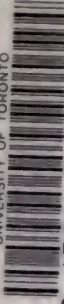


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THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

NOVELS BY
FRANCIS BEEDING

The Hidden Kingdom
The Six Proud Walkers
The House of Dr. Edwardes
The Seven Sleepers



HODDER AND
STOUGHTON
LTD., LONDON



THE
HIDDEN KINGDOM

BY
FRANCIS BEEDING



HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. I DISREGARD MY UNCLE JAMES	7
II. I ENTER THE RING	26
III. I TAKE A LESSON IN SPELLING	45
IV. I AM MURDERED BY PROXY	54
V. I DISAPPOINT A LADY	64
VI. I MIND MY OWN BUSINESS	76
VII. I WALK INTO THE PARLOUR	87
VIII. I FAIL TO BE CONVINCING	102
IX. I WITNESS A CONTRACT	120
X. I HEAR OF A FACE AT THE WINDOW	137
XI. I AM ABOUT TO RECEIVE A SHOCK	151
XII. I AM TAUNTED WITH THE LICENSE OF INK	163
XIII. I READ THE MISSING PAGE	175
XIV. I ENTER THE FORBIDDEN LAND	198
XV. I MOUNT AN UNEASY THRONE	215
XVI. I AM ASKED FOR A SIGN	228
XVII. I DISPLAY THE RED TRIANGLE	250
XVIII. I MEET THE LORD OF FEAR	269
XIX. I FALL FROM MY HIGH ESTATE	281
XX. I HEAR THE DEATH STAMMER	293
XXI. I LEAVE THE VALLEY PERILOUS	313



I JUST caught his wrist in time. The knife, held point upwards in a dirty hand, was flashing sideways between the unprotected ribs of the man in front of me. I bent back the offending arm, giving it a sharp twist, and the knife fell to the ground. But the man who held it writhed in my grasp, and in the same instant thrust his left knee hard into the pit of my stomach. The blow caught me shrewdly, causing me to loosen my hold, and in a flash he had slipped through the crowd, and was off like an arrow down the narrow side-street which ran into the square at the point where we had been standing.

As he turned, however, I caught a glimpse of his face, and received a further shock.

It was little Adolf.

His act had passed wholly unobserved by the crowd which filled the square. I should possibly have failed to see the act myself if my attention had not at that moment fortunately chanced to wander. The crowd was standing as one man in the hot spring sunshine. For this was Barcelona on Easter Sunday morning, and the municipal band was playing to the town. The people were extraordinarily silent and absorbed, so still that the whole scene affected me rather as a picture than a moment in real life, and I had begun to note its details as one examines a canvas on the wall.

We were standing in the Plaza del Rey, on the site of the old Roman forum. It was approached on three sides by narrow streets, but on the North side it was unbroken. The sun was behind me, shining full upon a

mediæval tower that rose above a line of small houses. Under the tower was a glint of splendour, where the rays of the sun caught the brass and lit the brilliant uniforms of the band. To the right of the band a single pillar of marble rose to commemorate undying Rome, and behind it the blind wall of an ancient church broke again the line of houses. But it was the houses themselves, their windows full of people in a hundred attitudes of attention, which gave to the scene its peculiar atmosphere. They were the houses of small folk who had come and gone about their business in the town for centuries, and who still in this little square, where Rome was a ruined pillar, crowded out the past and filled one with a sense of the happy continuity of human life.

I looked at the man in front of me whose life I had just saved. He was apparently quite unaware of what had happened. Pursuit of his assailant was out of the question; the fellow was by now lost in the thronged streets of a city with which I was unfamiliar. I, therefore, remained quietly where I was, determined when the music ended to tell the intended victim of his peril and find out if possible why he had been attacked. He did not look the kind of person for a sensational incident. He was, I could see, a man of middle height, dressed in the dirty canvas overalls of a mechanic. His face was smeared with oil; he wore the basque cap, or beret, common to all Northern Spain, a sort of undersized tam-o'-shanter, and an acrid Spanish cigarette adhered to his lower lip.

I had to wait for some time before I could speak to him. My reflections during the interval were very different from those which had preceded the attack. I now had good reason to remember the parting words of my Uncle James of Jebbut & Jebbut, hardware merchants, whose representative I was. He had warned me very earnestly

against the people of Barcelona. Uncle James is still in 1884; and he rarely leaves his native land. He believes in two sorts of foreigner: one is big and blond, with a passion for sausages and lager beer; the other is dark and sinister with black moustaches, who will stick a knife into you on the smallest provocation and whose private habits are such as can scarcely be mentioned even in the smoking-room. His statistics concerning Barcelona, for Uncle James believes firmly in statistics, were more than sufficiently alarming. "Barcelona," he had said, "is the most dangerous city in Europe: according to the latest information there have been two hundred and sixty-seven assassinations in the last three weeks. Mind your own business, boy, which is the business of Jebbut & Jebbut, and do not meddle with any matters that don't concern you."

Such warnings as these might have made the incident less surprising, and I might even have respected his advice and left the square without a word to the man in front of me, had it not been for the most startling of the facts to which I have just alluded. I had arrived that morning in a strange city, but I knew the man whose cowardly stroke I had intercepted. It was, as I have said, little Adolf. There was no mistaking the lean, rat-like face, with the jet-black hair and prominent Jewish nose. The sight of it was more than enough to carry my thoughts well away from generalities concerning Barcelona and the vivacious habits of the Catalans. I had recognised not only the face of Adolf, but his methods. Adolf in defence was always a handy man with his legs.

It was a little over two years since the sudden appearance of little Adolf in the Moulin Rouge at Geneva had involved me in the adventure of the Seven Sleepers. I have told that story elsewhere; but I will not assume that you are familiar with that affair, or with any of the

people who bore a part in it. The history of the Seven Sleepers has no necessary connection with the events I am about to describe; though we were all of us in it—myself, Beatrice, who is now my wife, my friends Etienne Réhmy and Gaston de Blanchegarde, Adolf Baumer, and last but not least, Professor Anselm Kreutzemark.

I often wonder how many people in Europe ever realised how very nearly Professor Kreutzemark succeeded in his great design. With the resources of the seven richest men in Germany at his disposal, the assistance of her greatest military leader, and his own genius as chemist and organiser he might easily have succeeded in breaking up the peace of Europe. But his ambitious plan was at the last moment ruined, and it is now remembered vaguely, if at all, as no more than one of the long series of scares which troubled the peace of Central Europe in the period preceding the Locarno agreements. The intelligence services of Europe, however, will not so easily forget; nor will the persons who shared in those events.

And now here was little Adolf, who had been the drudge and familiar of the Professor during our previous acquaintance, and to see the one was inevitably to think of the other. I decided at once, however, not to think of the Professor. Had I not obstinately endeavoured not to think of him for more than two years? Then I began very softly to curse little Adolf. The sunshine seemed suddenly less warm, and there was a shadow on the Easter festival.

I had, on the conclusion of my previous adventure, returned at once to my duties as a junior partner in the firm of Jebbut & Jebbut, and I was now industriously selling Uncle James's hardware far and wide. Nothing had since disturbed the tranquillity of my newly married life with Beatrice.

I led the life of an ordinary business man—going up to the office daily from my pleasant house in Edgbaston, and returning in the evening to tennis and billiards, or a book by the fireside; and a very welcome life it was after my three years of military service in France and my subsequent adventures in Geneva.

I had often wondered, however, whether I should ever again come into touch with the Professor. I saw him still in my dreams, with his silky yellow beard, the blue eyes that groped among your secrets and which no one could ever meet, the smooth voice with its even tones, picking its phrases with a maddening deliberation and suggesting horrors with the courtesy of one who offers his visitor a chair.

Standing now in the Plaza del Rey, behind the unsuspecting back of the man who had so narrowly escaped assassination, I found myself hoping fervently that the appearance of little Adolf did not, as on a previous occasion, mean that his master was near at hand.

The overture was at an end, and the crowd released from the music, under the spell of which it had seemed to have a being of its own, stirred, and after a burst of spontaneous applause, became a happy multitude. The girl smiled and spoke to her lover, friend became aware of friend, and the groups in the windows, which had seemed like figures on a tapestry, broke into life.

I at once bent forward to address the man in front of me.

“Señor,” I began in Spanish, “if you will pardon my addressing you . . .”

I got no further than that, for he abruptly turned his back on me. At the same time, however, my hand, which lay near to his own, was caught between his fingers, and jerked obliquely to the left, in which direction, on letting it go, he moved slowly forward out of the crowd.

The waiter had left the table and there was now no one within hearing. The stranger was absently fingering the stem of his glass. There seemed to be just the shadow of a twinkle in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I'm afraid I have a shocking memory for names. Anyhow, whoever you may be, I hope you will not refuse to drink a toast with me."

"With the greatest pleasure," I responded, raising my glass.

The stranger raised his.

"I give you," he said, as our glasses touched, "the Seven Sleepers."

I gulped hurriedly, and looked at the man in amazement.

"Yes, mon cher Thomas," repeated a well-known voice, in faultless English, "I give you the Seven Sleepers, and don't look as though you had seen the Professor himself. Let me see some of that British phlegm we hear so much about."

"Réhmy," I gasped, "my dear friend Etienne Réhmy."

"At your service," he replied, "and at this moment uncommonly grateful. You saved my life just now in the Plaza del Rey. Come, man, finish your sherry. You deserve a friendly glass."

Mechanically I complied with his suggestion, and I must confess that it did not come amiss. The shock of seeing little Adolf in the square had been as nothing compared to seeing my old friend. I gazed at him in astonishment across the marble table. He had certainly surpassed himself in his disguise. Except for a short toothbrush moustache, there was no hair on his face. He had clipped his eyebrows and contrived in some mysterious way to alter the angle of his nose, so that I do not believe his own mother would have recognised him. And yet it was undoubtedly Réhmy.

It was difficult to see the man he was under his present disguise. In ordinary life he was neat and leisurely, a young French official, typically normal, in that he gave one the impression of having been intellectually overdriven to the detriment perhaps of his more human qualities. But in Etienne Réhmy the human qualities were at bottom unimpaired. They had been driven in rather than driven out. He had, as I well knew, the spark of imagination which no amount of formal training or acquired opinion had been able to quench. By education he should have been the perfect bureaucrat, but he had in him the stuff of which heroes or fanatics are made. Nature helped him to keep this fact to himself, however, for he was in appearance not in the least extraordinary. His height was average, and his features were normal. He was, I think, the most unobtrusive-looking man I have ever met.

I no longer wondered at the recent incident in the square. Such events are only too frequent in the life of a secret agent of the French Republic. And in another moment I was asking myself how soon it would be before I met his friend and colleague, Gaston de Blanchegarde. Réhmy was obviously about some dangerous business, and on such occasions Gaston was never far away. The combination of the two men, cool and methodical Etienne who left nothing to chance, and intrepid Gaston with his swift flashes of intuition, was admittedly one of the most valued assets of the French intelligence service, and they were invariably set to work together in any undertaking of importance.

Outwardly they were a strangely assorted pair. There was very little of the moderate or normal in the character of Gaston de Blanchegarde. Gaston was restlessly enthusiastic and impulsive. His manner was eager, his gestures were rapid and abundant, his eyes were everywhere.

Everything about him was exaggerated and exuberant. One wondered how these two men could ever agree together upon any course of action.

"Well," I said, setting down my glass, "what are you supposed to be doing in Barcelona? Or is that a question which should on no account be asked?"

Réhmy leaned across the table and put his hand on my arm.

"It is a question which should on no account be asked," he said. "But with you I shall permit myself to be indiscreet."

He paused a moment, and then added with the simplicity of manner which always characterised any expression of his emotion, and which affected me more than I cared to show:

"Thomas, I am very glad to see you."

The waiter was replenishing our glasses, which was a good reason, perhaps, why Réhmy did not immediately inform me why he was in Barcelona.

"Tell me," he said, "first about yourself. How is Madame Preston, and how, too, is my godson?"

"Beatrice," I said, "is well, and the vocal powers of young Thomas are, I am told, well above the average of his class and weight. He has just begun to wield the silver spoon you sent him with some dexterity. I am sorry to say that he is taking strongly after his father. He has a fist like a leg of mutton, and to judge from his knees he will be leading a first fifteen to victory well before his time. And the signs of intellect are far from obvious."

"And what are *you* doing in Barcelona?" Réhmy pursued.

"I'm here for the firm," I told him. "There is a gentleman in Buenos Aires who is fitting up a number of big hotels. Jebbut & Jebbut have secured the con-

tract, and we are going to supply him with a large number of his brass bedsteads and other furnishings. I am meeting his representative here to discuss the details."

"Thomas," said Réhmy, "you seem to be well on the way to the ranks of the merchant princes."

The waiter had now withdrawn, and I looked pointedly at my friend's dirty overalls.

"You, on the other hand, appear to have gone down in the world," I observed.

"For the time being," he conceded.

"Very well," I said. "Now tell me all about it." He leaned closer.

"Listen," he began, "I have not yet thanked you properly for what you did in the Plaza del Rey just now, but believe me, I am not ungrateful."

"But how did you know that you were being attacked?" I asked. "Have you eyes in the back of your head?"

"That was not difficult," he replied. "There was a woman in front of me, bless her, who happened to be powdering her nose. I saw the arm of the man who went for me in her pocket mirror. But I could not see the man himself, which was a pity. I should like to have seen his face."

"There again," said I, "I am fortunately able to help you."

"You know the man?"

"Only too well."

"Who was it?"

"It was Adolf Baumer."

Réhmy received the information in silence, his eyes fixed steadily in thought, on the table. A stranger would never have guessed that he was in the least affected by the fact which he had just that moment learned. But I knew of old that peculiar stillness. Réhmy had received a shock.

"You are sure?" he said at last.

"Quite sure," I answered. "I am not likely to agree with little Adolf."

"Did he see you?"

"Not so far as I know. He was off and away immediately, before I could say knife. You know his pretty ways. He gave me one of his famous kicks, well below the belt, and for a moment it doubled me up. All he could have seen at that instant was the top of my head."

Réhmy maintained his attitude of still reflection. I bent forward and my tone caught something of his gravity.

"Tell me, Etienne," I said, "what does this mean?"

He did not immediately reply, but seemed to be considering at what point he should begin his story, and I had leisure to observe him more closely than I had done as yet. Was it my imagination, or did I detect upon his face a sense of strain such as I had never seen in him before? This was clearly the Réhmy of old, the man who brought the mind of a scholar to the work of a buccaneer; but there was a touch of the haggard in his looks, and as he gazed at me across the table in the little smoke-hung café, his fingers twirling the stem of his empty wine-glass, I felt instinctively that he was passing through a period of mental vigilance greater than anything which he had hitherto been called upon to bear.

"My friend," he said at last, "there is really very little to tell you, beyond what you must have guessed already for yourself. Little Adolf must mean what he has always meant."

"The Professor," I interjected.

"Exactly. And so far as I know, that blow aimed at me just now in the square is the first move in the game."

"So far as I know," he repeated almost in a tone of

despair. "That is the wretched part of this affair. I know nothing at all. The attack made on me this morning is the first real fact that has so far come my way. It tells me at least that the Professor is at work and as dangerous as ever."

"Then you have found the Professor?" I exclaimed. "You know where he has taken refuge?"

"It looks as though the Professor had found *me*," Réhmy grimly replied.

"But you are right," he continued. "We have found him at last. The police of half a dozen nations have been seeking for him now for over two years, but we never found anything that could put us on his track. Indeed, we were fast coming to the conclusion that he must be dead. Then, suddenly, about two months ago, we got a clue that pointed direct to Spain. It came, in fact, from this very city of Barcelona."

For the first time since our meeting Réhmy smiled, as though amused by some sudden memory.

"It was a queer clue," he continued. "Gaston and I were kicking our heels in Paris at the time, and one evening we went in search of distraction. We began with a cinema. I do not care very much for the cinema; but Charlot had just released his celebrated story of the Gold Rush."

"A good film," I interpolated, "and I hope you enjoyed it."

"We never saw it, my friend. We saw something considerably more exciting."

"And what was that?"

"We saw the Pathé Gazette. You know the kind of thing—General X unveiling a War Memorial in his Native Village, Floods in the Valley of the Rhone, and so forth. I was not paying very much attention. In fact I was lighting a cigarette, when suddenly Gaston gripped me

savagely by the arm, and I could feel that he was shaking with excitement; 'Mon dieu, Etienne. Regarde moi, ça.'

"I looked at the screen. It was showing the arrival of a big liner at some seaport town. The ship was already berthed and passengers were streaming down the gangway. And there, standing on deck waiting his turn to descend, was the Professor. Soon the way was free. He came right at us out of the picture, which gave us a kind of close-up of his features as he advanced. The camera had done its business well. You remember his eyes. I found that I was shrinking back instinctively in my stall and my forehead was damp. Then suddenly Gaston moved beside me. 'Quick, Etienne,' he said. 'This must go at once to headquarters.' 'What town was that?' I asked, having missed the caption. 'Barcelona,' said Gaston, and in less than forty-eight hours we were here, with introductions to the head of our agents in this city, a smart fellow, who combines the keeping of a cigarette kiosk down in the docks with the selling of lottery tickets. But he could tell us nothing of the Professor, though, like every other agent in the service, he had a full description of our man, complete with photographs, and had been looking out for him for the last two years. He cursed himself properly when we told him what we had seen in Paris."

Réhmy paused a moment to drink his sherry.

"I need hardly say," he continued, "that we decided to remain in Barcelona. Our first move was to get ourselves engaged as mechanics at the biggest garage in the town. You have no idea how much information you can pick up in a garage. Nothing happened, however, not a sign of a clue, until just three weeks ago to-day, when Gaston met the chauffeur of H.E. the Marquis de Guardalmedina del Puente."

"The Professor?" I exclaimed.

“ Not the Professor, Thomas, but, as we very soon discovered, the Professor’s host. The Marquis is a very well-known man in Spain—a great breeder of bulls, and incidentally there are one or two things against him in Paris, for he was notoriously acting in the German interest all through the war. More than once, in fact, diplomatic representations were made to the Spanish Government. But the Marquis is a great man. A Spanish nobleman who breeds bulls for the ring is as popular and as powerful in Spain to-day as a Whig nobleman in your eighteenth-century England who drove a four-in-hand and kept a prize-fighter.”

“ A sort of Duke of Plaza Toro? ” I said.

“ Plaît-il? ” murmured Réhmy.

“ Gilbert and Sullivan, you know. Not quite in your line, perhaps.”

Réhmy smiled. “ I leave comic opera to Gaston,” he said. “ I’m afraid, moreover, that it will be a long time before we shall be able to laugh at the Marquis.”

“ Continue,” I urged. “ What of the Professor? ”

“ Well, it seemed that the Marquis had been entertaining a very lavish and slightly mysterious stranger, known as the Graf. The Graf was then in Barcelona, and the chauffeur had been ordered to meet him that evening in order to take him back to the castle.”

Réhmy paused and added with a touch of bitterness:

“ A castle in Spain, and for me as intangible as such castles usually are.”

He paused a moment and again took up the tale.

“ We did not then know, of course, that the mysterious Graf was Professor Kreuzemark. It was Gaston who ascertained his identity that same evening by contriving to be present when the chauffeur picked up the Graf at his hotel.”

“ Gaston recognised him, and brought you the news? ”

"Gaston did not return that night, but the next morning I received a message." Réhmy fumbled a moment in his overalls, and produced a dirty piece of paper, which he pushed across the table.

I opened it and read as follows :

"C'est tout à fait notre homme, bien qu'il ait rasé sa barbe ; ses yeux sont exactement les mêmes ; personne ne peut en rencontrer le regard. Je vais le suivre vers le sud et vous tiendrai au courant des évènements." *

"Well," I said, looking up from the paper, "and then what happened?"

"Nothing," said Réhmy with that air of dejection which I had already noticed.

"You don't mean——"

"For the moment that is the end of the story."

"But that was three weeks ago."

"Just so. And for three weeks I have been waiting."

"But you have had news of Gaston?"

"It is always the same message. He tells me to go on waiting."

"But why don't you go to the police? There, at last, is your man. You have only to put out your hand. There is evidence enough against the Professor to hang a man twenty times over."

"Not quite so easy as you think," said Réhmy. "The Professor is under the protection of the Marquis. You probably know something about the laws of hospitality in Spain."

"But this," I objected, "is the twentieth century."

"The Marquis does not live in the twentieth century,"

* It's our man all right, though he has shaved his beard, but his eyes are just the same—no one can meet them. I shall follow him south and will let you know developments.

Réhmy replied. "He lives in Andalusia, and his power extends even to this city. To proceed against him, even in Barcelona, would be difficult, whereas to force a way into his privaté castle in the middle of the vast plains which he owns would be a stark impossibility, at any rate without the help of half the Spanish army."

Again he paused, and his fingers gripped nervously the marble edge of the table.

"Nevertheless," he continued, "I at last decided to risk it. I felt that in the final resort we could put sufficient diplomatic pressure on the Spanish Government to counteract any influence of the Marquis. I was actually on the point of starting for Madrid to present my credentials to the Spanish authorities. It was a rash decision. But what would you? It is difficult to wait."

Réhmy looked at me as though he were craving indulgence for an indiscretion. Then for a moment he seemed to be lost in thought.

"But you did not go," I suggested.

"I did not go. At the very moment of my decision I got another message from Gaston. It came to me through our agent here, the lottery-ticket seller. It told me almost nothing. But one thing was very clear. I was on no account to take any action whatever. Far away in Andalusia, Gaston was on the track of something, and felt that its discovery was far more important than an immediate arrest. 'I am working in the dark,' he wrote, 'and can only urge you to do nothing at all till you hear again from me.' You know Gaston. He is not the man to hold his hand. Never before have I known him to play a waiting game. He can have very little to go upon, or he would have communicated the facts; but I have learned to respect his intuition."

