sitting-room sketched on one of them: "Fireplace with ferns."

There was a tiled hearth in Kairi's sitting-room banked with pot-plants.

As he was helped into his bath by the valet, later on, he was aware of a pricking sensation down his right side, very slight, but augur of glorious hope. He was stained a deep purplish colour by the ointment. Almost holding his breath, he enjoyed to the full that slight sensation.

"Dapper," said he, "I think I feel; pinch me—prick me—test me."

The valet heard the sob in his voice and complied. "No," said the little man, an iota of his joy, as it were, dying, "I can't feel that. But somewhere down under my skin I am dead sure there was life." He could take no breakfast but a very strong cup of coffee after that.

He wheeled out into a beautiful world; only Victoria Street on a July morning, but it might have been the pathway to Paradise. And it was, for down that street he wheeled, bent for Kairi's rooms. He went by way of the Birdcage Walk, wanting to see young live things growing about him, past Buckingham Palace into the Green Park, and, emerging into Piccadilly, cut through Air Street to Regent Street, propelling his chair so fast that the stout valet was painfully heated by the journey's end. It was half-past ten, and the Egyptian healer ready to receive his patient.

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He made a sort of perfunctory examination. "Though," said he, "I can only treat you as a layman and not a professional. It is of no use pretending to put technical questions, and to understand the progress of your case. I understand nothing, but just place blind belief in this extraordinary ointment and my little massage machine. Come through into my bedroom."

Stretched on the bed, Napoleon went through the same process as the day before. The Egyptian, sitting sideways on the bed, white aproned and rubber gloved, kneaded the ointment into him for upwards of an hour, and then applied the little electric machine. The operations did not impede conversation.

"So you are leaving England to rejoin your parents?" said the patient.

Kairi smiled with a flash of teeth like ivory. "As soon as you have finished with me, my dear Mr. Prince."

"That means as soon as affairs are settled between us. The cheque for five thousand is yours as soon as I can write it with my right hand."

"It will take another day or two perhaps, but you will be cured," said the Egyptian positively.

"You seem very sure."

"I have seen the ointment used four times, and always with rapid and sure effect. If you are not cured I cannot tell you why not; and if you are, I cannot tell you why, either."

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The little machine purred on, the circular pads revolving up and down the brown anointed body. Slowly the faint pricking reasserted itself; at first a mere discomfort, increasing to a tingling more acute; this became a slight sore, nervous agony, when a gasp of joy escaped him, and Kairi, smiling with an ivory flash, cried: "Ah—h—h! So?"

"Get on!" said the little man, transported with joy, "Get on! You're hurting me like the deuce! Get on!" The machine purred up and down, and he took two or three deep breaths, and the muscles in his right side rippled faintly under the skin. He lay with closed eyes, and felt life, in agonies, flowing slowly back into his side, still dazed with its sleep of years. The pain grew, and he hailed and revelled in it. When Kairi pressed fingers into his leg he could feel that too. This was ecstasy, and while he lay there, very still except for long quivers, his mind turned away from this fierce astonishing bliss into its accustomed channel of mischief. "The last game!" he said within himself while the olive Egyptian, beaded with sweat, worked on, "The last game! So let it be a good 'un. I won't play another. It shall be the very last. I'll turn good." The plans on the sheets of drawing-paper came to his brain, floating to the rhythmic whirring of the electric machine. "Table—sideboard—desk—chair—fireplace with ferns——"

He worked his puzzle for some twenty minutes, when Kairi asked, "What do you feel?"

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"Very little as yet," he replied.

But he felt the rubber gloved fingers pinching the flesh of his right thigh. "Feel that?"

"No," he replied regretfully.

"But you have a different texture," said Kairi, slapping and pounding. "You are more like Munro, and St. Lewis and Abercare were after I had given them two or three treatments. Is the pain very bad?"

It was exquisite; intense.

"Very slight," he replied, "I shall have to pay you some more visits yet. To-morrow morning? At nine?"

"I shall not be up till 10.30, and that is earlier than I usually treat patients." The involuntary professionalism made both laugh. "At 10.30, then," the little man agreed.