I had a sudden vision of Gaston de Blanchegarde, with his eager Gascon face and flashing brown eyes, unaccount-

ably withheld from the swift action that he loved, spell-bound by some obscure mystery in that distant Spanish castle. I felt, with Réhmy, that if Gaston found it necessary to wait, the revelation, when it came, would be overwhelming.

"Courage, Etienne," I said. "The Professor is in no way supernatural. He is a discredited man, a criminal wanted by the police of Europe, living in exile. I can imagine no further mischief that he can possibly do. The Prime Ministers of Europe, so far as he is concerned, can sleep quietly in their beds."

Réhmy looked at me with the wistful smile of a man who appreciates the well-intended efforts of a friend.

"Pray heaven you may be right. But I wish I could believe you," he said. "You will think me extravagant, perhaps, and I know, of course, that this waiting has got on my nerves. But I tell you this—never than at this moment have I been more afraid."

"Afraid," I protested in derision. "Afraid of what?"

"Afraid of the whole position in the world to-day. We are living at a time when anything might happen. A desperate and supremely able man, as you and I know Professor Kreuzemark to be, might find a limitless opportunity at this moment," he said.

There was a long pause. Then Réhmy's attitude relaxed. He passed a hand over his forehead.

"I have been too long alone," he smiled. "You can have no idea what a relief it is to talk to a friend."

I leaned forward and gripped his hand.

"Etienne," I said, "is there anything I can do? Don't forget that you are in immediate personal danger. Little Adolf . . ."

He interrupted me, and there was a gleam now in his eyes of the ironic fighter whom I knew of old.

"Little Adolf," he said, "is almost in the nature of

comic relief. He has his serious side, however. His attempt this morning must mean that the Professor is close upon us, and that Gaston is probably in danger—if he has not actually been taken. I can wait no longer. I must find out at once what is happening down there in Andalusia.”

He broke off, and I could see that he was thinking rapidly.

At that moment, however, I heard a slight noise, and looking up saw beside our table a little man with waxed moustaches, in a cheap ready-made suit. He took off his broad-brimmed hat and swept us a low bow, at the same time spreading before us a sheaf of what looked like badly forged banknotes.

“Noble señors,” he began, “will you not enter the great lottery? There is a first prize of no less than 150,000 pesetas, and the winning numbers will be drawn on the fifteenth of next month.”

“Anda, anda,” I said irritably, annoyed at the interruption, but, to my surprise, I felt Réhmy’s foot touch mine beneath the table.

“I will take some of your tickets,” he said swiftly in Spanish. “What numbers do you recommend?”

“A combination ending in thirty-seven or fifty-nine,” returned the lottery-ticket seller swiftly. “Here, to my mind, is an excellent number.” And shuffling the lottery tickets together, he pulled one slightly out from the rest and pushed it towards my companion.

It was an ordinary lottery ticket issued by the State and bore the number 0067834237.

Réhmy took the ticket, and as he did so, I saw there was something in red ink written across it.

Then, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, he produced a two-peseta piece, handed it to the little man, who, with a bow and flourish, turned and left the café.

RÉHMY looked at the ticket, and at once I saw an expression of glad relief in his eyes.

"Thank heaven," he murmured, "Gaston is safe and sound, at least for the moment."

He pushed the ticket over to me. On it was written, across the lines of print :

"M. Réhmy is requested to meet M. de Blanchegarde at four o'clock this afternoon by the Puerta de Caballerizas of the Plaza del Toros Monumental to receive important news."

I handed back the slip.

"Good," said I. "You've got at last what you have been waiting for. Gaston is here, and he will be able to set your mind at rest."

Réhmy looked up. His face was still grave, but his eyes were alight.

"Pray heaven he may," he answered. "But I have yet to decide how I am to meet him."

"Why, what's the difficulty?"

"Have you so soon forgotten that little incident in the square this morning," he asked. "Think for a moment what it means. I have so far taken no active part in this affair. I have been living quietly in Barcelona, going about my business as a mechanic. This morning, for the first time, I was attacked—presumably by orders of the Professor. The Professor can only be aiming at *me* because he has somehow discovered the activities of Gaston."

"But Gaston," I objected, "is free. He is here in Barcelona."

"That may mean that the Professor is holding his hand."

"Or that Gaston for the time being has outwitted him," I suggested.

"Possibly," said Réhmy. "But you know the Professor's methods—his almost insane passion for the eleventh hour. He never strikes until the last possible moment. His instinct, of course, is right; it is only the fools who act too soon. The Professor likes to know that all the threads are in his hands. I feel sure that Gaston is being watched, and perhaps he is not fully aware of his danger. It is essential that I should receive his message, and it is even more essential that he should be warned."

"Then you will go to the bull-ring."

"I shall go to the bull-ring," said Réhmy; "but, knowing what I do of the Professor's powers of organisation, I very much doubt whether I shall succeed in speaking to Gaston. Little Adolf failed to get me this morning, but I must consider that henceforth I am a marked man."

"But Gaston must somehow be warned," I exclaimed.

"Certainly he must," said Réhmy.

He looked at me intently, and, knowing him so well, I could see at once what was passing in his mind. I was a man as yet unmarked and unsuspected. Could he go so far, in the name of our friendship, as to suggest that Thomas Preston might take a message with comparative safety?

And instantly, before I had time to think of the warnings of Uncle James or even of my duty to Beatrice, though she would have been the last to hold me back, I had put my hand on Réhmy's arm.

"Let me go, Etienne," I said. "For *me* the risk is small. I will warn Gaston and bring back his message."

Réhmy looked at me doubtfully. It was characteristic of our relationship that he did not stop to thank me or express any surprise at my offer.

"I wonder whether I ought to let you do it," he said, more to himself than to me.

"I am a stranger in Barcelona," I urged. "I will swear that little Adolf did not see me this morning. Nobody is looking for Thomas Preston."

"True," said Réhmy, "but the Professor will always be delighted to meet him."

He thought again for a moment.

"I might, of course, send the lottery-ticket seller. The difficulty is that he does not know Gaston by sight. He has merely been acting as a kind of post office."

But I was now a man with a grievance.

"Of course," said I, "if you refuse to be helped by your friends, you're likely to go further and fare worse."

Réhmy looked at me a moment, still in doubt, and then suddenly he smiled.

"Very well, Thomas," he said. "You shall go to the bull-ring. But mind you," he added, "you are going merely to take and to receive a message. You will then have nothing further to do with us. This is not the sort of work for a married man, and I have to think of my godson."

"Then it's settled," I said. "I will go at four o'clock to the Plaza del Toros Monumental. Where shall I find you afterwards?"

"That remains to be seen. I shall have to shed the humble mechanic and move up in the world. I hope when next we meet I shall be rather more fitted to associate with the representative of Jebbut & Jebbut."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "I was forgetting Jebbut & Jebbut."

"Why, what's the matter?"

“I was to see that fellow about the bedsteads this afternoon. His boat arrives to-day from Buenos Aires. It's a big contract, and Uncle James is very anxious about it. He told me to be sure to meet the boat, and to show him every civility.”

“Very well,” said Réhmy. “One good turn deserves another. I will go to meet the boat in place of you. Take me back to your hotel, give me a suit of your clothes, and I will transform myself into a representative of the firm of Jebbut & Jebbut. I will see your man, tell him that you have been unavoidably detained, take him to a good hotel, give him a cocktail, and make an appointment for you to see him as soon as he wishes. What's the fellow's name?”

“Señor Cunha-Riario,” I replied.

I looked at my watch. It was now half-past one, and I was beginning to be hungry.

“What about moving?” I asked.

Réhmy nodded, and calling to the waiter, settled the score, and asked the man to call a taxi.

“Where are you staying?” he inquired.

“At the Hotel Portsmouth,” I replied, “corner of the Plaza di Catalunya. It's scarcely any distance from here, and it hardly seems worth while to order a cab.”

“You forget,” said Réhmy. “I am not a man whom it's wise to be seen about with just at present. It will be better to drive.”

In a few moments a taxi came to the door, and we drove together along the little street into the Ramblas again. The place was thronged with people, most of whom were moving leisurely in search of lunch. The Spaniard lunches late, seldom before two o'clock, and the great street was consequently crowded. We drove along beside the flower-stalls and booths where you can buy mongrel puppies, singing-birds, cheap rugs and that apparently staple product of Spain—lottery tickets.

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With the prospect of at least obtaining news from Gaston, Réhmy was a different man. He had entirely shaken off his depression, and we chatted happily enough as we advanced slowly among the traffic to where the Ramblas joins the great Plaza, in one corner of which the Hotel Portsmouth is situated.

At the corner of the square there was a block, and our cab was for a moment brought to a standstill.

Réhmy touched me on the arm.

I looked through the window, and just beside us saw a smart open carriage drawn by a splendid pair of animals of that compact Arab breed which is found all over Spain. In it were seated two people—a stoutish man in middle life, flashily dressed, with a coarse rather handsome face and black moustaches. But my glance went quickly from the man to the girl beside him. The carriage being stationary, the man took the opportunity to buy some flowers from a flower-seller. As he bent forward I saw the girl more clearly. I did not wonder that Réhmy should have been struck, though it was not his habit to show the slightest interest in the opposite sex. She was very young, and was wearing clothes which could only have been bought in Paris. She was of the Bordelaise type, and came, I was almost sure, from that fascinating frontier land between France and Spain which in more picturesque days had been perhaps the most romantic corner in Europe, the land of Henry of Navarre and of D'Artagnan.

I turned to Réhmy with a smile.

"You are quite right," I said. "She is very lovely."

Réhmy seemed to consider the matter.

"Now you mention it," he said, "I suppose she is."

"Come, Etienne," I protested. "I was hoping to infer, from your pointing her out, that you are not altogether inhuman."

"I know the lady," he said abruptly.

“ A friend of yours ? ”

“ No. She is a friend of Gaston. He raves about her.”

“ Gaston has raved before,” I pointed out.

“ But this, I believe, is going to be serious. A little while ago, when we were in Paris, he wanted to kill a man for maintaining that she was the most beautiful woman in France. He appears to think that nobody has any call to notice the fact except himself. He has known her for years, I believe; they both came from the same part of the country. Her name is Suzanne de Polhac.”

“ From Navarre ? ”

“ Yes. Her family have owned a château near Orthez for generations. Her father died about a year ago.”

“ Who is the man with her in the carriage ? ”

“ That must be her stepfather—some sort of contractor, name of Dupuis. Her mother married him almost indecently soon after the death of her first husband. I know that Gaston was considerably upset about it, and I should say that he was justified. The fellow is far from prepossessing.”

The carriage moved on, and shortly afterwards we arrived at my hotel and dismissed the taxi. We had agreed that, in view of Réhmy's attire, I should enter the front door of the hotel, while Réhmy made his way round to the back.

I explained to the manager that a friend of mine had unfortunately lost his luggage. He was, therefore, somewhat shabbily dressed. He would shortly be asking to see me, and was to be shown up at once to my room.

I went upstairs, and soon afterwards Réhmy appeared, conducted by a supercilious waiter. I gave him the run of my wardrobe, from which he chose a suit of clothes and everything else that was necessary.

We lunched leisurely in my bedroom, Réhmy thinking

it unwise for us to run the risk of being seen together in the restaurant.

We spent the time pleasantly enough until about half-past three, when Réhmy rose to keep my appointment with the South American at the docks.

Five minutes later I also left the hotel and, taking an open carriage, ordered it to drive me to the Plaza del Toros Monumental, the biggest of the three bull-rings in Barcelona.

The boulevard down which we drove was full of a gay crowd, all moving in the same direction as myself. Noisy trams, packed with people, persons standing even on the stairs leading to the upper deck, followed one another at intervals of a few yards. Everyone was in a high good humour, and there were shouts and cries, which presently swelled to great applause as a gay carriage drawn by four beautifully groomed mules trotted past, containing five of what at first sight appeared to be life-sized dolls. This was, in fact, one of the matadors, who, with the principal members of his *cuadrilla*, was driving to the bull-ring to take part in the forthcoming fight. The men were incredibly brilliant, in clothes so wrought over with gold braid and trimmings that the original silk of which they were composed was hardly visible. Their olive faces were curiously impassive and indifferent to all the gaiety and clamour. The matador himself, seated nearest the door, was greeted with cries of "Viva, Viva el Pamplinas!" The young man, scarcely more than a boy, took little notice of his admirers, beyond raising from time to time with a grave gesture the black felt *montera*, disclosing as he did so a bunch of hair on the occiput, the *mona* or distinguishing mark of a *torero*, as precious to its wearer as the pigtail was once to the Chinaman.

All this excitement surrounding me had its natural result. I became infected with the general gaiety of the

crowd, freed from its Lenten prescriptions and enjoying the nimble air of spring.

The crowd grew denser as we approached the bull-ring. The whole town seemed to be moving, and I could begin to imagine what Rome was like when its citizens thronged to the Coliseum to see the games. Every hoarding and window was bright with huge posters advertising the event, and giving the necessary details. I saw in huge letters :

6 ESCOGIDOS TOROS DEL GANADERIA DEL MARQUES DE
GUARDALMEDINA DEL PUENTE,

from which I learned that the bulls to be killed were from the farm of the Marquis who was entertaining the Professor.

I reached the great red-brick bull-ring, which seats some 14,000 people, just as four struck on the clock above the main entrance. The confusion of the crowd, the thick dust and brilliant sunshine beggar my powers of description. People were fighting and clamouring for the last available places, or pushing through with their reserved tickets. The scene had almost the appearance of a riot, and I noticed a strong force of civil guards, in their dark uniforms with wide Napoleonic hats, mounted on strong horses and heavily armed. The crowd were in holiday humour, but evidently the authorities took no chances with the excitable Catalans.

I paid off my carriage, and resisting with some difficulty the importunities of various touts who were speculating in tickets for the fight and the persistent solicitations of a number of hideously deformed beggars for my charity, I made my way slowly through the crowd towards the door indicated in Gaston's message to Réhmy, the one by which the professional fighters enter the ring. It was at the back of the building and it led to the stables and

outbuildings where the bulls and horses used in the fight were kept, and where the servants of the ring had their quarters. The crowd was not so numerous here, and it did not take me long to get close up to the door.

I looked eagerly for Gaston, but, though this was the time and place he had indicated, he was nowhere to be seen. I scanned the face of every passer-by, thinking it well, however, not to be too obtrusively there for a definite purpose. I accordingly assumed an attitude of indifference, leaning idly against the rough brick wall, a cigarette between my lips. I was not likely to attract attention merely as a loafer. Loafing in Spain is almost a profession.

I remained beside that door for over half an hour, while the ring behind me hummed and rocked with the sound of fourteen thousand voices, but still no Gaston appeared. Only once did I quit my post, after I had waited for twenty minutes, when I made a rapid tour of the whole ring in case I had been mistaken as to the door, but it was in vain.

The *corrida* was due to begin at half-past four, and punctually to the minute I heard the band inside playing the processional music to the strains of which the *toreros* enter the ring. A few minutes later a roar behind me showed that the first bull had been let loose. The crowd of people about me had thinned and disappeared, and I stood solitary, smoking my cigarette and still pretending to have no business in the world.

The nonchalance of my attitude was, needless to say, in striking contrast with my state of mind. The failure of Gaston to appear filled me with a painful anxiety, and the whole scene and atmosphere of the place began to get on my nerves. There is something peculiarly exasperating in being unable to see a spectacle when one can hear its effect upon an audience. The sudden bursts of

music inside, the cheers of the crowd, its cries of anger or, worse still, the sudden immense hush which told me that some peculiarly daring or perilous feat was being accomplished, necessarily aggravated the strain of waiting.

Then a thought struck me. The six bulls fighting in the arena came from the bull farm of the Marquis, to which Gaston had gone in order to spy out the land. Gaston might very naturally have contrived, in order to stay at the farm, to be taken on as some kind of servant, and it was more than possible that as a retainer on the farm he had been sent up to Barcelona with the bulls, which were, I knew, usually despatched to the various bull-rings in which they were to die in charge of the breeder's men.

In any case, Gaston was not outside, and as the hands of my wrist watch approached five o'clock, I felt it impossible to wait any longer. I decided to enter the ring.

I walked quickly round to the main entrance. At first I thought that I should not be able to get in at all, for it appeared that every seat was filled; but, by good fortune, one of the speculating touts who had importuned me on my arrival still had a ticket to sell. It was a *barrera*, that was to say, one of the best seats in the ring, right in front and separated from the arena only by a narrow lane between the ring fence and the first row of spectators.

Once inside the red-brick outer wall a narrow passage conducted me to a flight of wooden steps, up which I walked, and so to my seat.

I found myself very fortunately placed. The seat was, as I have said, next the barrier, and it was the last of a row, so that I reached it without any trouble. Indeed, I do not think anyone noticed my arrival, so absorbed was the crowd in the spectacle before it. As I arranged the leather cushion which I had hired from a small boy

at the entrance, the carcase of the second bull was on the point of being removed. Six beautifully caparisoned mules, with bells and nodding plumes of red and yellow feathers, were dragging the dead bull towards the main exit from the arena, just on my left, while the matador who had killed it was walking slowly round the ring, bowing to the plaudits and congratulations of his admirers.

The ring, open to the sky, was packed to its utmost capacity. The yellow sand already bore sinister traces of the deaths of the two first bulls and the horses which they had killed. It was surrounded by a wooden barrier, some three and a half feet high, with a wooden step six inches from the ground. A hard-pressed fighter could leap this barrier and thus temporarily reach safety behind it in the narrow passage which separated it from the first row of seats in which I was sitting.

The departure of the dead bull was greeted with bursts of savage music from a brass band, and there was much applause, immediately diverted by the entry of the third bull.

He entered the arena with a savage rush, a magnificent animal, coal black, with great curving horns, a little streamer of the Marquis's colours, blue and yellow, attached to his neck.

Then began the first stage of the fight. The matador with his assistants, all bearing the cloaks with which they would play the bull, stood waiting for him in the ring. Near the barrier were the *picadors*, great lusty peasants sheathed in leather lined with steel from the ankles to the waist, mounted on horses and carrying their *garrochas* or lances. The matador and his men advanced to meet the bull, waving their cloaks, seeking to draw him on to attack the horses. The appearance of the bull was greeted with a roar from the mob, which increased

to a veritable frenzy when, disdainful of the proffered cloaks, he made straight for the nearest horse, and laid it low. The heads of the horses, which are blindfold, are held by persons known as *monosabios*, dressed in red shirts. It is their grisly task to place the wretched horse in such a position as to make it easy for the bull to attack it and for the rider to plant a sharp thrust with his *garrocha*.

I will not attempt to describe what happened in the next few minutes. It was a sickening spectacle, for the bull was a very fierce one. Each of his attacks on the wretched horses increased the excitement of the populace, a section of whom began shouting in monotonous, high-pitched voices for more and yet more horses.

I devoted those moments to as careful a scrutiny of the arena and the passage surrounding it as I could, with the object of discovering Gaston. He was, however, nowhere to be seen. I could distinguish half a dozen men any one of whom might possibly be he, but they were none of them near enough to be identified.

The second phase of the fight was beginning when I looked again at the bull. This consists in the planting successively of three pairs of *banderillas*, or barbed darts, about two feet long and gaily ornamented with paper streamers, on the bull's neck, one each side of the end of the spine. This is an extremely dangerous and difficult operation, for the darts are too short to allow the *banderillero* to insert them from a safe distance. To do so he has to lean right over between the horns of the bull as he charges, and the man escapes by a rapid side slip before he can be caught.

There was something like a hush over the ring as the slim, exquisite figure of the *banderillero* advanced, holding in his wide-stretched arms the two gay darts with their barbed points. Slowly he walked towards the bull, his whole body, in its blazing silken covering, taut and

expectant. Every now and again he waved the darts, at the same time shouting to attract the attention of the bull, and I noticed that all the other members of the *cuadrilla* were standing still as statues, grasping their cloaks in readiness to go to their companion's assistance if necessary.

Suddenly the man broke into a run. He ran directly at the bull, and I held my breath. The animal, which had been regarding him more in curiosity than in anger, changed its tactics and charged to meet him, its head down and its broad back, streaked with blood from the wounds given it by the lances of the picadors, temptingly displayed.

With a sudden dexterous movement the *banderillero* thrust the two darts, one each side of the spine, and then, slipping sideways, escaped the curved horn by a hair's breadth.

"*Olé, olé.* That was bravely done," shouted my next-door neighbour, a fat, over-dressed man in a pink collar, and his approval was evidently shared by the crowd.

The *torero*, thus encouraged, took his second pair of darts and once more advanced to repeat the performance, in which he was again successful.

The crowd was by this time enormously delighted at the clever work of the *banderillero*. I watched the man curiously as he passed close in front of me, a third pair of darts in his hands. His face was calm and impassive, and I recognised him to be the young matador El Pamplinas, who, in addition to killing the bull, was also planting the *banderillas* himself, a duty usually performed by a member of his *cuadrilla*. Evidently intoxicated by his success, though he showed no sign of it, he determined upon a more dangerous feat, for this time he did not advance into the middle of the ring, but, taking the darts, sat down on the edge of the wooden barrier and

directed his *cuadrilla* to lure the bull with their cloaks within striking distance. This manœuvre drew shouts of frenzied approval from the multitude. Even to my inexperienced eyes the thing he proposed to do was dangerous in the extreme, for, if he made the least slip in his movements, he ran the risk of being pinned to the wooden barrier, a bright, wriggling butterfly.

The bull came closer, tossing his head and emitting an occasional bellow, rather of rage than of pain, at the clinging darts sticking in his hide. The man was seated almost opposite to me, only a few feet away, the passage between us being crowded with attendants in the red shirts, and an adventurous camera man engaged in filming the spectacle.

The bull advanced to within ten yards of the barrier, and those who had been playing him with cloaks ceased and stood motionless. For a moment man and beast remained perfectly still, each waiting for the other. Then with a roar the bull charged. At the same instant the man leapt to meet it. In a moment the darts were planted and, as the animal's head went up at the prick of them, the intrepid fighter slipped sideways beneath the horn, while the bewildered animal rushed headlong against the barrier, and thrusting its sharp horns into it splintered the wood within a few feet of my nose.

This new feat provoked thunders of applause, most of the audience rising to their feet and yelling with delight. Sickened and dazed as I had been by what had already passed, I could not refrain from adding my own applause, for the feat was a gallant one.

I leaned forward, clapping my hands, and as I did so a man in the red shirt of a *monosabios* passed in front of me in the lane between the barriers, not three feet away. He turned his head as he did so, and with something of a shock I saw his face.

The features were streaked with dirt, but the eyes were astonishingly brown and twinkling, and as he moved he jerked his head in a manner which was familiar.

I gazed after him eagerly. He was of the right height, and his movements reminded me irresistibly of Gaston. I was, indeed, almost sure of him. But what was he doing in the ring, dressed in that horrible slaughterer's attire? And, if it were he, how could I get speech with him?

I paid little attention to the rest of the fight, but kept my eyes on the man. He remained quietly in the passage for the most part, watching the matador, who was now playing the bull with a series of expert passes of the red cloak.

The trumpet then sounded for the death, and the matador advanced bareheaded towards the bull. Being unusually expert or fearless, he advanced alone, signing to his *cuadrilla* to remain aloof. He carried in his right hand a red-hilted rapier of the finest steel, curved slightly at the end, and in his left a piece of scarlet cloth known as the *muleta*, kept extended by a slip of wood. He at once proceeded to delight the crowd with an extraordinary display of virtuosity, the finer points of which I was unable to appreciate, exhibiting amazing agility and skill in making a number of passes with the cloak. I was particularly struck by the way in which he seemed able to avoid the horns, without shifting his feet on the ground, merely with a graceful swerve of the body, a movement as light and inevitable as the dip of a swallow.

Presently a hush fell on the arena, and I saw that the moment had come for him to deliver the *estocade* or death stroke. The bull, to be cleanly killed, must be stabbed to the heart with a single thrust of the rapier, and to do this it must be inserted up to the hilt between two vertebrae of the neck immediately behind the head. The greatest skill is necessary to achieve this, for the rapier, if badly

placed, may glance off on a bone or pierce the animal's lungs—a disgraceful blow which brings the swift execration of the crowd. The matador drew himself up in front of the bull, and then leaned forward between the horns to effect his thrust. I saw him, poised straight as a dart, his right arm extended with the gleaming rapier, while the bull, tired out, stood quietly in front of him.

But though this was the supreme moment of the fight, and every eye in the ring was fixed on that gleaming figure, my attention was all for the man whom I took to be Gaston. At that very moment, however, I saw him move off and disappear under the archway out of sight.

At the same instant a shout, louder than all before, burst from the crowd. I looked round. The matador, his stroke delivered, was standing on one side, his red cloak folded in his hand, while the bull was running with a queer, drunken gait towards the middle of the arena, the red pommel of the sword up to the hilt in its neck. I saw the great beast bow twice like an ungainly dowager before the royalty of death, and then fall heavily on to the sand.

The dead bull was dragged out by the mules, and the matador received a deafening ovation. The president yielded to popular clamour. He accorded the honours of the *maestria* to the matador, and, as the bull was dragged away, signalled to one of the arena attendants, who came forward with a knife and cut off the tip of its left ear, presenting the blood-stained morsel to the matador, while the crowd yelled and cheered, throwing hats, cigars and even ladies' handbags, into the ring in a frenzy of enthusiasm.

While this scene was in progress the other fighters were preparing for the reception of the fourth bull, and it was then that I saw the man whom I took to be Gaston leading into the ring a pitiful screw, with every bone

showing in its emaciated body. Upon the wretched animal was seated a huge picador, who to my excited imagination appeared a veritable Colossus, sheathed as he was in yellow leather, with his broad-brimmed Cordovan hat and his tall lance. It gave me a queer sensation to see the man I took for my friend thus entering the arena. It made me realise how extremely uncomfortable I should have felt in his place.

The horse and its rider took up a position immediately in front of me, that was to say barely ten feet away, and there waited their turn in the fight. I was now quite sure that the man was Gaston. Every movement he made revealed my old companion, and he was so near that I could even distinguish his features beneath the grime with which they were disfigured.

We had not long to wait for the next event. Barely had the doors closed upon the carcass of the third bull when the fourth was in the ring. It was a fine large animal, black like its predecessor, with a small white patch on one shoulder. Unlike its stable companion, however, it did not immediately rush to the attack, but trotted slowly into the centre of the ring, where it paused, bewildered by the sudden sunshine and the roar which greeted its appearance.

This conduct did not at all appear to amuse the crowd. On the contrary, there was a distinct change of feeling: The occupants of the cheaper benches began to scream abuse at the bull for its lack of enterprise. The bull-fighters, however, obviously did not share the contempt for this creature exhibited by the crowd, for they showed the greatest caution in their advances. I learned afterwards that bulls of this kind, which show themselves slow to attack, are usually the most dangerous, being more intelligent than their fellows. They seem to realise dimly what is happening, and are, therefore, inclined

to attack the man instead of wasting their fury on the fluttering cloaks.

This particular animal refused to make more than one or two half-hearted charges at the extended cloaks, and the *toreros* evidently decided that the time had come to excite him to further activities by the smell of blood. They accordingly began to lure him towards the horses waiting under the wooden barrier.

The bull moved at last, showing many signs of doubt and suspicion, and made straight for the horse in front of me, which was led by Gaston; and Gaston, obeying the orders of a large man, also in a red shirt, who appeared to be the director of the *monosabios*, turned it round while one of the matador's *cuadrilla* fluttered a cloak with the object of luring the huge animal within striking distance. To the disappointment, however, of the populace, the bull, disregarding the taunts and shouts of the picador, who, with his lance levelled, was preparing to strike, refused to charge. In order further to excite it, the director of the *monosabios* called up another of his men, who relieved Gaston at the horse's head. The director then himself walked in front of the bull, hoping that the sight of a moving man in a red shirt would arouse its dormant anger. I noticed that, during this dangerous manœuvre, he kept his hand on Gaston's arm, thus causing him, quite unnecessarily as it seemed to me, to share the risk. The manœuvre had the desired effect. With a sudden bellow, the bull charged. The director of the *monosabios* leapt instantly to one side, but in doing so he struck Gaston on the shin with his foot, causing my friend to stumble and fall within three yards of the charging monster.

There was a great gasp from the crowd, in which I involuntarily shared, for it seemed that nothing could save the fallen man. He was, in fact, on his hands and

knees when the bull reached him. The animal struck him full in the chest, and I expected to see him tossed helplessly on the end of one of its gigantic horns. Fortunately, however, the bull had struck Gaston with its forehead just as he was rising to his feet. The shock knocked him senseless right under the legs of the horse, and at the same instant the picador thrust his lance into the bull's neck.

After that my memory is a little confused. There was a tremendous shout from the crowd, a fluttering of cloaks in the ring, the scream of a desperately wounded horse, the heavy thud of the picador as he fell against the barrier, and then such a cheer as I have seldom heard in my life. The young matador El Pamplinas had seized the bull by the tail, just as the creature, thoroughly infuriated at last, was making to gore the fallen horse and my helpless friend beneath it. This sudden diversion was sufficient to cause the bull to abandon its purpose. It turned round savagely on its new adversary, who began to play it with a series of magnificent passes with his cloak, which drew further shouts from the multitude.

It was then that I awoke to action. The horse which had just been killed by a *puntillero* had been dragged off Gaston's body, and the arena attendants were lifting him up. In a flash I was over the low barrier in front of my seat, heedless of the restraining arm of the man in the pink collar beside me.

I jumped into the narrow passage between the wooden barrier and the seats, arriving in time to bear a hand in lifting the senseless man over into safety.

No one attempted to interfere with me. I lifted Gaston by the head and shoulders, and we bore him slowly along the passage way.

As we proceeded to the place where the passage ended in the approach to the stables, I glanced up apprehen-

sively to see if any official might be coming to order me away. Above me now was a serried mass of faces and waving arms, reaching right up to a line of boxes, and above these again to the blue sky; and, as my gaze reached upwards above the crowd, I suddenly saw something which transfixed me with astonishment, so that I almost let fall Gaston's head and shoulders.

Leaning across the edge of a box was the girl whom I had seen that morning in the Plaza de Cataluna. It was not, however, her presence which astonished me. Close beside her, a man was leaning, and even at the distance which separated us I could see his face with a terrible distinctness, pallid, with a light yellow growth of beard on the chin. The eyes were of a tranquil blue, and they were gazing steadily in my direction.

And I knew that once again I was face to face with Professor Kreuzemark.

Chapter III

I take a Lesson in Spelling

I WAS still staring at that well-known face as it hung intently over the edge of the box, when it suddenly drew back. A man whom I had not hitherto noticed, but who was sitting beside the Professor, had touched him on the arm, and the latter, at the stranger's evident request, discontinued his scrutiny of our little group.

I noted with interest, though only for a brief instant, the face of the man beside the Professor. It was a round face, rosy and cheerful to look upon, and it shone like a full moon from under a faultless silk hat. Two eyes, which seemed small in comparison with the distended cheeks beneath them, twinkled with merriment and good nature. Its owner, with a little smile as of deprecation, said something to the Professor, who moved at once to the back of the box, so that he was no longer visible.

I was driven to assume that the rubicund stranger, though he did not look at all the kind of man to be a friend of the Professor, was the Marquis de Guardalmedina del Puente.

The spell which had held me rooted was broken, and I turned to perceive that one of Gaston's red-shirted companions had taken my place and was helping to bear my unconscious friend towards the exit which was only a few yards away. I followed him hastily, my mind in a tumult, but with the sight I had just seen clearly stamped on my brain in every detail—the Professor bending forward, the girl shrinking back in horror, the twinkling Marquis with his quaint air of caution. My first coherent thought was to wonder how the girl, Suzanne de Polhac, whom Réhmy had described as an old friend of Gaston, came to be in the company of the Professor. Both, presumably, were that afternoon the guests of the Marquis, but how the girl came to be there was a riddle which I could not read.

Then, overwhelmingly, my mind went back to the moment of Gaston's fall in the ring. I could scarcely yet believe what I had seen, but there could really be no possible doubt. Gaston had fallen by the foulest treachery. The director of the *monosabios* had deliberately tripped him up as the bull was charging, and but for the gallantry of the young matador, the manœuvre would have been only too successful.

Then came the question: who had planned this treachery? To what extent was the Professor implicated? He had clearly taken an interest in the event, which the Marquis had apparently rebuked. Then was the Marquis also involved? I found it difficult to associate that little smiling man with such a deed.

By this time I had passed under the brick arch which led to the stables and other outbuildings attached to the ring. We crossed a small, dirty yard reeking with the

smell of refuse, and entered another passage. Here the bearers of Gaston paused a moment beside a door splashed with whitewash, which one of them drew open. I was now so close behind them that we all entered together. The tang of iodoform came to my nostrils as I walked into a low bare room, with rough pallet beds along each wall and a bare wooden table running down the centre. It needed no great powers of deduction to realise that I was in the first-aid hospital which is attached to every big bull-ring for reasons which are obvious. The two *monosabios* laid their unconscious burden on one of the beds, and stood for a moment looking down upon him.

Almost immediately, however, a rough-looking man, whom I recognised to be the director of the *monosabios*, strode into the room.

He was making straight for Gaston when he caught sight of me. He pulled up suddenly and looked me up and down.

"What are you doing here?" he began harshly. "Don't you know that spectators are not allowed behind the ring? I will ask you to be good enough . . ."

He did not finish his sentence, or rather he changed his tone. A dapper little man in black came bustling into the room from another door, struggling into a white linen coat as he walked.

"Good-day to you, Dr. Gomez," said the director. "This lout of mine has just got himself knocked out, confound it. It is unfortunate, but I don't think you will need to waste much of your valuable time on the fellow. It's a pretty hopeless case, and the clown has only himself to thank. I told him what would happen; he is not one of my regular men, and it was only as a favour that I allowed him to appear at all."

The little doctor took no notice of this rigmarole. With a brisk bow he stepped up to the bed, picked up Gaston's wrist, and bent to listen for his heart, though the director

continued to protest that all this medical attention was quite unnecessary, especially on an afternoon when El Pamplinas was in such excellent form. Was it not a shame, he asked, to be missing one of the best *corridas* of the season?

I was glad to see that none of this had the slightest effect on the doctor, who quietly continued his examination of Gaston.

My poor friend was lying quite inanimate on the bed, his face bloodless and his lips blue. One of the *monosabios*, at a sign from the doctor, began loosening the red shirt which covered his breast, while I stood by almost beside myself with anxiety.

"Señor Doctor," I began, when I could bear the suspense no longer.

But with a sharp jerk of the head he beckoned for silence, and I was forced to curb my impatience as best I could.

The examination of the little doctor had lasted for some minutes when the door by which we had entered was again pushed open.

Two persons entered and I recognised both of them immediately.

One was the girl, Suzanne de Polhac; the other was the man whom I had seen in the box, and identified as the Marquis del Puente. He came into the room with little steps, quick and very deft in his movements, reminding me irresistibly of a plump robin. I could see now that he was short, and that his waist was past the art of any tailor to restore. He was bubbling over with assurances to the girl, his way of speaking suggesting a liquid being poured too hastily from a bottle.

"No need to distress yourself, Mademoiselle," he was saying in French, "no need at all. These things will happen, you know, all in the day's work. Nothing at

all, nothing at all, I assure you. Very unfortunate, of course, but I will see to the poor fellow. Be under no apprehension."

He moved forward to the bed as he spoke, radiating comfort and good nature upon all concerned.

"Well," he demanded of the doctor, "how is this poor fellow of mine?"

The doctor bowed formally. "He is suffering from shock, Señor Marquis. No bones are broken, but he has had a bad blow on the back of the head," and he indicated a cut on the scalp where the blood was oozing slightly between the black hair. "With any luck we shall soon have him on his feet again."

"There," said the Marquis to the girl, his round face dimpling into a smile. "I told you how it would be."

"I am very glad to hear it, very glad indeed," he continued, turning to the doctor. "Look after him well, doctor, for he is one of my own men. An excellent fellow but headstrong. Insisted on fighting to-day, though he hasn't a notion of the game. Hasn't been with me very long, but all my men are equally valuable. Give him your personal attention, and send the charges to me."

The doctor bowed and smiled, and the Marquis turned to the director of the *monosabios*, who stood awkwardly by.

"An unfortunate accident, José," he said, his beady eyes for an instant quite expressionless.

"What would you, Señor Marquis?" stammered the man, who had lost all his truculence and was very pale.

"It was an evil chance."

"I can only repeat, my excellent José, that it was a most unfortunate accident. I do not like things to go wrong. We will talk of this later. We shall all be very sorry for what has happened."

"The Señor Marquis will realise how deep is my regret," said the man obsequiously.

So far the Marquis had paid no attention to me, and I was at leisure to observe the girl, Suzanne. She stood beside the rough couch, an expression of pity on her beautiful face. But there was something more than pity, bewilderment and incredulous doubt. I realised that she had been struck by the resemblance between the man on the couch and Gaston, the man whom according to Réhmy she had known all her life. She could hardly, indeed, fail at such close quarters to discover him, for except that he had shaved his moustache and was dressed in the rough clothes of a *monosabios* he was the Gaston I had always known.

I wondered for an instant why he had not adopted a more complete disguise, but a moment's reflection made me realise that in this case it was hardly necessary. The Professor had only seen Gaston once during our previous adventures, and then only for a brief instant, while the Marquis had never seen him at all.

I could see, however, that so far the girl had been merely struck by the resemblance, and I wondered whether she would actually recognise her old friend. I determined at once that, if she did so, I must prevent her from revealing the fact. There was just a possibility that as the friend of Gaston she might be willing to help him, but her ability to do so would obviously be impaired if she betrayed too active an interest in his fate.

Her eyes had never left the face of the wounded man, and as the Marquis fell silent she suddenly bent forward and looked intently at the features of my poor friend. She turned very pale, and I saw that she was now quite sure who it was.

She raised her head and looked towards the Marquis.

"It's very extraordinary," she began. "But I believe I . . ."

I gave her no time to finish her sentence.

Now or never was the moment to intervene. I had an inspiration.

"Pardon me," I said, stepping briskly forward and bowing to the Marquis, "but I think I have the honour to address His Excellency the Marquis de Guardalmedina del Puente?"

I spoke with as good an imitation of an American accent as I could contrive.

The Marquis turned round and looked at me, his brown eyes twinkling with astonishment.

"At your service, Señor," he said, with a formal courtesy, in striking contrast with the familiar manner in which he talked to his servants.

"Then let me tell your Excellency that I am most proud and happy to have this opportunity. Your Excellency will probably have heard of the *Milwaukee Advertiser*, which I have the honour to represent in this city, and I would be just tickled to death if you could give me a few moments of your valuable time."

The Marquis looked at me blankly when I began, his forehead puckered in bewilderment. Then the dimples reappeared.

"I think I understand," he smiled. "You are an American journalist."

"That is so," I admitted. "And this little accident of yours is just a godsend to me. This is just the story I've been looking for, real human and carrying a message to us all. It just shows me that mankind is one big democracy. There was that poor fellow, the lowest of the low, felled by the madly enraged animal before the eyes of fourteen thousand excited spectators. And what happened? Was he left to his fate? No, sir. The first matador in Spain, the famous El Pamplinas himself, rushed forward to help his poor comrade in distress, and risked his life and reputation to help him. Why, sir, it was just marvellous

to see the cute way in which he laid hold of the tail of that bull and dragged him off his prostrate victim."

But the Marquis was now beginning to be bored.

"I am, of course, delighted to meet you, Mr. ——," and he paused inquiringly.

"Theophilus P. Cudder," I intervened.

"I am, as I say, delighted to meet you, Mr. Cudder. This simple incident seems to have greatly impressed you. If you would like to have some further details, I shall be pleased to put my secretary at your disposal."

All this time, the girl, whom I had intercepted in her attempt to speak to the Marquis, had been awaiting her chance to intervene. She made another effort.

"Marquis," she said, indicating Gaston, "is this really one of your men?"

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," he replied. "He has not, it is true, been with me for very long, but all my men are treated alike, whether they have been in my service for twenty years or twenty days."

"But, Marquis," the girl began again.

"That's just the sort of human touch," I hastily put in, "which goes straight to the hearts of the great American public."

The girl looked at me a little haughtily, offended by my unmannerly interruption. The Marquis, too, was ruffled.

"Just so, just so," he said, and pointedly he moved away and began talking to the director of the *monosabios*.

I determined then and there to take a big risk. The formidable Professor was in the ring, and, for all I knew, might at any moment appear. At all costs Gaston must be protected. I knew nothing of the girl beyond that she was a friend of Gaston, but I could not believe that she was willingly in league with his enemies. I had seen the look in her eyes as she bent over him at the moment of recognition. I quickly produced from my pocket a note-

book and pencil, articles which I always carry, in obedience to the advice of Uncle James. A good business man, my uncle is constantly impressing upon me, if he cannot trust a thing to his memory, writes it down in his notebook.

I opened the notebook and scribbled rapidly.

"Pardon me," I said, turning to the girl, "but perhaps you could inform me if that is the correct way to spell the name of the noble Marquis," and I thrust the notebook in front of her.

In it I had written in French :

"It is your friend Gaston de Blanchegarde, but do not appear to know it. Can I meet you to-day and speak to you alone?"

The girl, who had taken the notebook with an air of resigned politeness, flushed slightly as she read the message, and I waited anxiously.

She looked at me for an instant, her eyes dark with perplexity, but very clear and steadfast.

"That is not quite the way to spell it," she said at last. "Will you give me your pencil?"

I handed it to her without a word, but at that moment the Marquis turned and walked back towards us.

"Well, Mademoiselle," he said, "I think we should be getting back to our places if you are ready."

If the girl was disappointed at being unable to write a reply to my message, she did not show it.

"I am quite ready," she said, and she handed me back my notebook with the page open. On it she had written only two words: "Yes. Listen."

I shut the notebook and returned it to my pocket.

That girl was, clearly, a jewel.

"Let us go," she said, turning to the Marquis, adding as they made to approach the door: "By the way, what are we doing this evening?"

"I have taken a box at the opera," he replied. "It is the 'Rosenkavalier.' I thought you might like to hear it."

"That will be very pleasant," she said, "but as it is Easter Day I should like to go to compline at Santa Eulalia. It is at half-past seven, isn't it?"

"Yes," he replied. "You'll have time to do both quite easily, for the opera does not begin until ten o'clock."

Already she was moving off on the arm of the Marquis, leaving me amazed by her coolness and swift presence of mind.

At that moment, however, there was a movement from the bed on which Gaston was lying. We all turned together at the sound.

Gaston, who had all that time been lying motionless, stirred. He moved his head once or twice uneasily, and a troubled, anxious expression passed across his white features. He moaned twice, and a little froth appeared on his lips.

"If only one could hear," he muttered in a tense whisper. And then suddenly in a clear penetrating tone he half rose from the bed and called out: "The Lord of Fear! The Lord of Fear!"

I saw the Marquis suddenly draw himself up, and there came into his eyes the same expressionless look with which he had rebuked the blundering peon.

"He is delirious, poor fellow," said the doctor, who was standing by the bed.

Chapter IV

I am Murdered by Proxy

I CAN still see the little Marquis brought to a sudden standstill on his way to the door, the girl on his arm, with her lovely face turned back towards the bed, the

doctor bending in professional concern over his patient, and behind them all the red-shirted *monosabios* like three painted devils in a pantomime, while on our ears there still lingered an echo of that mysterious phrase.