"I will give you another hour now," said the Egyptian pulling off a stained glove to wipe the trickles of sweat from his forehead; "then another visit should be the last."

So he lay for another hour in this beautiful agony, his brain thrilling, his heart light, and afterwards Dapper was called in to dress him. Endeavouring to lift the right hand at Kairi's request, he announced himself still perfectly helpless. He cast one long glance round the room as, in his wheel-chair, he prepared to leave it. "It is a pleasant room," he explained the glance, "but, I should think, very noisy at night."

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He propelled himself through into the adjoining sitting-room. There the eye was met by a fireplace with ferns, which he stopped to admire. "Your own ferns?" to Kairi.

"They are nothing," said the Egyptian, "nothing."

The little man came to a stop before them.

"They are very fine specimens. I am interested because I am buying some now for the fernery of my sister, Lady Luckweather, at Luckweather. May I look closely at the front row? The ones in the grate I don't care for so much."

There he sat with his left hand outstretched, very evidently expecting the pots to be lifted from the tiles and placed upon his knee for examination. The Egyptian smiled politely, stooped, lifted the ferns one by one and displayed them. The little man's gaze, bright and intense, was not on Kairi as he stooped, nor on the fern-pots, but on the tiles one by one as the weight was lifted from them. It was the third tile which gratified him—he having admired preceding plants immensely—by shifting very slightly as the pot was moved. The tile was loose. The fourth and fifth tiles he judged to be loose too, in the infinitesimal fraction of a minute vouchsafed to him to gaze. He had a great deal to say on the subject of ferns though. After which he took his leave and wheeled out into Regent Street, Dapper beside him.

"It is two-thirty, sir," the valet reminded him, "and you have not lunched. Will you stop at the Criterion?"

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Napoleon turned to him a face somewhat wrung by endurance, but set in its usual determination.

"Dapper, we'll go home. Thank Heaven, I'm suffering the most infernal pain I've felt for years."

"Sir, is it worse since we left Mr. Kairi?"

Napoleon lifted his right hand from the chair arm with the thrilled pride a mother shows in the infant who has just learned to walk.

"It is exactly the same as when we left Mr. Kairi, Dapper. And look at that! My God! Dapper, look at that!"

He propelled himself home, using both hands, his side burning, as Kairi had prophesied, with the torments of hell-fire, and the sleek valet hurrying beside him. His lunch was served as soon as he arrived home, but if his pain had allowed him to eat the ecstasy would have forbade it. As soon as the valet had snatched a quick meal, he was required to support his master in a slow passage up and down the dining-room. For some while the right leg was still inert, though the anguish grew every minute more poignant, but when the promenade had lasted some three-quarters of an hour, with an exclamation of triumph he dragged his right leg slowly, still without lifting it, some inches over the carpet. "Dapper, I could move my foot—did you see the step I made——?"

The valet wiped his face, and they resumed the walk. Half an hour more saw the right foot being used more freely, an hour, and he was sitting down

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in unaccustomed seats, crossing his knees—the right over the left—with great pleasure in renewed strength, and lifting a book from the shelf near him with his erstwhile dead hand.

“I’ll read, and have tea, Dapper.”

The servant left him, having taken the amazing revelation of the cure as unemotionally as he had been drilled to receive any facts about his master. But when he was alone the little man did not read; he put the book down, sunk his face into his hands, and his eyes rubbed wet against his palms. He said to himself:

“So I am whole? So I am whole? Lord! it will be difficult now! When one is only half a man one can accept circumstances, but——”

Again we may assume that he was racked with the problem of Gerda and himself.

Over his tea-drinking the exhilaration of the game stirred him again. The last game, for “I’ll turn good,” he reminded himself. “I’ll turn good.” He smelt the spice in it, for he knew that a combination of the cleverest heads at Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police were quietly busy over certain losses of (1) a collection of Egyptian scarabei; (2) the St. Lewis pearls; (3) the two Abercare Turners. And as regards the plans of those Regent Street rooms made yesterday after his first visit, the fireplace with ferns was apparently the most interesting study there. The first haphazard conjecture had been good. If he could not sleep much that night

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owing to the rapturous tortures in his side, he was very enjoyably entertained planning to-morrow morning's little comedy.