Then the scene broke and something like a sigh escaped from us all. The eyes of the Marquis lost their expressionless look, and he was immediately his affable self again.

"Poor fellow," he murmured. "Do what you can for him, Señor doctor."

"Your Excellency need be under no apprehension," replied the man, with a bow; "he shall have my best attention."

On that the Marquis, without any further notice of me, beyond a grave inclination of the head, moved slowly away with the girl on his arm, Silenus in a modern coat leading an unwilling dryad from the Rue de la Paix.

I again approached the bed, and, still in my rôle of American journalist, I "interviewed" the little doctor. The man was very willing to talk, and, by playing on his evident wish to appear in the newspapers, I was soon on the friendliest terms. I inquired what would happen to Gaston, to which he replied that he would be taken to a hospital in the town as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made.

"How soon," I asked, "can the poor fellow be moved?"

The little doctor looked at his patient.

"I shall make a further examination," he said, "in an hour's time. If his temperature and condition have not changed for the worse, he will be moved at once."

"Has he no friends who would be willing to look after him?"

"I know of none."

"But suppose his friends were to call at the hospital and ask to take charge of him."

“ I must be satisfied that they are able to do so, and I should, of course, feel it necessary to consult the Marquis. I am responsible to His Excellency. You heard his instructions, Señor. I was to give the case my personal attention. I shall accompany the man to the hospital, and see that the authorities do everything that is necessary.”

“ I might like to inquire how it goes with the poor fellow,” I said. “ Perhaps you would kindly tell me the address of the hospital.”

“ Certainly, Señor,” he replied, and I took a note of the address he gave and his directions for finding it. These were simple enough, as it seemed that the place was hard by the cathedral.

I did not see how it was possible to do more. The doctor would obviously not relinquish his patient, and any insistence on my part would send him straight to the Marquis for instructions. I had at least secured the address of the institution to which he would be taken, and either I or Réhmy would be able to call there in the course of the evening and to make inquiries.

Accordingly, after a last look at my unconscious friend, I took leave of the little doctor, and once outside the first-aid hospital, I made all haste to leave the ring.

I looked at my watch. It was past six o'clock, and the *corrida* would, I knew, be over in twenty minutes or so. I had arranged to meet Rhémy at the Café Oriental at the corner of the Plaza di Catalunya. It was full early for my rendezvous, and to fill the time I got into a little carriage and bade the man drive me to a gunsmith's. We rattled along the same boulevard up which I had driven two hours previously. The wide street was now deserted, waiting silently for the tide of humanity which would shortly be pouring in its thousands from the ring, sated with blood, and in search of the evening glass of manzanilla.

Presently we turned to the left and again to the left and again to the right, and clattered into the narrow Calle de Fernando Siete, the old main street of Barcelona, in which are the principal shops, facing the beautiful Man-comunidad, where of old the Catalan Parliament used to sit. We drew up at a gunsmith's a hundred yards or so further on to the right, which I entered with some difficulty, since it was Sunday and the shop closed, and persuaded the owner to sell me an eight shot automatic pistol and fifty cartridges.

Less than an hour ago I had seen the Professor, and I was taking no risks.

Thence I drove by way of the Ramblas to the Café Oriental, arriving there twenty minutes before my appointment with Réhmy. I paid off my cab and found a seat with difficulty. The café was crowded. All the basket chairs on the pavement were occupied, and I had, therefore, to go inside, where I found a vacant table in a corner of the room. I sat down on a red plush seat, and, ordering the inevitable glass of sherry, prepared to wait for my friend, rising for a moment to take off a linen dustcoat, which I had worn to protect my clothes from the dusty streets, and hanging it up on a stand in the middle of the café.

I passed the time in reading some of the local newspapers. They contained little of interest as far as the foreign news was concerned. The dictators of Europe all appeared to be busy in their several ways, Mussolini in embellishing Rome, which he desired to make as great and beautiful as it was in the time of Augustus, and Primo de Rivera in promulgating a new constitution in Spain. There was the usual telegram about the civil wars in China, and a paragraph on the troubles of certain Jesuit missionaries in Eastern Mongolia.

I laid the paper down, and took a sip at my sherry, and,

as I did so, a man sitting at a little distance to my right rose and left the café. I did not particularly notice him until he had reached the door, when something about his back struck me as somehow familiar. Then in a flash it came to me.

He was wearing my overcoat. There was no mistaking the light-coloured linen of which it was made. It was not a possession of which I was exactly proud. I should, in fact, have thought twice about wearing it in St. James's Street. I had, truth to tell, been careless enough to lose a very good overcoat on the way from Calais, and had, therefore, been obliged rather hurriedly to buy another one in Paris as I was passing through. I admit it was a poor garment, but it was for the moment my own, and I was not prepared to have it coolly appropriated by a stranger.

In two strides I was across the room, handing a *douro* to the waiter as I passed, and telling him that I would be back in a moment for my change. Once in the street, I looked keenly to right and left, and instantly perceived my man. He was walking quite at his ease down the Ramblas, and was some fifty yards ahead of me. I went quietly in pursuit of him, not, of course, wishing to cry out or to make a scene, since the last thing in the world I could desire was to draw attention to myself. I intended to come upon the man from behind, tap him on the shoulder, and politely suggest a restitution.

I had decreased the distance between us to about thirty yards, when he turned sharp to the left into a narrow street, little more than a passage between two big modern buildings, and leading apparently direct to the more ancient quarters of the town. The way was so narrow that, coming from the evening sunshine of the Ramblas, I found myself in comparative darkness. The man I was following kept to one side. I had just decided to over-

take him when, without a moment's warning, two dark figures slipped from the shadow of a house, leapt on the wearer of my coat, and bore him to the ground.

There was a loud scream, instantly stifled, and then two heavy thuds as the arm of one of the figures rose and fell twice above the back of the prostrate man.

I stood still as an image in the shadow of the tall houses, too astonished to move or to cry out. The two men bent down and lifted their victim. From the way his head fell back, I judged him to be already dead. I was now accustomed to the light, and could see one of the men distinctly. He had a spotted handkerchief tied about his face, covering all except the eyes. He was hatless, however, and I noticed that his hair was black and greasy. Then suddenly a door, just ahead of the men, opened, and together they dragged the body through.

Appalled as I was, I felt it impossible to intervene. The man was past any help that I could render, and I could not risk myself upon a side issue. Mechanically, without waiting for more, I turned and walked back to the café.

What was the significance of what I had just seen? Was it merely an assault by footpads, desperate men, hungry and out of work, or an attack on an employer by a syndicalist, such as were common in Barcelona? Was it, in fact, merely one of the two hundred and seventy-six assassinations in which Uncle James had warned me on no account to be involved?

The deed I had just witnessed must have affected me like a blow. Within the last five minutes a man had been murdered before my eyes. Yet there was the café as I had left it, the waiters moving cheerfully about their business. Nothing was changed, except that less than a hundred yards away a customer who had been sitting at one of those tables was lying stabbed and plundered.

I found, to my surprise, that I was trembling, and realised that I should be glad of a chair. I accordingly entered the café and sat down once more at my old table. I looked at my watch and found it was now seven o'clock. Réhmy would arrive at any moment.

To satisfy the waiter who approached me, I ordered myself another glass of sherry.

Then, as I was drinking it, I looked up, and I confess that some of that sherry found its way to my waistcoat!

In front of me, staring me straight in the face was my overcoat, the overcoat which less than ten minutes ago I had seen leaving the café on the back of the man who had been murdered. There it still remained hanging on the peg where I had originally placed it.

I rose to make sure that it was so. I even took down the overcoat and felt in the pockets. There was no mistake, for I found in them the packet of acrid Spanish cigarettes which I had bought that morning, and which I had thrust there just before little Adolf had made his murderous attack on Réhmy.

I returned to my seat staggered by this new discovery, and for a moment I was unable to grasp what it meant. Then suddenly, with a sickening clarity, I realised my position. A man wearing an overcoat precisely similar to mine had left the Café Oriental a few minutes ago. That man had been murdered in mistake for me, and it was only by the merest accident that I was not now myself lying in a house near by stabbed through the back.

It was only too clear, and I marvelled at the swiftness and dexterity of our enemies. In the course of a few hours, Réhmy had been attacked in the Plaza del Rey, Gaston had nearly met his death in the bull-ring, and I myself had been murdered by proxy in the streets of Barcelona. And in all three cases it was only by the purest chance that the attempt had not succeeded.

I felt for an instant sick to the point of nausea. The whole thing had been so foul and sudden, the pursuit of our lives so relentless. I understood now that the Professor would stick at nothing, and I did not fail to be impressed by the fact that already he seemed to know that I was in touch with my old friends. I was in this business now, whatever it might be, whether I liked it or not, and I smiled grimly as I remembered Etienne's definition a few hours before of my limited liability.

I glanced once more at my watch, and as I did so I felt a touch on my shoulder. I started like a nervous horse, at the same instant grasping the pistol which rested in my right-hand coat pocket.

There beside me with his quiet smile stood Etienne Réhmy.

"What's the matter, man?" he said, for I was still trembling. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I have," I answered, "or very nearly. It's only by an almighty stroke of luck that I'm not a ghost myself."

We sat down, and I started to tell my story, but Réhmy refused to hear a word of it until I had drained my glass. The golden wine of Spain put heart into me, and I began to recover command of my nerves. Rapidly I told him of what had passed in the bull-ring, of the mishap which had befallen Gaston, of my interview with the Marquis in the infirmary, of my arrangement to meet Suzanne at Santa Eulalia, and lastly of the incident of the overcoat.

Réhmy listened in silence, but he kept his eyes steadily on my face, and his own was graver than ever when I had finished.

"You are quite sure that the man in the red shirt deliberately intended to cause Gaston's death?" he said.

"Perfectly sure," I answered. "He tripped up Gaston intentionally just in front of the bull."

"Worse and worse," reflected Réhmy aloud. "Here

is Gaston seriously injured and apparently delirious, and the Professor so close upon our heels that he has already discovered that you are taking a hand."

He paused a moment, and then added :

"What was it that Gaston said?"

"Just a phrase which he repeated twice over: 'The Lord of Fear . . . The Lord of Fear.'"

"And the effect on the Marquis was noticeable?"

"It was startling."

"And for the moment Gaston cannot even communicate with me," said Réhmy, almost with a groan. "I must follow up the clue for myself."

"I am with you there, Etienne," said I.

He looked at me and shook his head in hopeless rebuke.

"The risk," he began.

"The risk," I broke in, "seems to me just as great if I turn my back on the Professor as if I decide to face him. I have always felt somehow that none of us will ever be really safe so long as the Professor is at large. And that brings me again to the question: Why don't you go to the police? You were not in favour of it this morning, but things have happened since, and the case of Gaston is desperate. It is just possible that the girl may be willing to help us. But what can she do? If these men have decided that he shall die in the hospital, she will find it very difficult to interfere."

Réhmy thought a moment.

"Meet the girl as you have arranged," he said at last.

"If you find that she can be trusted, she will at least be able to watch the position, and let us know how things are going. As to the police . . ."

He paused.

"You will go to them?" I said eagerly. I'm afraid that I can never quite get away from my British confidence in the police.

"It's the last resort," said Réhmy, "but Gaston must somehow be protected."

"Surely we have evidence enough to go upon?"

"I have little hope that the police will act. The Marquis is one of the most powerful and popular men in Spain, and the Chief Commissioner here is, I believe, Del Puente's personal friend. However, I will go to police headquarters while you are keeping your appointment at the cathedral, and I will tell the Chief Commissioner as much as I think necessary. I don't suppose he will help us for a moment. I have already made several attempts to get in touch with him, and he has always put difficulties in my way."

He paused and added:

"One of us should also call at the hospital to see if Gaston has yet arrived."

"I will call there myself," I said. "It is on my way to the cathedral."

Réhmy agreed to this arrangement, and as it was now nearly half-past seven, we rose to go.

"We will leave by the back door," said Réhmy, "and I should advise you to leave your overcoat on the peg. Fortunately I know the people here. The proprietor is a Frenchman, and he has two sons whom I knew as soldiers in the war."

He beckoned a waiter and said something in a low tone. The man bowed, and took us at once behind the polished wood counter to the back of the café. There we met the proprietor, a fat little Frenchman from Picardy, all smiles and very anxious to oblige his friend, M. le Capitaine.

Réhmy rapidly explained that there were some *cretins* on the look-out for us in the street, and that we needed to show them a clean pair of heels.

The little man nodded.

"I will let you out by the back door, Monsieur," he

said, "and what's more, my sons, Jules and Marcel, shall go along with you. They remember you well, M. le Capitaine."

Réhmy thanked the little man, and we moved off through the kitchen to a door which opened into a small lane.

Meanwhile, two brown-faced young men, dressed as waiters, had got into overcoats, and were prepared to follow us. Both had their hands in their right-hand pockets, and signified by a gesture that they were prepared to shoot at a signal from us.

Outside we separated. Réhmy, accompanied by Jules, turned to the right and went towards police headquarters, while I, taking with me Marcel, continued straight on towards the cathedral of Santa Eulalia.

Chapter V

I Disappoint a Lady

I WALKED in silence by the side of my companion through the narrow, winding streets of the old town in no very cheerful frame of mind. Gaston was hurt and in danger, and unless Etienne was successful with the police, our only hope lay with the girl whom I was about to see.

Colouring all my thoughts was the conviction that I was now finally committed to this adventure: and, strange to say, there was in this conviction a queer kind of relief. In spite of my two years spent at home in complete tranquillity, I had always had the feeling secretly that the day must come when the Professor and I would meet and finally settle our accounts.

Within sight of the cathedral I stopped my guide and asked him to show me the hospital to which Gaston had been taken. It was a large, barrack-like building, about four hundred yards away in an unfrequented side-street.

At the gate I was stopped by a concierge, to whom I explained that I wished to inquire after a friend, hurt in the bull-ring, who had been brought to the hospital some time after five o'clock in the afternoon. The man was polite and sympathetic, but maintained that no one had entered the hospital since the previous day. Yielding to my insistence, he sent a porter to make special inquiries. The answer was categorical. Not a single new patient had been admitted to the hospital since eight o'clock that morning; nor had any request for admission been made.

I was much dismayed by this intelligence, for I could no longer have any doubt that the Marquis had given special instructions to the doctor in charge of the case. Gaston was almost certainly in the hands of the Professor and his confederates. My only remaining chance was to win the confidence and help of the girl I was going to meet.

Passing up a narrow lane with a high stone wall on our left, we presently stopped opposite a Gothic porch giving access to the cloisters of the cathedral.

"There is a small door at the end and on the right," said my guide. "It opens into the south transept. I will wait for you here and watch for anyone who may enter."

I nodded and passed into the cloister, round which I walked to the door indicated. The whole building, which is of late Spanish Gothic, was bathed in purple gloom. The mystic arches, magical in the veiling light, seemed curiously unreal in that land of sun-drenched spaces, like the brooding of a northern civilisation in exile; and, to point the contrast, rose six or seven graceful palms, suggesting the clear, dry air of the South. In the midst was a great stone basin on which there floated duck and sleepy water-fowl, and upon the whole place rested a spirit of untroubled ease.

As I approached the church and pushed my way past the beggars at the door, the Professor, with his modern weapons and his air of triumphant science, seemed suddenly remote, a shadow that would pass.

This impression remained with me, and was strengthened when I crossed the threshold. For there came to me there, in the magnificent dusk, words that were old when Jerome translated the Scriptures and Benedict assembled the first of his black-robed followers—words that came from a great distance, chanted slowly by a wailing choir somewhere behind the spears of light which stabbed, but scarcely illumined, the darkness of the sanctuary :

“ A sagitta volante in die ; a negotio perambulante in tenebris : ab incursu et daemónio meridiano.”

(From the arrow that flieth in the day ; from the plague that walketh in the darkness ; from the assault of the evil one in the noon-day.)

And presently, when the Psalm was done, came up the solemn warning that the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

And I knew that all these horrors awaited me outside in the unfriendly streets of the noisy city. Here in this quiet gloom, however, they were shut out, mere creatures of the mind which imagines a vain thing.

In a little while, when my eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, I began to look about me in search of Suzanne de Polhac. The church was not crowded, though there were a certain number of people, women for the most part, kneeling in prayer before a statue of the Virgin surrounded by votive candles at the entrance to the north transept, or passing slowly up and down the marble stairs which lead to the tomb of Santa Eulalia beneath the sanctuary itself. I watched those moving figures carefully, but saw none which resembled Mademoiselle de

Polhac. They were mostly old women performing their devotions.

Then, suddenly, I saw her. She was mounting the steps of the shrine, and, as her head reached the level of the pavement upon which I stood, her face was lit by the light of the candles round the statue of the Virgin, so that I recognised her immediately. She was dressed for the opera, her evening frock covered by a dark velvet cloak trimmed with fur. On her head was a mantilla of black lace, of which the delicate folds hid her hair and neck and allowed little more to be seen than the eyes and forehead.

I moved forward to meet her. She caught sight of me at once, but she made no sign beyond a slight gesture with her left hand to indicate that I was to follow her. She turned to the right and walked slowly past the statue of the Virgin till she reached the entrance to the north aisle, down which she turned.

I moved quickly after her. She stopped at the foot of the fourth pillar on the left, and turning round awaited me.

She looked at me, obviously eager with curiosity.

"You must be brief," she said at once. "My mother is to meet me here in a quarter of an hour."

She spoke in French, and I answered her in the same language.

"That will be time enough, Mademoiselle," I said, and at the same time moved a little closer, so that we both stood in a gloom so deep that I could scarcely see my companion.

"What is it that you want to say to me?" she began abruptly. "I know, of course, that you are not an American journalist."

"Was my impersonation as bad as that?" I asked.

"It was like a page from Sinclair Lewis," she replied.

"I have been to Boston, you see."

"But I was from Milwaukee," I objected.

"Tell that to the Marquis," she retorted.

I was astonished to find myself talking thus lightly in that solemn place, when every moment was of importance and danger pressing in on every side, but her vivacity was infectious.

"Tell me," she went on imperiously, and I recognised here the tone of a girl who was accustomed to obedience, "why was my friend Gaston de Blanchegarde masquerading this afternoon in that horrible disguise? He was always eccentric, but there are limits to what one expects of a friend."

I perceived that she was indignant, and I realised what a shock it must have been for her to surprise Gaston, apparently for no good reason, in such a *métier*.

"He is really a friend of yours?" I asked.

"One of my oldest friends," she answered promptly. "We have known each other all our lives, though I haven't seen him lately—once only, in fact, since," and for the first time her voice faltered for an instant, "since my father died."

"Then he has told you nothing of what he has been doing of late?" I said.

"Nothing," she replied. "Is he not still in the Air Service?"

"He is still in the French Air Service, but he is often, as you may know, seconded for special work. He is here on a mission of great—of vital importance, and he is in danger."

I saw her head move back slightly at my last words.

"I am glad of that," she said surprisingly. She was thinking not of the danger, which she had yet to realise, but of the fact that Gaston stood excused.

There was a short silence, and then she spoke again.

"You say that Gaston is in danger?" she continued.

"He is in great danger," I replied. "And I think you

may be able to help us. But first I must tell you who I am, and then I hope you will allow me to ask you one or two questions."

"Quickly then," she responded.

"My name is Thomas Preston," I began.

She gave a little gasp of astonishment.

"Then I know you well. Gaston has often talked to me about you."

I could feel that in the twilight she was trying to examine me more closely.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Preston," she added at last. "I know that Gaston owes you a great deal."

She paused, and then asked :

"But how do you come to be here? What does it all mean?"

"I will tell you as much as I know, which unfortunately is very little. But first let me ask you my questions."

"Of course."

"Who exactly is the Marquis Guardalmedina del Puente? Is he a friend of yours?"

"No," she answered immediately. "I never met him till yesterday. He is a friend of my stepfather. He has asked me to stay with him for some weeks at his château in Andalusia."

"M. Réhmy," I said, "has told me of your stepfather. His name, I understand, is Dupuis?"

"Yes," she said, and then added, in a perfectly expressionless tone : "My mother married him four months ago. My own father died last year."

She paused a moment, and then continued rapidly :

"M. Dupuis is a financier. He has business with the Marquis del Puente and with a German count, the Graf von Königsberg, who is staying with him."

"What kind of business?"

"I have no idea," she answered. "I know very little about my stepfather, for I never met him before he married mother. He has some business, however, with the Graf von Konigsberg, and it is evidently of importance, for he has been engaged upon it now for a considerable time, long before he met and married my mother, so I believe. And recently he has been meeting this German count at all kinds of places in Spain—Madrid, Bilbao and here in Barcelona."

"Does your stepfather take you with him on these occasions?" I inquired.

"My stepfather usually travels alone. This, indeed, is the first time mother and I have accompanied him; he insisted on our coming."

"You have mentioned a certain Graf von Konigsberg."

"Yes," she said, with something like a return to her original lightness of tone. "The Graf is at present the one bright spot in our lives. I am not, as you may have guessed, very fond of my stepfather, and I am inclined to dislike the Marquis. He is what we call a *faux bonhomme*. Am I being too frank? But the Graf is charming."

I stared at her in amazement. This was new light on the Professor.

"How long have you known this man?" I asked.

"We made his acquaintance only a few days ago. But I'm sure he will be a perfect godsend at the château. He is one of the most interesting men I have ever met."

"You find him charming?"

"Charming and just a little mysterious, which adds, perhaps, to his charm. He can talk about anything, and he talks like an angel. And then I suppose I am not quite exempt from a certain vanity. The Graf is extremely flattering."

"Flattering," I gasped.

"He talks to me as though I were a person of intelligence."