He rang for Dapper at seven-thirty, and when the valet, surprised at the earliness of the summons, entered his bedroom, he rose unaided from bed, and stood proudly on both feet, a triumphant figure in blue pyjamas. "Dapper, behold!"

"It's a miracle, sir," replied the valet in tones of congratulation.

"Ah!" He rubbed a hand on his side, enjoying the soreness of the skin. "I'll bath now, and breakfast at eight. We shall be at Mr. Kairi's rooms at nine."

"Do you remember that Mr. Kairi will not be up till 10.30 to receive patients, sir? You told me so yourself."

The little man had the diamond lights in his eyes. He was as full of pure joyful mischief as a man can be.

"Never mind, Dapper. We will surprise Mr. Kairi in bed. I shall go in the chair as before, and then walk out of it to astonish him."

His simple delight at the plot was the most ingenuous thing in the world. The servant prepared the bath, and went to the kitchen to order breakfast sharp at eight. At nine they were, as Napoleon had said they would be, at Kairi's rooms, the meal having been an affair of ten minutes. He wheeled there in his invalid chair. They heard that Mr. Kairi was

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breakfasting in bed, and would not leave his room till 10.30. The maid asked, however, if she should announce the visitor. Laughingly negating this, he gave her an impression of some effected prearrangement. When he had been carried up, chair and all, in a lift, she showed him, therefore, into Kairi's sitting-room, and as she shut the door had a glimpse of his wheeling gaily towards the bedroom, which opened into the sitting-room, as if quite intimate enough with Mr. Kairi to call him unceremoniously and personally from his bed. When the door had closed behind her, however, the chair stopped and came back, on its noiseless tyres, and he beckoned Dapper close to him. Very little sound had been made on entry, no more, in fact, than might be attributed by anyone in the adjoining room to a servant performing her matutinal duties therein. The little man spoke in a whisper to Dapper: "Wait for me in the corridor."

The valet went out.

Napoleon stepped from his chair and approached the hearth. The risk of Kairi's appearance at any moment was the risk he loved; it filled him like wine. He knelt down, lifted the pots cautiously, and found the loose tiles. There were four of them; and in the cavity beneath lay the St. Lewis pearls coiled round into a wonderfully small space, like a milky snake, a chamois bag containing lumps which must be the scarabei, and the two canvases, each about one foot by two, tightly rolled. The cavity had been

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scooped out to receive this booty. In a moment he had lifted out the pearls, the bag, the canvases, and placed them in the recess shown by the sliding back of the panel in front of his invalid chair, just under the seat. The panel replaced, his task was to fit the tiles again above the hole. One cannot lay tiles on thin air; his glance raked the room, found bookshelves filled with books obviously belonging, like the furniture, to the proprietors, to be let to any lodger indiscriminately of his literary tastes. He selected a few thin volumes, laid a foundation of them, and the tiles fitted in neatly on top. All this without so much as a glance at the closed bedroom door. The tinkle of breakfast things came faintly to his ear. Then he returned to the chair, seated himself in it, drew his thin summer rug over his knees, wheeled to the door, smote upon it, and cried: "Dr. Kairi, Dr. Kairi, your patient awaits you!"

How he smiled to himself at the exclamation, the breaking of china, the thud of feet upon the floor from within! Kairi flung open the door, and appeared, dragging on a dressing gown over his pyjamas. His face cried anathemas; then "You, Mr. Prince!" said he, all polite snarl, "so early!"

"I—so early!"

The patient was extremely blithe.

"I thought we said 10.30."

"We said 10.30. But I could not wait any longer to reveal a miracle to you. Behold!" He threw aside the rug, stepped out, and paced the room,

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swinging his right arm vigorously. There was a halt in his walk, but he moved briskly and freely.

"I congratulate you, sir!" said the smooth Egyptian. His glance had darted to the fireplace with the ferns, and returned to the ingenuous delight, the open simplicity, the glowing triumph of the little man's face.

"Shake hands!" cried Napoleon.

They shook hands. Kairi closed his bedroom door and came forward. Napoleon shook with inward laughter. The Egyptian, then, would not leave a stranger alone in that secret treasure-house. The thought was ironic. "Go back and dress," said he, unable to resist the provocation, "and I will wait in here."