"I perceive, Mademoiselle, that you have made a conquest."

"And I perceive," she answered quickly, "that you know the Graf, and that you do not like him."

"My conversations with that gentleman," I said, "have been less fortunate than yours. I am sorry to disappoint you, but the Graf von Konigsberg is not quite the man he seems."

"Men seldom are, Mr. Preston," she said, and I detected in her manner a shade of offence. This was obviously a lady who was not accustomed to have her likings challenged.

I paused a moment, wondering how to make my revelation.

"You said just now," I began, "that Gaston had talked to you about me."

"Yes," she said.

"Then in that case you have probably heard of someone else—the man who has since become the Graf von Konigsberg."

"Why," she exclaimed, "is he also a person in disguise? First Gaston, then the gentleman from Milwaukee and now my charming friend who talks like an angel. It is a regular masquerade."

I put my hand on her arm.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "you are going to realise that this is infinitely more serious than you can imagine. I have told you that Gaston is in great danger. You will appreciate how great the danger is when I tell you that the Graf von Konigsberg . . ."

I paused, fearing the effect of my words.

"Mr. Preston," said the girl with a touch of disdain, "you will at least pay me the compliment to which I

alluded a moment ago. Do not treat me like a child. Who is the Graf von Konigsberg? "

"The Graf von Konigsberg is Professor Anselm Kreutzemark."

I saw at once that she knew to whom I was referring.

"You don't mean," she said, "that this man is just . . . the Professor."

The cathedral was now so dark that I could not see her face. I did not know what thoughts were passing through her mind. I can only tell you what she said; and, whatever bewilderment or dismay she may have felt, I assure you that when, after the lapse of nearly a full minute, she spoke again, she seemed completely to have mastered the significance of the fact which had just been conveyed to her.

"It is serious indeed," she said. "What are we to do? "

"First," I replied, "we must find out to what place Gaston has been taken."

"But I know very well where he is," she replied. "He was brought to the villa this evening—'Las Delicias,' the villa of the Marquis on Tibidabo. Owing to your warning in the infirmary this afternoon, I did not tell anyone that I recognised him. But I took a sympathetic interest in the case, and he is regarded as in a sense my patient. He is in the hands of the doctor we met behind the bull-ring, and they are waiting for him to recover consciousness. The Graf, or I suppose I should say the Professor, has twice inquired after his condition. I told you the Graf was very kind," she concluded with a catch of the breath.

"Can you remember exactly anything that was said? "

"I remember the exact words which the Professor used on the second occasion. He said: 'I will talk to the man myself as soon as he recovers.' "

I drew a breath of mingled relief and alarm.

"Then for the moment he is safe," I pointed out. "He is safe, in fact, as long as he remains unconscious."

We were silent a moment, considering the situation. At last I said :—

"Could you not contrive, somehow, to stay with him, and, as soon as he shows signs of recovery, warn him to remain unconscious until we can come to his assistance?"

"I will do what I can," she said doubtfully.

"It is our only chance," I insisted. "The moment Gaston is in a fit condition to speak, the Professor will carry out his purpose, whatever that may be, and the Professor is merciless."

"Then I will contrive it somehow," said the girl. "Gaston shall be warned, and I will keep as close to him as I can."

There was another moment of silence between us. I could feel that she was shaken by the sudden urgency of the position—indeed, she would otherwise have been scarcely human. She had lost completely the vivacity of her earlier manner, and I suddenly felt uncontrollably drawn to the quiet figure by my side, very white and still in the gloom.

"Courage, Mademoiselle," I said. "The Professor is dangerous, but he is not now in his own country, and he has to go very carefully after the ruin of his former plans. Already the net is closing about him. It is perhaps only a matter of hours."

We were unable to say more, for at that instant there was a sound of footsteps in the aisle, and a moment later a woman dressed in severe black approached us, and said something to Mademoiselle de Polhac, who immediately turned to me.

"My mother is waiting in the car outside. This is my maid Marie. She comes from the home of Gaston, and

she will, I know, be willing to help us. I would trust her with my life. Good-bye, Mr. Preston."

"Good-bye," I said.

I raised her hand to my lips, and a moment later she was gone. I looked after her, deeply moved by her courage and resource. I felt that she had presence of mind and wit enough to do what she had promised, and that Gaston would be safe at least for another twenty-four hours.

I walked quickly to the altar of the Virgin, and by the candlelight wrote down the address of the Marquis's villa. Then I left the church and rejoined Marcel. He told me, in answer to my inquiry, that he had seen no one in the least degree suspicious. None but women, in fact, had passed the door since I had entered.

Together we walked back to the Hotel Portsmouth. There I left him, promising to ring up the Café Oriental and ask for him if I should again require his services. The good fellow ignored entirely my somewhat clumsy effort to reward him for the trouble and risk which he had run on my behalf.

At the hotel I inquired at once for Réhmy, who, at my suggestion, had taken the second bed in my double room. I was informed that he had not yet returned, and I accordingly sat down in the lounge to await him. Evidently his interview with the Chief of Police was more difficult than either of us had imagined.

I thought over, as I waited, the information which I had received from Mademoiselle de Polhac. It all tended to confirm Réhmy's impression that the Professor had some considerable scheme in preparation. For some months he had apparently been holding frequent conferences with the man Dupuis, stepfather of Suzanne, and Dupuis, it seemed, was a successful financier. I felt that to Réhmy these somewhat mysterious conferences would not fail to be of interest.

But Réhmy still failed to appear, and to pass the time I called for a selection of periodicals. Among them was the current number of *L'Illustration*, which apparently, for want of a better subject described the work of the French missionaries in the north of China and Mongolia. Among other matters it related that three Jesuit priests had arrived six weeks before at Jehol, north of the Great Wall, with news that they were the last survivors of a mission station which had been massacred by Mongols five hundred miles further north on the great plains. They reported that large areas of the country in which they had formerly carried on their work were now closed to strangers, and they attributed the action of the native inhabitants less to fanaticism than to the desire to exclude all foreigners from their domains.

At this moment, however, a page appeared at my elbow.

"The Señor," he said, "is wanted on the telephone."

I rose and went to the box. It was, I hoped, a message from Réhmy, but I found myself listening to a voice which I had never heard before, and which inquired in Spanish whether Mr. Thomas Preston was speaking.

I replied in the affirmative.

"This," continued the voice, "is Señor Cunha-Riario."

My mind was brought back with a jerk to the affairs of Jebbut & Jebbut, and to the real reason of my journey to Barcelona. Señor Cunha-Riario, you will remember, was the man with whom I was to discuss the contract, the man whom Réhmy that afternoon had gone to meet in my place.

"My compliments, Señor," I answered. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Your friend who met me at the boat was most kind, and did everything that was possible. Are you engaged for this evening?"

"No," I said.

"Then would you perhaps be good enough to dine with me? Unexpected developments make it necessary for me to leave Barcelona earlier than I thought."

"With pleasure," I said. "Where shall I meet you?"

"At the restaurant on Tibidabo," replied the thin metallic voice. "I shall be expecting you at 9.30 p.m."

I wondered rapidly whether Réhmy might possibly have need of me. Was it wise to accept this invitation?

"One moment, Señor," I began.

But a click at the other end of the wire indicated that my invisible host had already cut me off.

Chapter VI

I Mind my own Business

I PUT up the receiver and left the telephone-box somewhat disconcerted. I had not intended to accept unreservedly the invitation of Señor Cunha-Riario, but he had been too quick for me. To be in reasonable time to meet him for dinner I should have to leave the hotel very shortly, but Réhmy had not yet returned, and I knew he would be most anxious to have an account of my interview with Mademoiselle de Polhac. Señor Cunha-Riario, however, would not be expecting me, and I could not fail to keep my appointment without giving offence to my host and running a serious risk of endangering the contract so skilfully secured by Uncle James.

I decided to leave a message for Réhmy, and to start at once for Tibidabo.

I sat down and wrote a short note explaining what had happened, and adding a brief summary of my conversation with Mademoiselle de Polhac. Réhmy would thus know without loss of time that Gaston was lying at the villa of the Marquis, and that Mademoiselle de Polhac would be doing her utmost to protect him while we took what steps

we could to rescue him. I also added a few words concerning the information she had given me about the activities of the Professor and her stepfather, Dupuis.

I told the hall porter to give my note to Réhmy the moment he arrived, and to say that I hoped to be back by midnight or shortly afterwards.

Tibidabo is a tall hill to the south of Barcelona. It governs the town, and from the plateau on the top you can see, if the day is clear, the Pyrenees on one hand and the Balearic Isles on the other. It is a great place of resort for the citizens, and there is a kind of permanent exhibition on the top, a miniature and dilapidated Earls' Court. There is also a large and very excellent restaurant, and a great church dedicated to Our Lady, only half-finished, of which the gaunt beginnings of the tower are visible all over Barcelona.

Soon we turned sharply into the Avenido del Tibidabo, which leads to the bottom of the funicular and is bordered by the houses of the rich, built flamboyantly of coloured tiles and zinc, with bulging roofs and twisted windows which defy description. It struck me as I was thus carried on my way that I should have done well, perhaps, to ring up the Café Oriental and obtain the services of Marcel as guide and protector. But I fear that I am never likely to shine as a secret agent. It is not natural to me, and never will be, I am afraid, to look furtively to right and left for first and second murderer. I had not, however, forgotten one thing—I carried a very satisfactory pistol in my pocket, and I was determined to use it, if necessary, without a moment's hesitation.

I reached the funicular just in time to catch an ascending car, and soon I was rising slowly through woods of umbrella pines in the scented darkness of a warm spring night. I was beside a window; and, as the car slowly climbed the hillside, Barcelona became a city of ten

thousand lights, some isolated and twinkling, others a blur or bar of radiance marking the sweep of some great thoroughfare. It was a wonderful sight, for in the clear air the lights not only of the town, but of fishing villages far up the coast towards the Pyrenees and France were clearly visible. Irresistibly I thought of my friend Réhmy somewhere down there in the city spread at my feet, and of the Professor weaving his invisible nets to take us all.

The restaurant at the top was full of diners, mostly couples, and there was a large sprinkling of tourists. I derived a strange comfort from the obviously commonplace character of my surroundings. I had been growing fanciful, and it was reassuring to find myself once more in a thoroughly tedious and normal world. I went at once in search of the head waiter, to whom I explained that I was to meet a gentleman who would arrive in a few minutes. Had the gentleman reserved a table? His name was Señor Cunha-Riario.

The head waiter responded at once to the name. Señor Cunha-Riario had taken a table in the corner of the room by the palms, from which a splendid view of lamplit Barcelona could be obtained. He had telephoned that he might be a few minutes late, and had given orders that I was to be welcomed and offered an *aperitif*.

I found myself comfortably installed opposite a table laid for two in the embrasure of a big plate-glass window.

Impatiently I surveyed the scene, the large room plastered with gilt, the elaborately appointed tables, waiters hurrying with a supple deference at the beckoning of a fat finger, or proffering rich dishes to the clients, gross men with their painted women ostentatiously lavish and indulgent. The air was heavy with the smell of food. Somewhere out of sight an orchestra was playing a melancholy Sevillana which called up visions of the

empty plains of Andalusia, and of the sun setting on their dusty rim, and made the vulgar scene intolerable with its evocation of a land, hard and spacious under a wide sky.

The shadow still lay upon me, and I could not get rid of a queer feeling that even in this garish restaurant, with its elaborate air of being entirely at the service of anyone with the necessary cash, things were not altogether what they seemed. I found myself counting on my host to set that right. Nothing could be more materially of this world than a man of business from South America intent on the purchasing of bedsteads. I drew his picture in advance. He would be very obviously rich, of an olive hue, wearing diamonds, puffy with good living, much too well dressed, and smelling of *quelques fleurs*. I had met such men before, excellent for business purposes, who lived invariably in the richest suites of the best hotels in an atmosphere of brocaded chairs and marble bathrooms.

Then all at once he appeared, coming towards me in the wake of the head waiter, and I can still remember the curious shock, as of a hope unexpectedly defeated, with which I encountered him.

To begin with, the man was fair, and I found myself at the moment of our greeting looking into a pair of steady grey eyes. Their look was candidly inquiring, and yet there was about it a quality of reserve, almost of meditation. They were the eyes of a solitary man, normally preoccupied with his own thoughts, looking beyond what was actually before them to some distant prospect, or perhaps to some secret vision. I had met with it in the eyes of sailors and explorers, a look which is at the same time alert and steadfast, observant and yet withdrawn. They were the eyes of an ascetic, and the rest of the man, lean and spare, obviously fit and complete master of all his faculties, athletic in mind and body, was in keeping with the eyes. In height he was not above five

feet three or four, his face aquiline, of the type established by the Renaissance painters; with thin lips and a high forehead, his hair light brown, turning grey and a little thin at the temples. I judged him to be between forty and fifty years of age. He was dressed neatly in a grey suit, and he moved with grace and decision. Jewellery was conspicuous by its absence except that on the first finger of his left hand was a plain gold signet ring larger than is usual and engraved with that common symbol or mascot the swastika, a cross each of whose arms was a separate right-angle.

I rose to meet him, and he excused himself briefly for being a little late.

He invited me, as we sat down, to choose our dinner from the elaborate menu placed before us.

I saw he took but little interest in the process, and I quickly suggested one or two obvious dishes, which he accepted without further comment or inquiry.

He handed the card back to the waiter, whom he addressed in Spanish, and I noted that, though he had paid little attention to our choice, his instructions were given with the accuracy and brevity of an army order.

Then he turned to me with a renewed apology.

"I'm afraid I have kept you waiting," he said, speaking English. "And I must ask you to forgive me. I have had a great deal to do."

I murmured a conventional disclaimer, and followed it by a remark about the beauty of the city, which through the window lay spread romantically to our view.

"This is hardly," I said, "the sort of place in which to discuss the price of hardware."

"Hardware?" he echoed, and for an instant he seemed to be at a loss. Then he looked at me, I thought, in some confusion, and added hastily: "Yes, of course. We are to talk of hardware. But do not let us think of

business yet. With your kind permission, I should like to leave that until after dinner."

And he went on to sing the praises of Barcelona, a city of which he seemed to be especially fond.

I took advantage of a pause in his tribute to Barcelona.

"It is a city," he had said, "which I find peculiarly sympathetic. To come back to it is almost like returning home."

"You are, then, of Spain, Señor?" I inquired.

He looked at me keenly, and there was at that moment more reserve than candour in his eyes.

"Of Spain, perhaps, as much as any other country," he said, "but I have travelled so much that it is becoming difficult for me to claim one country more than another. For the moment, however, I am from South America."

"I understand you live like princes there," I ventured.

His lips tightened in disdain.

"If princes have the tastes of a billiard-marker," he said. "I refer, of course, only to the men who grow rich in spite of themselves."

"I am not," I said, "much of a traveller myself. I know Europe fairly well, but I have always wanted to go further, especially to the East—India, Thibet, Afghanistan."

The searching grey eyes were again scanning my features.

"Who knows," he said. "Perhaps some day you will."

"Hardly possible," I sighed. "It is unlikely that I shall ever be called upon to sell bedsteads to the nomads of Central Asia."

"Bedsteads?" he echoed. "Oh, yes. . . . But that is a forbidden subject—at least until after dinner."

We were silent for some minutes, and, taking my soup, I began once more covertly to observe my companion.

He sat opposite me crumbling his bread, rather at a loss for conversation. For my part, I was distinctly attracted by his personality. He was so unlike any other business man I had ever met, and I sought in my mind for a subject which might draw him out.

"There has not been much of interest in the papers," I began.

"No," he answered. "Events have moved very slowly since Locarno."

I took the cue, and talked about the European situation, referring at random to French difficulties, German hesitations and the Italian attitude.

He listened to me in silence, but I could feel that I was winning his attention, and I was oddly pleased to be able to do so.

"I congratulate you," he said, when I had finished, "on your summary of the European situation. Europe is, as you say, very far from secure. England and her allies during the war missed a great opportunity. England, France and America had the world at their feet in November, 1918, and they might have done almost anything. You might, had you chosen, have formed a United States of Europe. Instead of which you produced the Treaty of Versailles."

I looked at him in renewed amazement. South Americans do not usually have such decided views on European politics.

"But you will admit," I protested, "that we are doing our best to put things right again. We have now the treaties of Locarno, and the League of Nations is growing stronger every day."

Señor Cunha-Riario was looking into his plate, and a faint smile was playing about his lips.

"In the country from which I have just arrived," he said, "there is sometimes an earthquake. A house may

be shaken to its foundations. One day, unless it is almost entirely rebuilt, the house will certainly fall. Meanwhile, it is the custom of the country to hold it up by means of a great baulk of timber thrust against the wall."

My mind went back inevitably to the words of Réhmy that morning in the little café when he had alluded to a Europe where almost anything might happen. It needed but a blow to the shaken house.

"Feeling as you do," I said, smiling at my host, "you must be rather glad that your country, at least, is well out of it. The nations of South America are so closely bound together by common interests that they can successfully outlive the ruin of the rest of the world."

For just an instant he had a blank, startled look as of a man suddenly tapped upon the shoulder.

"Er—yes," he said. "Of course. South America, as you say, is well out of it. But we are not all blind to the tragedies of modern civilisation—even in South America."

And then, like a man who felt that he had perhaps been led to betray too frankly his opinions, he hastened to change the subject.

I will not attempt to give in detail the rest of our conversation. Suffice it that I very soon realised that I was talking to a man of exceptional experience. He had travelled far, not in the beaten tracks, but adventurously. I kept surprising him into showing, quite inadvertently, a knowledge of unfrequented parts of the world, for I talked continually of subjects that took us far afield, having myself a natural but, so far, thwarted ambition to visit distant countries. I found that he easily forgot himself in such discourse, but ever and again he would suddenly stop short as though he were committing an indiscretion, and for a moment would be stubbornly inaccessible.

I remember, in particular, our happiest topic. He was, it seemed, an enthusiastic horseman, and I had interested him greatly in English hunting, a sport to which he was a stranger. My enthusiastic description of a typical day in the hunting-field seemed greatly to appeal to him, and I felt instinctively that he had appreciably warmed to me, and was becoming quite cordially friendly. He was led to talk with an equal enthusiasm of riding in other lands, in which he passed bewilderingly from Mexico to the Caucasus, from the *haute école* of the circus master to the rough riding of the Pampas, from the desert cavaliers of Arabia Felix to the yellow horsemen of the Asian plains. The charm of his conversation and the enthusiasm which united us were such that for a moment I quite forgot my anxiety to leave as early as possible.

"The Bedouins," he said, "are marvellous, and the horse they ride reminds me of your Shakespeare: *he bounds from the earth as if his entrails were hairs—he trots the air—the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes*. But there are better horsemen yet than the Bedouins, and better steeds than the Arab. Wait till you have ridden the horses of Mongolia, the horses on which the shepherds of Asia drive their flocks without any need of a sheepdog, the horses on which they rode with Genghis Khan and Tamerlane."

"Then you have ridden in Mongolia," I exclaimed.

He stared at me a moment, and then said :

"No . . . that is to say Mongolia is hardly a country. It is a vast region of the world."

"Which, as I happened to read to-day in a newspaper, appears to be now entirely closed to foreigners."

"Indeed," he said, leaning across the table. "That is interesting. What did it say, exactly?"

"There appears to have been some trouble with missionaries."

“ And where did this occur ? ”

“ I do not know precisely. Somewhere in Mongolia.”

“ That is not particularly helpful,” he said, smiling. “ Mongolia is so enormous that no one ever really knows when he begins to be there, and it has never been properly explored. Nor is that at all surprising. There is little to attract the modern wayfarer. I cannot claim to know it, but I will admit to having been on the wrong side of the Great Wall of China.”

He proceeded to amuse me with some account of the nomads of Central Asia, who seemed still to be living like the patriarchs in the book of Genesis. But the zest had gone from our talk, and I caught him looking at me from time to time with a queer kind of compunction.

I began again to be anxious to get away. With this object in view, I tried to bring round the conversation to the business for which I had come. But I still found him reluctant to discuss with me the affairs of Jebbut & Jebbut.

It was after eleven o'clock by the time we had finished our coffee and liqueurs, and I had just made up my mind to bring him strictly to the point, when I saw approaching our table an altogether unexpected individual. He was dressed in the livery of a chauffeur, and was, I saw at once, some kind of Oriental. He had a flat face, of a yellowish hue, very prominent cheekbones, with wide-set slanting eyes and a broad low forehead. He was in a chauffeur's livery. He bowed very low to his master, and said something in a language which I could not understand.

Señor Cunha-Riario rose.

“ The car is awaiting us,” he said. “ If you will be good enough to accompany me to my rooms, we will discuss our business, where we shall be more at home. I do not think it will take us long to settle matters to our mutual satisfaction.”

I assented, and we left the restaurant together. Outside was a magnificent eight-cylinder Hispano Suiza car, a superb limousine, into which we stepped. Señor Cunha-Riario evidently did himself proud, a fact which augured well for the interests of Jebbut & Jebbut.

We moved silently down the big road, which runs in a series of loops and spirals from the summit of Tibidabo to Barcelona. In the car conversation ceased between us. I sat back on the cushioned seat, and tried, but I fear with little success, to concentrate on the business proposals which I was to put before this princely stranger. I had a notebook full of details, and as my host appeared to be a man of character, I hoped that the negotiations would be short and to the point.

I was aroused from my reflections by a slight jolt of the car as it turned abruptly to the right. The windows were covered with silk blinds drawn down, and I pulled one of them aside and looked out. We were running between two dark hedges of some kind of tree, which was unfamiliar. I turned to my companion in some surprise.

"Are we on the right road?" I asked. "I thought you were staying at the Ritz?"

"Not since this evening," he answered. "I was lucky enough to meet some friends there to-day, who have very kindly invited me to stay at their villa. I will send you back in the car to your hotel when he have finished our business."