"I will not leave a visitor," said the suave Egyptian, "if he will excuse my garments."

"Am I to have another treatment to-day?"

"If you wish," Kairi answered, "but it hardly seems necessary."

"I think I should like it, to make sure." The braggadocio of remaining here amused him. "But first——"

He drew a cheque book and fountain pen from his breast pocket and wrote out a cheque for £5,000.

"With my everlasting gratitude," said he, handing it to the miracle worker.

Kairi's eyes gleamed; he smiled with a flash of ivory; thanked his patient. "You would like an-

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other treatment now, at once? There's just enough ointment left for one more application."

"You want to make yourself scarce at the earliest possible moment, friend," said the little man within himself. Aloud he replied gaily: "At once, if you will; if it is not inconveniencing you; if you will forgive this early visit of mine. You can understand I am in a tremendous hurry to go and show all my friends. If you are quick there is even time to collect a little lunch-party—a celebration." He laughed. "Will you join it?"

The Egyptian pleaded other plans.

They retired to the bedroom, although it was in the disorder of the night, and Napoleon lay on a couch while Kairi massaged in the ointment with rubber-gloved hands. How the hands worked, as if impatient of the delay of all this since the fee had been earned and paid! While under treatment Napoleon chatted. He begged Kairi to join that little celebration presently; to meet the friends who would rejoice; to hear himself toasted—— The Egyptian persisted with suave excuses.

And while he rubbed, and Napoleon talked, came a sound of feet and low voices in the corridor outside; the sitting-room door opened, and the proprietor, shocked, angry, and vehemently assertive, entered with two plain-clothes men behind him. The bedroom door was open and the little man, from the couch, could see through, past Kairi. The drama of the moment filled him with intense

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satisfaction; it was what he would have chosen for a good curtain; in spite of the sudden unexpectedness of it, he gripped and thrilled to the situation in a moment.

"Look!" said he dramatically, with a gesture to the open door. Kairi looked, leapt up, and stood with his jaw dropping, his rubber gloves clenched, and primitive ferocity in his olive face. The police walked in, and took in the situation at a glance: the miracle worker treating a patient. One of them, advancing, laid his hand on Kairi. "I have to arrest you for being concerned in the theft of Professor Munro's scarabei on —, of the Duke of St. Lewis's pearls on —, and of Lord Abercare's pictures on —."

"It is false," said the Egyptian. He looked nobody in the face, but repeated: "It is false!"

The patient sat up and thundered fury. "False! I should think it is false! An abominable outrage——"

"Who are you, sir?" said an officer crisply and quietly.

"My name is Prince, of 110A Victoria Street Mansions, and this gentleman has just cured me in a most marvellous fashion of paralysis. I have been a cripple for five years, and he has cured me. I owe him everlasting gratitude; I——"

"How long have you known him, sir?"

"Three days," replied the indignant patient, "and I would vouch for his impeccability as I would for

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my own. He is a marvel—a wonder. By what authority do you come here and insult him?"

"I need not repeat the charge, sir."

"It is preposterous!" cried Napoleon. "My poor dear friend," to Kairi, "my poor, poor dear friend! And what course do you propose to take, officer?"

"I must regretfully place Mr. Kairi under arrest, and submit these rooms to a thorough search——"

"I will stake my last farthing on it that you will find nothing indicative of guilt. Nothing!"

"And if the search is fruitless, Mr. Kairi will be released, sir."

"He will, of course, be released, officer, with a handsome apology. I shall make it my business to see to the apology."

This patient was obviously a very fiery little man, and he had the air of haughty authority of one accustomed to rule. The air advised respect.

"There is nothing hidden here," said Kairi frantically, "nothing."

"I will find bail to any amount," said the grateful Napoleon. "Call upon me, my dear Dr. Kairi, for any little help I can give. My all is at your service."

The police looked at him as if his simplicity needed their respectful protection. The proprietor burst out into indignation directed against anyone.