"It's very kind of you," I said. "I'm afraid I am giving you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all," he answered shortly.

At that moment the car stopped opposite the front door of what appeared to be a large and comfortable villa, with a light porch, in which two servants in livery were standing.

We got out and walked together up the steps. The

two servants silently threw open a double door, through which we stepped. My companion laid his hand on my arm. It was a friendly gesture, and I felt that it promised well for our deal. But his grip tightened a little as we crossed the threshold, and when I looked at him, there was an expression in his face which I could not read. I could almost have sworn that he had an impulse to warn me of something. Then in a tone strangely apologetic, and looking me squarely between the eyes, he said :

“ I am sorry about this, but I’m afraid it had to be.”

“ What do you mean,” I began, but could get no further.

We had entered a wide hall, and there, awaiting us, stood a man whom I knew, with a green parrot perched on his shoulder.

“ Good evening, my dear Mr. Preston,” said Professor Kreutzemark.

Chapter VII

I Walk into the Parlour

WITHOUT an instant’s hesitation my hand slipped to the hip pocket in which I kept my revolver. But it was already too late, as I might have known. In front of the door, which now was closed, stood the two impassive Spanish servants in their bright liveries of blue and yellow, and between them was the little Oriental chauffeur, a pistol in his hand levelled at the fourth button of my waistcoat. I looked instantly round for Señor Cunha-Riario, but I found that he was no longer at my side, and I saw him walking with a quick firm step up a flight of stairs leading to the upper floors.

Then came the voice of the Professor.

“ Be good enough to raise your hands, Mr. Preston. It is not a comfortable position, but knowing your impulsive temperament, I think we shall all feel more at ease when Kara has removed your revolver.”

At the sound of his voice, so smooth and yet so deadly, a host of memories rushed up from the past and overwhelmed me. Slowly, under the menacing eyes of the little yellow man in livery, I raised my hands. The Professor had not moved, and the cold, grave smile of welcome was still upon his lips. I saw that he was but little changed, except that his face was whiter than when I had seen it last, and the yellow beard rather less luxuriant. I remembered vaguely how Réhmy had told me that he had shaved it.

"Oh, you are a fool!" said a voice sharply in German, so that I started. It came from the evil bird, his parrot, perched as usual on his shoulder.

"Silence, Ahasuerus," said Professor Kreutzemark, lifting a finger and ruffling the feathers on its head. "That is not at all the way to greet an old acquaintance."

The bird chuckled loudly, as though it fully understood (as perhaps it did) the irony of its master.

At the same moment I was aware that the Spanish servants had advanced and were disarming me. They removed my pistol, and were about to turn out my other pockets when the Professor ordered them to cease.

"There is no need to do more than disarm you, Mr. Preston," he said, as one of the servants handed him my pistol on a salver. "You will realise now, I am sure, the uselessness of any further resistance."

I maintained a sullen silence, the only thought in my head being that Ahasuerus was right. I had walked straight into a prepared trap. The strange manner and the riddling personality of Señor Cunha-Riario were now explained, and I felt all the futility of wisdom after the event.

The Professor seemed to read what was passing in my mind.

"Is it so bitter, then?" he asked.

Then, after a pause, he added :

“ Believe me, Mr. Preston, this meeting is none of my seeking, as I hope to explain. I have little interest or leisure to devote to the renewing of old associations. I have other and more important matters in hand. Meanwhile, I would invite you to adopt a rather more comfortable attitude. You may lower your hands, Mr. Preston.”

I lowered them helplessly as he spoke, and at a sign from the servants, who motioned me to go forward, I followed the Professor as he turned and preceded me towards a door at the other end of the hall.

It opened into a sitting-room, low, white-painted and sparsely furnished, in the Spanish manner, with old furniture, a great carved table of black walnut wood and heavy chairs with leather seats. On the wall hung a strange and terrible picture of a Dominican monk in an ecstasy of prayer. His gaunt face, half-turned towards me, was charged with a fanaticism and a resignation which only the hand of a master could achieve.

The Professor stood aside to allow me to draw level with him, and he followed my gaze.

“ Yes,” he said. “ It is a remarkable picture—a fine El Greco, and an heirloom of our host.”

But my eyes had strayed already from the picture to the single occupant of the room, and as I saw who it was I abandoned what little hope was left.

Seated in one of the old carved chairs was Etienne Réhmy. He rose as I entered, and I saw that his hands were manacled. His appearance was somewhat dishevelled, and his clothes were torn. He looked at me quietly, betraying neither astonishment nor dismay.

“ You too, Thomas,” he said, with a sad little smile. “ I’m beginning to think that this is not one of our better evenings.”

"Oh, come," said the Professor. "I intended this as a pleasant surprise for you both."

"You have a quaint idea of making yourself agreeable, Professor," said Réhmy, apparently quite undisturbed. And ruefully he displayed his manacled hands.

"Hardly a fair retort, Captain Réhmy," said the Professor. "I received you like an old friend, and immediately you assaulted all before you. I have no wish to cause any more inconvenience than is absolutely necessary, and I would accordingly propose that during our conversation—for I am sure we shall have a good deal to say to one another—you give me your word to refrain from any further violence. Such an arrangement will add to the comfort and convenience of us all."

During this characteristic speech I did not fail to notice in the pocket of the Professor the outline of my pistol in the grasp of his right hand.

I looked inquiringly at Réhmy, who nodded his agreement.

"Very well," he said. "But it is understood that the arrangement may be cancelled with reasonable notice on both sides."

"Certainly," said the Professor, and walking towards Réhmy's chair, he produced a key and unlocked the handcuffs, removing them and putting them on the table behind him.

He then took up a position with his back to the fireless hearth, leaning at ease against the mantelpiece. Réhmy seated himself in silence in the chair from which he had risen on our entrance, and I sat down in a chair facing them both. Ahasuerus, who all this time had been perched on the Professor's shoulder, now alighted on the mantelpiece, and proceeded to examine the clock with an expression of venomous distrust.

I could contain myself no longer.

"Tell me, Etienne," I exclaimed, "how on earth do you come to be here?"

It was not Réhmy, but the Professor who answered.

"Captain Réhmy came here in answer to a message," he said.

And putting his hand in his pocket, he handed me the following note. It was in English, in my own handwriting, and it read as follows :

"Meet me *xx* at the north corner of the garden of the villa Las Delicias, Tibidabo. It belongs to the Marquis and Gaston is there. I think I have hit on a plan.—T. P."

"That was little Adolf," volunteered the Professor with a smile.

I handed the paper back.

"It must be admitted," I said, "that in the hands of little Adolf the pen is a dangerous weapon—far more dangerous, it seems, than the knife."

I saw Réhmy smile. He had as yet shown no sign of disturbance or alarm, and he now addressed the Professor in the manner of a man chaffing a friendly opponent.

"Well, Professor," he said. "I suppose that from our point of view this is what our English friends would call the end of a perfect day. You nearly murdered me this morning; you provided a sensational end for M. de Blanchegarde this afternoon; and you imagined you were killing Mr. Preston this evening. We are naturally wondering what will be the climax to all this activity."

The Professor shook his head with an air of gentle deprecation.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Captain Réhmy," he said. "You seem to have inferred that it was I who inspired the unfortunate proceedings to which you have just alluded. The inference, however, is quite unjustified.

I had no part in them whatever. I did not even know that either you or M. de Blanchegarde were in Spain. Still less did I dream that I should so soon have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Preston. Do me the justice to believe that if I had made arrangements for your removal this morning, you would not be talking to me here this evening. The same applies to M. de Blanchegarde and Mr. Preston.

"You don't mean," I broke in impatiently, "that you had nothing whatever to do with these attempts."

The Professor looked at me with the specially indulgent smile usually reserved for an engaging child.

"Nothing whatever," he declared. "Strange," he went on, "that you should so naturally attribute to me these unworthy efforts. You had no evidence of my connection with them. Yet you thought at once of the Professor. The fact is, my friends, you have got the Professor just a little on the brain. You see him everywhere. In a way, I suppose, it is a compliment."

There was, at this point, an interruption from Réhmy, who, I could see, was staggered by the Professor's declaration.

"You ask us to believe," he said incredulously, "that you knew nothing of what happened to me this morning or to M. de Blanchegarde this afternoon?"

"Nothing whatever," he repeated.

"But little Adolf . . ." I began.

"Exactly," said the Professor. "Little Adolf in this case acted on his own initiative. He is an inquisitive little person, with undoubted gifts. He discovered that you were proposing to meddle in my affairs, and he took such steps as occurred to him to deal with the situation. He knows how busy I am just now—yes, Captain Réhmy, I am quite exceptionally busy—and it seems that he did not wish me to be worried with small details. But Adolf

is not a successful man of action. His programme was too ambitious. It was a chastened and disconsolate little Adolf who came to me at six o'clock this evening. It seems that he had not only failed to dispose of even one of you, but that he had somehow acquired the dead body of a person unknown of which he was extremely anxious to dispose."

Réhmy looked steadily at the Professor.

"And that was the first time you knew that we were in Barcelona?"

"Exactly. You will admit that I have lost no time in meeting you. I felt it would be a pity, as we happened to be in the same city, to lose this quite unexpected opportunity of renewing our old acquaintance. I found that my friend the Marquis Guardalmedina del Puente had secured M. de Blanchegarde. I was, in fact, surprised to discover that the Marquis was already in the confidence of little Adolf. The Marquis is a very affable man, but in the matter of spies—and I'm afraid that's how he would describe you, Captain Réhmy—he is apt to lose control of his better nature."

The Professor shook his head in meditative reproof of the absent Marquis and continued:

"I next consulted my friend, Señor Cunha-Riario, and I found, to my surprise, that he had a long-standing appointment with a Mr. Thomas Preston."

Réhmy had started at the name, and a look of utter bewilderment had come over his face. My own feeling was more of curiosity than of surprise. I knew only too well the part played by the man from Buenos Aires in that evening's work. But what could be his connection with the Professor, and how on earth did he come to be offering himself as a customer of Jebbut & Jebbut?

Réhmy's bewilderment did not escape the Professor.

"Yes," he said in answer to our thoughts, "I quite

appreciate your astonishment. If, indeed, I were disposed to believe in Providence, I should be inclined to see here a deliberate intervention on my behalf."

"But obviously," I exclaimed, my mind leaping at what seemed to be the only possible conclusion, "the man with whom I dined to-night was not Señor Cunha-Riario."

The Professor smiled upon me.

"The logic of your inference, Mr. Preston, is not, if I may say so, quite impeccable. But you are right. Señor Cunha-Riario is not Señor Cunha-Riario. We will call him for the moment Mr. X. I'm afraid that he will have to remain something of a mystery. Until quite recently Mr. X was a gentleman living in Buenos Aires because certain misguided Governments took exception to his residence in Europe. Not long ago, however, he found it necessary to return, for he and I had important business to discuss. It was impossible for him to return as Mr. X so it became necessary for him to obtain some other identity. Very conveniently he had the good fortune to meet in Buenos Aires a certain Señor Cunha-Riario, the representative of a firm of hotel proprietors in the Argentine, who was just on the point of leaving for his first visit to Europe to conclude a business transaction. Mr. X invited Señor Cunha-Riario to dine with him, and I am sorry to say that in the course of the evening, Señor Cunha-Riario lost his passport, certain letters of introduction, and other necessary papers. Next morning Mr. X set sail for Barcelona. The arrangement, it seems, was even happier than he suspected; for Señor Cunha-Riario was to meet a representative of Jebbut & Jebbut, who was none other than my old friend, Mr. Thomas Preston. The coincidence was much too good to lose, and on learning the facts, I naturally suggested that Mr. X should extend to Mr. Preston the hospitality which Señor Cunha-Riario had previously enjoyed, and bring

him on to see me afterwards. That made our little party quite complete."

The Professor smiled pleasantly as he concluded his exposition. Throughout he had maintained the smooth politeness which I so well remembered, and now, as often before, it filled me with a sick despair. His maddening courtesy and deliberate choice of words gave an edge to the menace which they concealed. He politely assumed that the small matter of life or death was immaterial. It might be his painful duty to make arrangements shortly for our demise. Such things sometimes happened between gentlemen. But the matter was of no consequence, and there was no reason why we should allow ourselves to be ruffled.

And Réhmy met the Professor on his own plane and on his own ground, betraying no emotion, but listening with polite attention. I was less able to contain myself.

"Why not come to the point?" I broke in savagely. "What do you intend to do with us?"

"That," said the Professor, "will depend on the attitude of yourself and Captain Réhmy. My friends, moreover, will wish to be associated with any decision I may feel it necessary to take."

He pressed, as he spoke, an electric bell beside the mantelpiece.

The door opened in reply to his ring, and a servant appeared.

"Tell your master," said the Professor, "that we are ready to receive him."

The servant went out, and for a few minutes we all three remained silent. The Professor played affectionately with Ahasuerus, Réhmy sat motionless and seemingly indifferent, while I looked carefully about me, making a close survey of the room.

Again the door opened, and this time three persons

entered, followed by the Oriental chauffeur and another servant in dark livery. The first to enter was the Marquis. Dupuis, whom I recognised at once as the man I had seen in the carriage with Suzanne and Mr. X (as I must now call the man from South America) were close behind him.

Réhmy and I rose to our feet, as the Marquis, in a smoking-jacket of maroon velvet, came forward smiling, the perfect picture of a man who had dined happily with his friends and wished ill to nobody. He paused at sight of me, and the Professor, ruffling the feathers of Ahasuerus and looking at us sidelong, was heard to say :

“ Marquis, I think you have met Mr. Thomas Preston.”

The Marquis bowed, his little eyes twinkling with good humour.

“ You are a humorist, Mr. Preston,” he chuckled. “ I like the English humour. What was it again? The *Milwaukee Advertiser*, I believe.”

He looked from me to Réhmy, who stood gravely inspecting him with the peculiarly searching look with which he almost unconsciously noted a stranger.

“ That is Captain Réhmy,” continued the Professor, “ a distinguished member of the French Intelligence Service.”

“ Enchanted to meet you, Captain Réhmy,” said the Marquis. “ I’m sorry, very sorry, to hear that you belong to so dangerous a profession.”

“ I have counted the cost, M. le Marquis,” answered Réhmy, and I saw that the Marquis was ill at ease under his grave inspection. The eyes of the little man shifted; the expressionless look which I had noted in the infirmary came into his eyes, and there was a cruel compression about his mouth as he added :

“ The Señor captain is a brave man. It seems that he has endeavoured to inconvenience my friend the Graf von Konigsberg.”

Meanwhile, the servants who had entered with the Marquis had shifted a long oak table to the middle of the room, and had arranged some chairs behind it. Dupuis and Mr. X, who had stood watching these proceedings, now moved towards the table, as the Professor, once more depositing Ahasuerus on the mantelpiece, turned to the Marquis and said :

“ Well, gentlemen, we are ready to sit. Shall we begin? ”

Dupuis and Mr. X had already sat down at the table without a word. Dupuis, who on closer inspection revealed himself to be a large, over-fed man in the early fifties, appeared obviously nervous. I judged him to be the sort of man who disliked violence and irregularity, and whom it would be difficult to lead into crime unless the stakes were very high. I noted that Mr. X kept his gaze averted from both of us, and seemed, or perhaps it was merely my imagination, slightly ashamed of the part he was called upon to play.

The Marquis joined them, and the three men were now seated behind the long oak table, having left a chair for the Professor, who crossed the room and sat down in it.

“ Captain Réhmy,” said the Professor, “ our friendly conversation is at an end, and you are now under examination.”

Réhmy bowed.

“ If that is so,” he said, “ I now withdraw my parole.”

“ As you please, Captain Réhmy,” said the Professor. “ Does Mr. Preston also withdraw? ”

I nodded, and the Professor turned to Mr. X.

“ In that case,” he said, “ a word to little Kara might be in season.”

Mr. X, looking as I thought with some impatience at the Professor, spoke sharply in an unknown tongue to the

little Oriental, who, with his companion, at once moved forward, and during the rest of the scene kept their narrow eyes fixed closely upon us.

"The proceedings," said the Professor, "are now open, and I propose, before we decide the fate of these gentlemen, to ask them a few questions. The answers they make may have some bearing on our sentence."

I looked at Réhmy.

"Give sentence, Professor," he said. "There is nothing to be gained by prolonging these rather theatrical proceedings. Neither I nor my friend Mr. Preston proposes to assist you in your examination."

"Very sensible," babbled the Marquis, "very sensible and most considerate. Captain Réhmy realises that we have a painful duty to perform. Get it over quickly, he thinks. Very sensible. Very sensible indeed."

"Nevertheless," said the Professor, "I intend to ask these gentlemen some questions."

Mr. X moved impatiently in his chair.

"What is our object?" he asked bluntly. "Have these proceedings any bearing at all on our plans? We are not here, Herr Professor, if I may say so, merely for scenic effect. If you have a score to settle with these gentlemen, settle it in your own way, and leave the rest of us to get on with our work."

The pale face of the Professor, who was unused to such a tone from his colleagues, flushed slightly, but I was astonished to note that, instead of snubbing the man who had thus addressed him, his manner of reply was propitiating, and that it even had a touch of deference. Mr. X must be either a very important person in himself, or peculiarly essential to the work on which the Professor was engaged.

"No one," he said, directly addressing Mr. X, "is more conscious than I am of the value of our time at this

particular moment. But I think you will agree that it would be well to persuade these gentlemen to tell us exactly how much they have discovered of our plans. Captain Réhmy has told us that it is useless to press him further on the subject. Perhaps Mr. Preston will be more obliging."

"Mr. Preston," said Réhmy hastily before I could answer for myself, "can be left entirely out of this affair. He met me purely by accident this morning, incidentally saving my life when Adolf Baumer attempted to stab me in the Plaza del Rey. Till then he did not even know I was in Barcelona. I can assure you, Professor, that he is ignorant alike of my mission and my plans."

"You have a mission then?" said the Professor slowly. "As to Mr. Preston," he continued, "from what I know of him he is the last man in the world to be left entirely out of anything. Then, of course, there is M. de Blanchegarde, who is not yet able to speak. M. de Blanchegarde is a friend of yours, is he not?" the Professor concluded, turning to Dupuis.

"Nothing of the kind," grumbled Dupuis. "I hardly know the fellow."

There was a short silence. No one spoke for a while, and the only sound in the room was the cracking of a match-box which Ahasuerus had discovered on the mantelpiece and was destroying.

I looked at the men who had us at their mercy. Mr. X, his eyes bent to the table, embarrassed and ill at ease, played awkwardly with some blotting-paper and quill pens in front of him. Beside him was the Marquis, whose face was immobile, a shapeless mask strangely revolting now that the wrinkles were vacant of the laughter which had created them. Then came Dupuis, stupid, sensual and apprehensive. Of these three men there was only one that I could look upon without disgust, and he only

served to emphasise the evil by which we were encompassed. For that man was ashamed.

My eyes went back to the Professor. He was looking straight at Réhmy, who had somehow found the courage to meet that dreadful gaze. I had a queer sense of being cut off, of being not physically but morally, I had almost said spiritually, abandoned. I was aware of a subtle presence, which had as it were entered the clean, white room as into a house swept and garnished. I am not a fanciful person or apt to surrender to the assault of secret powers. But I felt at that moment the intrusion of a peril which threatened the hidden sources of life.

To you who read this with a tranquil mind, in your library, with familiar things about you, or in a prosaic railway carriage or among the flowers of an English garden, I despair of conveying the reality of the vile influence by which at that moment I was subdued. Still less can I explain what followed. I can only tell you that no sooner had my eyes wandered from the other men behind the table to the Professor himself than I fell under his dominion, and everything I saw had the quality of a hallucination.

He was, as I said, looking straight into the eyes of Réhmy, whom he faced across the dark pool of the polished table. The whole force of his will was directed towards my friend, but we others were also within the circle of his power. I remember that as soon as I saw his face bent in a malevolent stillness on the man confronting him I tried to cry out as one would cry out at a man who unawares was walking over a precipice and realised at once the awful peril in which he stood. We had all good reason to remember the strange magnetic forces which the Professor had at his disposal, and my own method of meeting them was one of avoidance. I never, if I could help it, consented to meet his eyes.

My immediate impulse, as I say, was to warn Réhmy of his danger, but I found to my horror that it was too late. I could no longer command my voice. The cry was strangled in my throat as by an invisible hand, and I knew with a queer certainty that every other man in the room was similarly spellbound. We had become to each other as phantoms. The only reality for us all was the Professor, gazing at Réhmy, his eyes glittering in a face, so it seemed, that would never change so long as time endured, eyes like those of a great snake hunting birds.

I was master of no human sense but that of sight, and my vision, perhaps owing to the inertia of my other faculties, had become intolerably clear. I can still see on Réhmy's face the tiny beads of sweat which broke out in his agony, and the play of his muscles as he braced himself to withstand the full force of the power with which he grappled. I can recall the little gesture he made with his head as though he were trying to free it from a noose.

The silence grew more profound and more unbearable. No one moved, only the eyes of the Professor were alive. And then I realised that he was speaking, his voice coming to me from far away, very faint, in tiny tones, but each syllable minutely distinct.

"Why have you come here?" the voice was saying.

A faint tremor shook Réhmy from head to foot.

"To arrest you," he said in a voice that spoke all on one note, and did not seem to be humanly alive.

"And is M. de Blanchegarde helping you?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Preston?"

"He has promised to do so."

"And what are your plans?"

There was a silence. Réhmy was as still as a statue, save for his hands, which clenched and unclenched like the claws of a shot bird, an automatic movement indescribably

pitiable. Some hidden force within him was still resisting the strange power of the Professor. It was as though some sentinel on guard below the threshold of his consciousness was barring the way of this intruder into the inner stronghold of his soul.

He opened his mouth once or twice, but no words came. The tension grew.

"What are your plans?" said the Professor once again, and the tone was now more urgent, so that it seemed as if no merely human will could resist its importunity.

Réhmy swayed slightly, so that I thought he was about to fall, and then I had the feeling of a ghostly door suddenly giving way before the pressure of impalpable forces.

And Réhmy gave up involuntarily and unaware of what he said, the enigma on which he had been brooding, the riddle which had fevered the brain of the unconscious Gaston:

"The Lord of Fear . . . The Lord of Fear," he murmured.

Chapter VIII

I Fail to be Convincing

IT was the little Marquis who ended the spell, for, on hearing the words uttered by Réhmy, he leaned suddenly forward over the table, and, as he did so, his elbow swept a brass inkstand to the ground.

It fell with a crash. Réhmy started. The trance was broken. He came abruptly to his senses like a diver breaking the surface, and, in his natural voice, he said:

"It's no use, Professor. You won't get any information from me."

I saw that he did not realise in the least what had happened. His conscious mind bore no trace of the realm of horror from which he had so suddenly returned.

The Professor, at the sound of the falling inkstand, turned swiftly and savagely upon the Marquis. The Marquis

fleeced before the terrible look in his eyes, but in an instant the Professor recovered his self-control, and instead of the annihilating rebuke which we all expected, he smiled.

"I am sorry, Marquis," he said. "You have spoiled a rather interesting experiment, and I am afraid it is beyond my power to repeat it for the moment. We will, therefore, continue our interrogatory according to a more normal procedure. You will have noted that Captain Réhmy has confessed to being entrusted with a mission."

"My mission," said Réhmy, "and the mission of M. de Blanchegarde, was to discover the whereabouts of Professor Kreuzemark, and to procure his arrest."

"Then you still maintain," went on the Professor, "that your only object in coming to this country was to effect my capture?"

"That is so," answered Réhmy.

The Professor turned to his colleagues.

"You have heard the statement of Captain Réhmy," he said, "and I need not remind you of certain words which fell from his lips a moment ago, but which he has himself apparently forgotten. It is for you to judge whether he knows more than he admits.

The glances exchanged between the three men at the table clearly showed that they entirely disbelieved the declaration of Réhmy. How could they possibly credit it after what they had just seen and heard?

Who or what was the Lord of Fear? I did not know.

It was clear that the phrase uttered by Gaston in the infirmary and unconsciously repeated by Réhmy a moment ago had some connection with the work on which they were engaged, and that from the moment Réhmy had pronounced it we were under suspicion of knowing considerably more than we were prepared to divulge.

It was Mr. X who intervened. He had lost his shame-faced manner, and his tone was now curt and incisive. The change was significant. Hitherto he had behaved like a man involved in an issue which was to him irrelevant and personally distasteful. Now, however, he had the air of a person whose plans were threatened, and who was determined to get at the truth. His grey eyes were cold and hard, and I perceived in him a fanaticism which would spare no necessary means to achieve its purpose.

"You tell us, Captain Réhmy," he began, "that your only object in coming to Spain was to arrest Professor Kreutzemark."

"That is so," repeated Réhmy.

"And that you know nothing of the work on which Professor Kreutzemark is now engaged?" Mr. X continued.

"That also is correct," said Réhmy.

"In that case," went on Mr. X, "you had no idea that Professor Kreutzemark and I were in any way connected?"

"Obviously not," Réhmy agreed.

"Still less," Mr. X pursued, "that I was coming to Europe in order to meet him?"

"That necessarily follows from what I have already said," admitted Réhmy.

"Then may I ask, Captain Réhmy, why you came to meet the boat on which I arrived at Barcelona this afternoon in place of Mr. Preston, whom I expected? Of what concern to you are the business affairs of Mr. Preston that you should have relieved him of his responsibility at that particular moment?"

"I can only repeat," said Réhmy, "that I had no idea of any connection between Señor Cunha-Riario and Professor Kreutzemark. I met you merely to oblige Mr. Preston, who could not keep his appointment."

Mr. X leaned back in his chair. He had made his

point, and I could see he was convinced that we were trifling with him.

Meanwhile, the Professor had turned to me.

"May we ask you, Mr. Preston, why you were unable to keep the appointment with Señor Cunha-Riario, and why, instead of attending, like a dutiful nephew, to your uncle's business, you went to the bull-ring?"

"May we also ask," said the Marquis, twinkling amiably as at a recollection of the joke, "why you introduced yourself to me this afternoon as a representative of the *Milwaukee Advertiser*?"

"And finally, may we ask," continued the Professor, "why you met a mysterious veiled lady at the cathedral of Santa Eulalia at seven o'clock this evening?"

Staggered by their accurate knowledge of my movements, I beat my brains for an answer. It was Réhmy, however, who spoke, playing to create a diversion and to give me time.

"Professor Kreutzemark," he said, "you are very well informed."

The Professor bowed.

"As I said before, Captain Réhmy, Adolf Baumer is an inquisitive little person. That side of his activities leaves nothing to be desired. But we are waiting for Mr. Preston," he concluded, turning to me.

"I know no reason," I said, "why I should be called upon to account for my movements."

"Come, Mr. Preston," said Mr. X, "isn't that attitude in the circumstances rather childish?"

His manner was kind, but I saw that henceforth he would support the Professor in any attempt to discover how much we knew.

I was thinking rapidly. Clearly they knew exactly what I had been doing from the moment of my visit to the bull-ring. I could tell them nothing which they did

not know, and I, therefore, decided to tell them the truth.

"The explanation is simple," I said, addressing myself to Mr. X. "I was present quite by accident when an attempt was made on the life of Captain Réhmy in the Plaza des Rey this morning. M. de Blanchegarde had made an appointment to meet Captain Réhmy at the bull-ring that afternoon. We felt it would be dangerous for Captain Réhmy to keep that appointment. So we decided that I should go instead, and that he, in my place, should meet Señor Cunha-Riario from Buenos Aires. We, of course, had no idea that Señor Cunha-Riario was in any way connected with Professor Kreutzemark."

Mr. X considered my story for a moment, and looked at me thoughtfully.

"You appear to be greatly attached to your friends, Mr. Preston," he said at last.

The Professor looked round on his companions.

"Would anyone," he asked, "like to put any further questions to Mr. Preston?"

"There's one thing he hasn't yet explained," said Dupuis, scowling heavily in my direction. "Who was the lady whom he met at Santa Eulalia?"

"Yes," said the Professor, "the mysterious veiled lady. I regret to say that little Adolf was at fault in that particular. I cannot help feeling that the rendezvous was of some importance."

There was a short pause, all eyes being turned in my direction. I maintained a stubborn silence, fighting with difficulty to control my rising temper.

"I think you will understand," I said, "that it is useless asking me any further questions."

"In that case," went on the Professor, "I think we may assume that the veiled lady was a confederate. And we are asked to believe that all this devoted activity

was the result of an accidental meeting with an old friend in the Plaza del Rey less than seven hours previously."

"Is it so surprising," I broke out, "that I should be ready to assist Captain Réhmy in his mission? It was his duty to arrest Professor Kreuzemark, and it has become obvious that for me, as well as for my friends, the arrest of Professor Kreuzemark is an act of self-preservation."

The Professor smiled.

"I quite understand your eagerness to assist in that achievement," he said. "You naturally feel that it may be difficult for me to forget our previous encounters. You are right, Mr. Preston. I have always had the feeling that you and I would meet again, and sooner or later I should myself have sought that occasion."

I find it impossible to convey the implacable menace which he conveyed. At that moment I knew, if I had not known before, that for me there would never be any safety as long as this man was alive and at liberty.

He would have pursued the theme still further had not Mr. X interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"Once again, Professor," he protested, "I would ask you to forget your private vendetta. It is already obvious that it is waste of time to question these gentlemen any further. What do you propose to do?"

"I propose that we now send for M. de Blanchegarde," said the Professor. "I think he will find it even more difficult than Mr. Preston to account for his unusual interest in our proceedings."

"That I can quite believe," put in the little Marquis. "But will you find it any easier to make him speak?"

"M. de Blanchegarde will be informed," said the Professor, "that unless he is prepared to be quite frank with us the consequences for Captain Réhmy and Mr. Preston will be extremely serious. I am prepared, with your

permission, to go as far as may be necessary. This is no time for trifling. The life of a spy"—and here he looked for support to the Marquis—"is forfeit from the moment of his conviction, and the manner of his death should be such as will most usefully serve the interests of those against whom he is working. Should M. de Blanchegarde hesitate to take us into his confidence, I feel we should scarcely be justified in adopting the easiest and quickest method of dealing with his friends."

"What does this mean?" stammered Dupuis, his red face paling a little.

"You are proposing torture," said Mr. X curtly.

"Does my proposal alarm you?" said the Professor, looking from one to the other.

"I have lived in the East, Professor Kreutzemark," said Mr. X. "This is your affair, and you will act as you think best."

"And you, Marquis," continued the Professor.

"Just a little *demodé*," said the Marquis, "and I'm afraid I haven't much to offer you in the way of facilities. But don't let me deter you, gentlemen. Torture was recently practised by all the best families in Spain."

"M. Dupuis," said the Professor, "have you anything to say?"

Dupuis was now white as a sheet; his lips trembled and beads of sweat stood on his forehead. It was grim to look upon a man thus appalled at what we ourselves were to suffer. I thought he would protest, but under the eyes of the Professor he wilted.

"No," he stammered, "that is, I—er—accept the decision of the majority."

"In that case," said the Professor, "we will send at once for M. de Blanchegarde."

Here at last was something definite. I could already in imagination see Gaston, weak and fevered from his

injuries in the bull-ring, forced to betray his trust or to see his friends suffer to the death. I stole a glance at Réhmy. He was very pale, but his head was high. Yet his thoughts must have been bitter enough. Gaston had some important, perhaps vital message for him, and now, unless Gaston revealed it in the presence of the Professor, we should probably die in ignorance. Fortune, which had so amazingly protected all three of us throughout the day, had now its revenges.

The Professor had already risen, with the intention apparently of having Gaston summoned to the room, when Dupuis, quivering with eagerness, ventured to place a hand on his arm.

“One moment, Professor,” he said. “I think perhaps there is another way.”

The Professor turned and considered him.

“I am open to any suggestion,” he answered.

“There is a point to which I have already alluded,” began Dupuis, “but—but——” his voice faltered as his gaze met that of the Professor.

“Continue,” said the Professor, “if you have any useful proposal to make.”

“Well, what I mean is this,” returned Dupuis. “As I have already told you, my stepdaughter knows this Gaston de Blanchegarde. I gather, indeed, that they have been acquainted for years. It occurs to me that perhaps she might be able to induce him to speak if we pressed her sufficiently.”

The Professor, at the mention of Suzanne, had fixed his eyes with a strange, glittering eagerness on Dupuis. He paused a moment before replying.

“This is most interesting,” he said at last. “I confess it is news to me that the charming Mademoiselle de Polhac and M. de Blanchegarde are old friends.”

As he said this, I looked at Réhmy in despair. Our

last hope—always a slender one—had gone, for now that our enemy knew of the connection between Suzanne and Gaston she could not hope to protect him.

Meanwhile, I could see that the Professor was considering the implications of this discovery. He turned suddenly to the Marquis.

“Marquis,” he said, “this is for me a new and unexpected development. Can you tell me whether Mademoiselle de Polhac has recognised her friend, and whether she has had any access to his room since the accident of this afternoon?”

“I cannot say whether she has recognised the man,” said the Marquis. “She has certainly had access to his room. On her own request she is nursing him.”

The Professor’s hand clenched tightly on the table.

“But this,” he said, “is extremely serious. I need hardly assure you that it would be most regrettable if Mademoiselle de Polhac were to be in any way persuaded by an old affection into misplacing her sympathies in this affair. I propose, gentlemen, with your permission, to look into the matter at once.”

He crossed the room as he spoke, and pressed the bell. I heard it ring twice, and then, after an interval, a third time.

It was answered almost immediately by a man whom I recognised at once as he slipped nervously through the door and approached the table. It was Adolf Baumer. Never very engaging to look upon, his appearance was rendered all the more revolting by the conditions of complete nervous and physical collapse from which he evidently suffered. His thin, dirty neck rose out of a crumpled collar, and his clothes were torn and disordered. Moreover, his whole bearing betrayed a twitching eagerness to propitiate the master whose affairs he had so badly mishandled. Under the pitiless gaze of the Professor he

looked like a man who was silently entreating the floor to cover him.

But the Professor, who, I could see, had been profoundly disturbed by the revelation of Dupuis, was in no mood to play, as was his custom, with this wretched creature. After looking at him for a moment with withering contempt he smiled.

"Adolf," he said, "I wonder if you will ever learn that you are not built for a man of action."

He paused.

"I meant well, Herr Professor," muttered Adolf, watching the Professor like a dog who wonders whether he will be whipped or petted.

"There is, I hope, a peculiar and special fate reserved for those who mean well," said the Professor.

"The fact is," he continued, looking intently at his victim, "you have lately been getting beyond control. You take too much upon yourself. Your misguided attempt to assassinate three gentlemen in the course of a single day indicates a degree of independent enthusiasm which may be very commendable, but which is also extremely dangerous."

Little Adolf stood twisting his fingers and shuffling uneasily before the table, avoiding his master's gaze.

Then suddenly the Professor pointed a lean finger at Adolf.

"Look at me," he said in a voice of cold authority.

Adolf obediently raised his head and stared at the Professor's outstretched finger as though fascinated. The Professor moved it sharply to the right. Adolf's head immediately followed it as a needle follows a magnet. The Professor then moved his hand to the left, and again Adolf's head followed it helplessly. I was reminded of an absurd display which I had once witnessed at a continental music hall, in which a professional mesmerist,

practising with his "subjects," had caused them to laugh and cry and catch imaginary fish with a walking-stick.

The Professor, after moving his finger once or twice from side to side, lowered it, this time touching the surface of the table with his finger tip, and again Adolf's head followed the gesture with such fidelity that his long curved nose touched it gently. The Professor tapped the table several times, and each time Adolf's nose tapped it at the same instant. It was a grotesque sight, the more horrible from being so completely ridiculous. Adolf looked like a sleepy chicken trying with its beak to peck imaginary crumbs.

Abruptly the Professor ceased. He made a rapid pass with his hands, and Adolf with a tremor abruptly came to his senses.

The Professor addressed him in his normal tones.

"Go and ask Mademoiselle de Polhac if she would be good enough to come here at her earliest convenience," he said.

Little Adolf bowed clumsily and shuffled quickly towards the door.

"I am sorry for this diversion, gentlemen," said the Professor as the door closed behind the little Jew. "But it was necessary to re-establish my authority. Adolf Baumer is more useful to me than you think, and he must not be allowed to escape control."

There was complete silence after Adolf had left the room. It was broken by the Marquis, who sat back in his chair, and lit a large cigar. The Professor was looking towards the door, very still, but, as it seemed for the first time in my knowledge of him, nervously impatient. Mr. X, who had not concealed his contempt for the recent performance with little Adolf, was aimlessly tracing patterns on the blotting-pad in front of him. Dupuis drummed nervously on the table with his fat fingers.

There came a knock at the door, which was opened immediately, and Suzanne de Polhac stood facing us. She was in an evening dress of white and silver, without jewels save for a pearl necklace. She did not at once come forward, but remained on the threshold, her eyes looking in inquiry from face to face, as though asking what the meaning could be of this curious scene. As yet she did not perceive—at least she gave no sign of perceiving—either Réhmy or myself.

At last her gaze came to rest on the Professor, and I saw with amazement that she did not fear to meet his eyes and that in her own there was even a faint flicker of amusement.

“You sent for me, Herr Graf,” she said, and her first words filled me with hope. She addressed him in his assumed name of Graf von Königsberg. She had, therefore, retained presence of mind enough not to betray her knowledge of his real identity.

“I am sorry to trouble you, Mademoiselle,” said the Professor, and there was a curious deference in his tone quite unlike his usual ironic courtesy, “but we have need of your assistance. Adolf,” he continued, “bring forward a chair.”

Suzanne came slowly into the room.

“You are all very impressive,” she said, “rather like a miniature Cabinet in a crisis.

“And who are these gentlemen?” she continued, turning for the first time in our direction.

“Why,” she exclaimed, in a perfectly natural and pleased astonishment, “isn’t it Captain Réhmy?”

She took a step forward and held out her hand, but as he took it, her astonishment turned to dismay.

“But what has been happening to you?” she said, looking at his torn clothes.

“An accident, Mademoiselle,” said Réhmy, bowing over her hand.

"Nothing serious, I hope," said the girl.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. I am at present quite intact," Réhmy replied, and there was the ghost of a warning in the light stress which he laid on the words "at present."

The girl turned quite naturally from Réhmy to me. She bowed slightly and said, more distinctly :

"The gentleman from Milwaukee! Are you still viewing the world as one big democracy?"

Her quickness and vivacity, and the fact that apparently she was quite at her ease, made more emphatic the silence and constraint of us all. Mr. X, after a first glance at her as she entered, seemed to be unaware of her existence. Dupuis was gazing at her resentfully, as though he grudged her the cool assurance with which she was meeting the situation. The Marquis, obviously wondering what the Professor was intending to do, was admiring her covertly in a way which, if Réhmy was to be trusted on the subject, would have meant death for him three times over if Gaston had been present and able to act. The Professor himself, as I saw with astonishment, was looking at her also with admiration, but of a very different quality. There was no irony, none of the faintly contemptuous observation with which we were so familiar. He was like a man disarmed. The look was all the more significant as he was callous to women as a rule, and firmly convinced of their complete futility.

"Mademoiselle," he said with the same grave courtesy as before, as she took the chair obsequiously proffered by Adolf, "I apologise for bringing you to what, I am afraid, is a strictly business meeting, but a crisis has arisen in certain affairs on which your stepfather and I are engaged, and you can help us by answering one or two questions."

"Certainly, Herr Graf," she said composedly. "But

I can't in the least imagine how I can be of the smallest assistance. I do not even know what your business may be."

"That," said the Professor, "is unnecessary—as yet."

He was looking at her now in a strangely speculative way.

"I am not inquisitive, Herr Graf," said the girl indifferently.

"In that, as in other ways," said the Professor, "you are exceptional, Mademoiselle, and worthy, if I may say so, of your exceptional destiny."

He said this without a trace of mockery. More than that, there was a look in his eyes as he pronounced the last two words and a queer ring in his voice which clearly showed that no idle compliment was intended. There was also something in his manner—I hardly know how to describe it—something which was partly eagerness, partly satisfaction, something that looked beyond his words to a secret prospect.

"Destiny?" echoed the girl, returning the Professor's look with a smile. "That is far too big a word for me."

The Professor did not return her smile, but continued to regard her with the same intentness.

"No," he said, rather to himself than to her, "I am sure you will be equal to any destiny, however high it may be, and I know that when the moment comes you will be ready to meet it."

During the whole of this conversation the girl had unflinchingly sustained the Professor's gaze. But at this point she could apparently no longer endure it.

She gave no sign of any misgiving or confusion, however, but looking away and settling herself more at ease in her chair, she said lightly :

"Now that the compliments are finished, Herr Graf, I should like to know what it is I can do for you."

There was now a slight change in the Professor's

manner. He was once more the inquisitor. It seemed to me, however, during what followed, that it cost him an effort to recover his judicial calm, and that he paid a strained attention to all the answers made by the girl.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it seems that you are acquainted with the gentleman upstairs, and that you are taking a special interest in his welfare."

I could have sworn she did not turn a hair. But there was an added brilliance in her manner, a brightness rather more superficial.

"Of course I know him," she replied. "He was a friend of my father."

"Your father?" said the Professor, looking towards Dupuis.

"I said my father," flashed the girl, suddenly passionate and abrupt.

Dupuis shifted uneasily, and there was a moment of constraint.

"Have you any idea," continued the Professor, "why your friend was masquerading in the bull-ring this afternoon? The somewhat disagreeable office which he had assumed seems, if I may say so with all due respect, to be a rather curious pastime for a French flying officer."

"I am afraid I cannot help you there," said the girl. "In fact I'm simply dying to know myself. Why M. de Blanchegarde—I presume that you already know his name—should suddenly transform himself into a kind of butcher is a perfect mystery. He was always a little odd, but he has never gone quite so far as that."

"Did you know that M. de Blanchegarde was in Spain?" asked the Professor.

"Not till I recognised him in the infirmary this afternoon," she answered.

"And you were immediately interested?" observed the Professor.

"But of course I was interested," she retorted. "You have complimented me on my lack of curiosity. But I am not inhuman. When an old friend of the family suddenly turns up as an amateur slaughterer and nearly gets himself killed into the bargain, one is naturally intrigued."

"You are now attending personally to M. de Blanchegarde," went on the Professor.

"Of course. He is an old friend, and he is badly hurt. Besides, I want to hear as soon as possible what he has to say for himself."

"Then he has said nothing as yet?"

"He has not yet sufficiently recovered."

The Professor seemed satisfied with her replies. He thought for a moment, and then spoke with an engaging air of candour.

"We will be frank with you, Mademoiselle," he said. "This M. de Blanchegarde, it appears, is an old friend of yours. We are at present engaged upon a piece of business in which he can be of the greatest possible assistance to us. He has probably obtained knowledge of certain facts which we are anxious to ascertain for ourselves. In his present state of health it would be discourteous and perhaps even dangerous to ask him for a formal interview. You, however, are possibly in a position which would enable you, with a little tact, to get from him the information we desire."

"But certainly," said the girl after a moment's hesitation. "If I can do anything to help you and your friends I shall be only too delighted. But I must not, of course, allow my patient to be worried."

"You will, of course, be the judge as to whether your inquiries can be made at once or whether they should be postponed," said the Professor courteously.