"You must come with us," said one of the officers to the appalled Egyptian; "we will get a cab to the door, and," he looked at the angry little man pulling on his coat and waistcoat, "trust us to conduct

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things as quietly as possible. I understand you, sir, to say that bail to any amount——”

“Is forthcoming,” replied Napoleon promptly.

“You have no doubt paid Dr. Kairi a heavy fee, sir?”

“My cheque for £5,000 lies on his dressing-table. I wish it were double.”

They looked at him very protectively.

“Call my valet in,” he said to the proprietor.

“I am very much upset—very angry indeed——”

He took Kairi’s hand, and pressed it with almost affection. “Have no fear,” he said, “you will soon be out of this absurd and painful position. I would vouch for you as for my brother. I know they will find nothing, and since only by circumstantial evidence can they prove their confounded ‘case,’ you will be free again directly. They may search your rooms from floor to ceiling, pull up the damn planks and tiles, and they will find nothing. *I* am confident in you. They will find nothing.”

And so he, Dapper, and his chair passed down into the street, and after their exit the police took the Egyptian away in a cab. Incidentally it might be here mentioned that the police found nothing but a few books placed beneath loose hearth tiles as an amateur way of levelling them, which fact no one could account for; that Mr. Kairi, as puzzled as the police, was released, and fled back to the merchant at Cairo a sadder but no wiser man; that the scarabei, the pearls, and the Turners were never recovered

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by their former owners, though a dry old person in the Bagdad bazaar knew something of them all a fortnight or so later. All this, I say, and more, might be related, but that we are concerned with our Napoleon, whom we left wheeling out into Regent Street with his imperturbable servant beside him.

Arrived at the corner of the street he left the chair, ordering Dapper to take it home, and saying blithely that it must be preserved in memory of miracles. He himself took a taxicab and drove to Mrs. Muswell's hotel. But behold, as he stepped out, wanting to bear her away somewhere, anywhere, for a long drive that should end in lunch, she emerged hurriedly from the hotel, passed him without noting his new identity, and drove away swiftly in another taxicab.

He followed her. The chase went on and on, and he guessed that she was going to visit her sick Friedrich. The morning sun lost some of his brightness at the thought, and he said "Damn him!" as they sped on. The chase ended in a squalid street of Islington. He saw her hurriedly enter a grimy tenement of the lodging-house persuasion, and he followed her in, at a prudent distance, up flights of dirty stairs. She hurried on, pantingly, not waiting to rest or look round, until she stopped at a door high up, pushed it open, and went in. The pursuer heard a faint hoarse cluck of "Gerda!"

Her feet pattered across the floor and her voice said, "I'm here! How are you, Friedrich?"

THE LAST GAME

"Good old girl!" he clucked hoarsely. Napoleon went softly in and stood just within the door. She kneeled by a bed, and on that bed lay the ex-Lieutenant of the Austrian army, grimy, gaunt, unshaved, his cruelty and his insouciance crushed out like flames under a heavy hand, all his soldier's glad insolence gone, and the blindness of death over his eyes like a film. He had to grope for her face and her lips, and if the lips were cold to him—though still pitiful because of all the things he had meant to her, as a husband to the wife—he could hardly savour it. The hideous room showed traces of her daily care, and she had brought delicacies in a parcel, but delicacies were so much dust to him now.

"I—am—going," he moaned to her.

"My poor Friedrich!" said the woman, terrified of death. Because of her woman's terror and her loneliness here the man by the door must let her know of his presence. He made the slightest sound. She looked over her shoulder, and saw, and the relief was so great that he thought she might faint, but she signed to him to keep back, and he knew that she was trying to render her duty to Friedrich, as women will to the husbands who have possessed them. She showed no surprise in seeing Napoleon stand unaided, no curiosity as to his presence. He was there, for her relief. She kneeled down by Friedrich with his heavy head lolling in her arms.

"Gerda," he clucked, "kiss—me——"

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She did not so much as glance at Napoleon before complying.

"Good-bye," whispered the Austrian, "good-bye—my—good—Gerda. Good-bye——"

His soul went out at her kiss. All was grey. She laid him down and staggered up. She waited during a long silence to see if he would move again—needed her more. She heard by the door the slightest sound. She turned, from the dead, and walked straight into Napoleon's arms, which had never been open to her till now.