"What is it you wish me to ask?" she said, carelessly smoothing out a fold in her dress.

"We merely want you to ask M. de Blanchegarde exactly what he discovered at the country house of the Marquis del Puente in Andalusia."

"M. de Blanchegarde has been staying, then, with the Marquis?" she exclaimed.

"That is so," said the Marquis, beaming with good nature. "I have had the good fortune to entertain a friend of the Señorita unawares—a pleasant coincidence for us all."

The girl hesitated a moment, as though troubled with a scruple. At last she said, looking full at the Professor :

"You will, of course, give me your word of honour, Herr Graf, that I am not betraying M. de Blanchegarde into any confidence or any indiscretion which he might afterwards have reason to regret."

The Professor paused for a perceptible moment before replying, and to my amazement it was he and not the girl who looked away.

"Mademoiselle," he said at last, very deliberately, "I can assure you, on my word of honour, that you will best serve the interests of your friend by trying to obtain this information and by acquainting us immediately with the result."

"In that case, Herr Graf," she replied, "I can, of course, have no possible hesitation."

Her manner was so confiding and assured that I could scarcely control an impulse to warn her against the step she had consented to take. I believe I should actually have cried out if Réhmy, who had been following the scene with a vigilant attention, had not gripped me by the arm. There was, moreover, at that moment a diversion. There came a slight knock on the door.

"Come in," said the Marquis.

The door opened, and there again stood little Adolf.

"Well," said the Professor, "what is it now?"

"The Frenchman upstairs is waking up," Adolf announced.

Suzanne de Polhac rose to her feet.

"I will go to him at once," she said. "And if he is indeed sufficiently well, you will soon have the information you desire."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," said the Professor. "Allow me to say, on behalf of us all, that we are extremely grateful to you, and to apologise once more for having disturbed you."

He rose and bowed. Suzanne, after a slight but formal bow to the men at the table, who all rose in acknowledgment, turned and left the room. Adolf started to follow her, but checked at a word from the Professor.

"Adolf," he said, "where are you going?"

"I presume, Herr Professor," he said, "that it is expedient for me to be present when M. de Blanchegarde recovers. In so important a matter it would scarcely be wise to trust the young lady."

The Professor was like a man transformed. He rose to his full height, and for a moment I expected him to fell the little man with a blow. With a great effort, however, he mastered himself, but his voice fell upon us all like a lash.

"Henceforth," he said, "you will remember that Mademoiselle de Polhac is above suspicion."

Almost equally incisive came the voice of Mr. X, who had remained almost motionless all through the recent scene:

"Do I understand, Professor Kreuzemark, that you do not propose to have any witness of what takes place between this lady and M. de Blanchegarde?"

The Professor was silent a moment, and when next he spoke I perceived that he was his old ironic self again.

"I was merely wishing to indicate," he said, "that for reasons which you will all appreciate I cannot seem to

tolerate for a single instant the slightest impertinence or disrespect towards the lady who has this moment quitted us. But I do not propose to omit any of the usual precautions."

He turned to Adolf.

"Where have you put M. de Blanchegarde?" he asked.

"He is in the room next to your own, Professor."

"Excellent," said the Professor, surveying with disgust the unclean figure before him. "I believe that the apartment you mention has a private bathroom."

"Yes," said Adolf.

"Very well," returned the Professor. "You will go to the bathroom at once. Do you understand?"

"Go to the bathroom?" faltered little Adolf. "But the water is cold, Herr Professor, and my constitution . . ."

"Silence, fool," interrupted the Professor impatiently. "I am not proposing that you should risk your miserable life by an unseasonable act of cleanliness. You will go to the bathroom, and you will listen carefully to what M. de Blanchegarde has to say. You will report to me here in person any answers he may make to the questions which Mademoiselle de Polhac has undertaken to put to him on our behalf. I have every confidence in Mademoiselle de Polhac, but I think it only courteous to spare her the quite unnecessary trouble of any further appearance before us."

And once again he turned to little Adolf.

"You have received your instructions," he said. "Be so good as to see that they are strictly obeyed."

Chapter IX

I Witness a Contract

"GENTLEMEN," said the Professor, as the door closed behind Adolf Baumer, "I propose to await the report of Adolf Baumer before taking any further steps. May I take it that you agree with me?"

The men round the table assented each in his different way,—Mr. X with a curt nod, the little Marquis with a bright smile, and Dupuis with a nervous, almost abject, movement which showed that he was accustomed to having his consent taken for granted.

“In the meantime,” continued the Professor, “it is necessary to find suitable accommodation for our guests.”

“Only too happy,” said the Marquis, radiantly hospitable. “I have a number of excellent cellars. They are at your disposal, Professor.”

He signed, as he spoke, to the menservants, who came beside us and took us firmly by the arms.

I made an instinctive movement of recoil, but realised at once that resistance was futile. Réhmy was already leaving the room under the guidance of his attendant, and I turned to follow him. As we moved off, and the door closed behind us, I heard the nervous neighing laugh of Dupuis, followed by a murmur of voices as the discussion round the table was resumed.

On our way from the room we were joined by two other servants, and the six of us together descended several flights of stone stairs, and eventually reached a dark passage lit only by a single candle held by the leading footman. Fantastic shadows played on the walls and ceiling. There was a smell of wood, of drying fruit and of wine barrels.

“Courage, my friend,” said Réhmy as we stopped at a sign from our conductors, and he held out his hand. I took it and gripped it.

The door in front of me opened. I felt a gentle pressure in the small of my back, and stumbled through, fetching up against a great pile of hard objects, which, as I guessed, were logs. The door closed, and, feeling about, I sat down on what was evidently a small outcrop of the main pile. The logs knocked dully together under my weight, and

as I sat in pitch darkness, and the excitement which had carried me through the day died down, I gradually sank into a condition of almost complete despair.

On what enterprise were these men engaged? What evil design was hatching behind that impassive face and those intolerable eyes? Clearly it was of an overwhelming importance, so much so that the Professor's colleagues, sitting calmly about a table, men as unlike as Mr. X, the Marquis and Dupuis, were ready to condemn us to death by torture in order to ascertain what we knew, or to ensure that we should not use it against them. They were obviously about a business of such weight that they could not afford to take the slightest risk. The irony of it all was that of this business Réhmy and I as yet were ignorant.

We had nothing to go upon except that strange phrase, "The Lord of Fear," words on which Réhmy had evidently been brooding ever since I had repeated them to him on my return from the bull-ring. His unconscious repetition of them under the hypnotic influence of the Professor, though for us they had no meaning, had instantly convinced all those men at the table that we had plucked out the heart of their mystery. Would Gaston be able to interpret them? What was he saying even at that moment to the girl, Suzanne de Polhac, within earshot of the listening Adolf? I rose in an agony of impatience from my pile of logs, and stood in the darkness with clenched hands fighting for self-control, as I pictured Gaston, unwarned and unsuspecting, recounting, for the benefit of that miserable spy, the story for which Réhmy had waited with such eagerness, to be at the last moment so cruelly defeated.

And what of the girl who was now eliciting his confidence? Under the influence of the black mood I was in, I doubted even her. What was the nature of the

thoughts which had passed through her mind during that silent moment in the dark cathedral when she had learned the real identity of the charming Graf von Konigsberg? How was I to measure the attraction of such a man for a girl who had not yet come into touch with the evil side of his genius? What was the meaning of his strange respect for her, and of his queer allusion to her "high destiny"?

I was still standing rigid in the darkness, when, at some distance away on my left, I heard a cautious tapping on the wall. I groped my way towards the sound, and my outstretched hands presently came in contact with the rough surface of a wooden partition. The taps sounded a little lower down to my right. I bent down, and heard my name uttered in an urgent whisper.

"Yes," I answered, "what is it?"

"This is Réhmy," came back the voice. "I have found here a knot-hole in the wood."

"Good," I answered, "it is at least something to be able to talk."

I felt for the logs and sat down, so that my ear was level with the hole.

Merely to hear Réhmy's voice was some relief from my miserable brooding. There, at least, was my friend, alert and beside me.

"Well, Thomas," said the voice of Etienne, "the Professor has at any rate saved us the trouble of telling each other how we come to be here. There is only one thing you do not know. Before receiving the forged note that brought me running into the trap, I went, as we arranged, to the police."

"Yes," I said eagerly. "Is there any hope from that quarter?"

"None whatever. The Chief Commissioner, who, as I thought, is a personal friend of the Marquis, would not

even receive me, and I only saw the second in command. He, on the other hand, was most polite and obliging, but he gave me clearly to understand that, in view of the attitude of his chief, he could do nothing, though he was frank enough to let me see that I had convinced him of the urgency of our case, and that he himself would have acted if he had been in a position to do so."

"You told him that Gaston was being forcibly detained against the law."

I heard Réhmy sigh wearily in the darkness.

"My dear fellow," he assured me, "I made as good a case as I could, but the man said, very justly, that our story was not very probable, and that, though he personally was ready to believe us and to do all he could, his chief would be quite unconvinced. It is apparently notorious that the Marquis has the Chief Commissioner completely under his thumb, which means that nothing will be done contrary to his wishes or instructions."

I spent the next half-hour telling Réhmy of my interview with Mademoiselle de Polhac in the cathedral. I found him oppressed with forebodings of some dark event, and I discovered that he had been as forcibly struck as myself by the interview between the Professor and Mademoiselle de Polhac.

We fell silent at last, and presently, strange to say, I dropped into a troubled doze. I awoke in cramped discomfort to feel a hand on my shoulder.

"Food, Señor," said a voice, and I saw, floating as it appeared in mid air, a plate with bread and cold meat.

Mechanically I put out a hand and took it, while by the light of a flickering candle the shadows of two liveried footmen played fantastically on the wall.

Then I began to laugh weakly. Somehow it struck me as extraordinarily funny for me to sit in that dirty cellar among logs of wood and be served with food by a

liveried manservant with all the formalities of punctilious Spanish etiquette.

The men withdrew immediately, and I was left to eat in solitude. I assumed it was now morning, but no ray of light reached the cellar, for it had apparently no window. I could not see the time by my watch, the figures on the illuminated dial being too faint.

An hour must have passed when suddenly, without warning, the door was flung open and the same two men-servants appeared. They bowed politely, and one of them beckoned me forward. I got stiffly to my feet. Outside in the passage I was joined by Réhmy, and the two of us stumbled up the stone stairs and emerged suddenly into the blinding light of day.

"What's happening now?" I said.

"I have no idea," he answered, "but say as little as possible."

We proceeded down the same wide passage along which we had been led to the cellars the day before. The door was thrown open, and we found ourselves once more in the presence of the Professor. He was standing as before by the hearth.

Then suddenly we heard our names called in a well-known voice, and turning we saw Gaston seated in the same chair which had been occupied by Réhmy.

He got slowly to his feet, and came towards us, still very shaky. His face was white and there was a bandage round his forehead.

"Thomas, *mon cher*," he said with a wry smile, "this is not the good meeting I would have wished. But what would you? Man proposes and the devil disposes," and he glared, but for only an instant, at the Professor.

I gripped his right hand, while his left sought Réhmy's shoulder.

"I am sorry to interrupt so cordial a greeting," came

the voice of the Professor, "but time presses, and I will ask your permission to come quickly to the point."

"For the first time in *my* knowledge," growled Gaston, who I was glad to note had lost none of his irrepressible spirit.

"Hasty as ever, M. de Blanchegarde," said the Professor. "But I fear that on this occasion I shall be going too quickly even for you."

Réhmy put a hand on Gaston's arm and got him to sit in the chair. We then stood on either side of him and waited to know what the Professor had to say.

"I have summoned you," went on the Professor, "to hear my decision, though perhaps I should say at once that the decision in this instance is not my own. It lies with Mademoiselle de Polhac."

"Take care," said Gaston, his eyes flashing. "I do not allow the name of that lady to be lightly used."

"Of that I am sure," said the Professor. "Mademoiselle de Polhac is fortunate in having had so excellent a friend."

Gaston moved in his chair, and I put a restraining hand on his shoulder. The Professor's easy references to the girl were like a blow in the face, and, sick with apprehension, I wondered what he would be saying next.

At that moment, however, the door opened, and Mademoiselle de Polhac stood on the threshold. She was accompanied by the Marquis and Dupuis. All three entered the room, the girl slightly in advance of the other two. I gazed at her eagerly, hoping to obtain from her looks some sign of what was intended. She gave, however, no glance in our direction; but, after her eyes had rested for an instant on the Professor, who advanced courteously to meet her, she looked steadily to the floor. She was pale, and her face, though I tried hard to read it, was utterly expressionless.

The Professor began to find a chair for her, and Gaston rose awkwardly.

"Thank you, Professor," she said in a voice as expressionless as her face, "but I prefer not to sit. Will you have the goodness to see that M. de Blanchegarde is seated? He is not yet well enough to stand."

She did not look at Gaston, however, though I could see that the poor fellow's soul was in his eyes. For myself, I was as yet too bewildered to think what any of this might mean. I noted with surprise, however, in spite of the confusion of my thoughts, that she had addressed him as the Professor. She no longer troubled to conceal her knowledge of his identity. Evidently the position had moved, and there was some sort of understanding between them.

Then I heard the voice of Gaston.

"Suzanne," he was saying, "for God's sake speak to me. What are you doing here?"

Even then she did not look at him, but spoke in a tone of quiet authority, with her eyes persistently lowered.

"Gaston," she said. "I must entreat you not to interfere. You can do nothing at all except make matters worse for us all."

Her tone was calculated to check any further protest. It was deadly cold, as though she had suppressed all pity or regard.

The Professor had meanwhile moved to the table in the middle of the room, and he now stood between the Marquis and Dupuis.

A slight movement caused me to turn my head, and behind me I saw a row of four liveried servants, looking, with their powdered hair and their liveries of blue and yellow, as though we had suddenly stepped back two centuries.

“ You will do well,” said the Professor to Gaston, who stood supporting himself by the table, “ to respect the wishes of Mademoiselle de Polhac.”

I put a hand on Gaston’s shoulder. He was trembling, his gaze fixed continually on Suzanne, almost disregarding the scene of which she formed a part. I can still see every detail of it as clearly as though these events had happened an hour ago,—the beautiful girl, remote and impassive, standing by the hearth, her eyes steadfastly on the Professor; the Professor himself, with his golden beard and strange, livid face, perfectly at ease; the fat little Marquis, the gross Dupuis, with ourselves, a haggard trio, on the other side of the dark table, and, for a background, the sumptuous lackeys with their wooden faces and their gorgeous apparel.

“ I have sent for you,” said the Professor, addressing Gaston, Etienne and myself, “ at the request of Mademoiselle de Polhac. Mademoiselle de Polhac is aware that I am engaged upon an important mission. She knows that from a mistaken sense of duty you have attempted to render my mission more difficult, and she realises that I should be justified in taking steps to make any further interference from you impossible. She has begged me, however, as two of you, at any rate, are old friends of hers, to perform an act of grace, particularly as she regards the steps I was about to take as going somewhat beyond the needs of the situation.”

“ In other words,” broke in Gaston savagely, “ Mademoiselle de Polhac has entreated you not to cut our throats. But I refuse to accept my life as a gift from her to you. Suzanne,” he continued, turning towards her, “ how could you bear to ask a favour of this man? ”

Still without looking at him she answered :

“ It was your life, Gaston, and the lives of your friends.”

“ Mademoiselle de Polhac,” said the Professor, not in

his usual smooth tones, but with a voice that rang, "has a right to ask of me anything she pleases."

He turned to her.

"You desire that Gaston de Blanchegarde and his friends should be set at liberty?"

"I do," she answered. "I wish you to free them immediately."

She spoke with an odd air of authority, as though she, and not the Professor, were in command of the situation.

"Have I your permission, Mademoiselle," went on the Professor, "to announce to these gentlemen the result of our recent interview?"

She bent her head, and I was astonished to see a warm flush spread over her face, so that it turned from white to crimson.

"Yes," she said in a low tone.

"You consent to this arrangement of your own free will and desire?"

"Of my own free will and before these witnesses," she answered steadily.

"It is well," said the Professor; and he passed round the table, a strange look on his face. He bowed to her with a grace and precision which might have belonged to a much younger man. Indeed, as he crossed the room, his shoulders straightened, and he seemed in the few steps which he took to have thrown off a weight of years. Having bowed, he held out his hand, and the girl quietly and without apparent reluctance gave him her own.

"Gentlemen," he said, with the same unusual ring in his voice, "I have the honour to announce that Mademoiselle de Polhac has promised to become my wife."

There was complete silence. Dupuis and the Marquis, obviously parties to the arrangement, were watching the scene to see how we would take it. Réhmy was

standing still as a stone, and I was so bewildered that for a moment I scarcely realised the force of the announcement. Then there came a cry from Gaston, and I saw that he was stumbling blindly towards the Professor, whom in another instant he would have had by the throat if Suzanne had not at the same moment stepped in the way.

"Gaston," she said imperiously, "I have asked you not to interfere. You must accept this decision. It is my wish that you should do so."

He stopped abruptly at the sound of her voice and passed a hand across his face. He looked at her piteously.

"The man is lying," he muttered. "This cannot possibly be true."

The tones of Réhmy, cold and cutting, came almost as a relief after the hopeless misery in Gaston's voice.

"Are we to understand, Professor, that the consent of Mademoiselle de Polhac to this arrangement is a price which she has been induced to pay for our lives?"

"I would suggest you put that question to Mademoiselle de Polhac herself," said the Professor.

Réhmy turned to the girl.

"Mademoiselle," he said with a grave dignity, "I will ask you to be entirely frank with us, and before you answer my question, I will also ask you to believe that neither Gaston nor myself, nor, I am sure, Mr. Preston, would dream of accepting willingly the sacrifice which we believe you to be making on our behalf."

"Captain Réhmy is speaking for us all," I said, as Réhmy turned to me for confirmation.

The girl made to speak, but Réhmy interrupted her.

"One moment," he said. "I want you before you answer me to realise fully the position. We have incurred certain risks in the performance of what we considered to be our duty. We are quite prepared to

face the consequences. I want you also to realise the character of the man with whom you are making this abominable contract. This is Professor Kreutzemark, whose name is infamous throughout the world; a man with a hundred crimes to his account. He is now engaged upon some evil design unknown to us, with which he apparently proposes to associate you as closely as possible. I warn him, and I warn you too, Mademoiselle de Polhac, that if, as a result of your mad act, we are now released, we shall leave no stone unturned to discover that design, and to prevent its accomplishment. The work we intend to do can end in only one of two ways. Either we shall fail, in which case we can hardly escape with our lives, or we shall succeed, in which case Professor Kreutzemark and all those who are associated in any way with his plans will be brought to justice."

He paused and waited for her answer, but it was the Professor who spoke, turning as he did so to the girl.

"Captain Réhmy," he said, "has put the case with the precision which we have learned to expect of him, though I naturally deplore the character of his personal references to myself. I would beg you, Mademoiselle, to answer him with an equal frankness and decision."

There was a deadly silence in the room. For an appreciable moment the girl stood, as though in reflection, looking straight in front of her. Then at last she raised her eyes and fixed them upon Réhmy, speaking with an almost lifeless composure.

"I have nothing," she declared, "to add to what I have already said. I take this decision with a full sense of what it implies. I have formed my own opinion of Professor Kreutzemark."

"You realise," Réhmy persisted, "that we do not accept this sacrifice."

"I give you no choice in the matter," she replied.

"The understanding between Professor Kreutzemark and myself is complete, and nothing you do can possibly affect it."

"Suzanne," Gaston began, in the voice of a man who is being strangled.

She turned on him swiftly.

"Gaston," she exclaimed, "will you not understand that it is useless for you to protest?"

"Quite right," said the little Marquis suddenly. "You should be grateful to the Señorita, who shows a very clear sense of the situation. You will perhaps appreciate it better yourself when you have seen what I had prepared for you."

And obeying a motion of his dimpled hand, two of the menservants drew back, as he spoke, the curtains covering the window at the end of the room.

It was a large window, and the garden outside was plainly visible to us all. In the foreground was the branch of a great tree, from which hung three ropes with nooses on the end of them.

There was a sharp cry, and turning, we saw Suzanne gazing out of the window with eyes of horror, and swaying where she stood. The Professor instantly supported her, but not before he had darted a terrible look at the Marquis.

"Pull those curtains at once," he commanded.

The Marquis, startled by the sudden fury with which the order was given, signed to the servants, who drew the curtains together, and shut out the engaging spectacle to which he had directed our attention.

Meanwhile, Dupuis had taken a paper from his pocket and laid it upon the table.

"The document is ready for your signature, Professor," he said. "And I hope it will be signed as quickly as possible. There is no time to lose."

He seemed nervous, and looked at his watch uneasily.

Indeed, I had lately begun to be aware that there was a general air of unrest about the whole group. The Marquis was drumming impatiently on the table, and even the menservants seemed unusually alert, and I caught them glancing now and then over their shoulders. All through that dreadful scene there had been intermittently sounds of bustle and preparation in all parts of the house.

Meanwhile, the Professor, offering his arm to Suzanne, conducted her towards the table.

"Your stepfather," he said, "has prepared the contract of betrothal. As we are in Spain, I feel it only due to our host to follow the custom of his country, especially as it will lend a certain solemnity to the occasion."

"The ceremony of the *esponsalis*," said the Marquis, "should rightly be performed before a justice, but it may also take place before witnesses privately.

"You understand," he went on, "that the signature of this paper is not binding in the sense of being equivalent to the marriage vow. It is, however, considered in my country to be an honourable undertaking, and either party breaking it is liable in law to be sued for damages, while in life that person is not considered to be any more of good society."

The girl had recovered from her momentary weakness, and was now standing in entire possession of herself by the table.

"I quite understand," she said, and stretched out her hand in silence for the pen.

The Marquis leaned across the table, and handed her a large white quill. She bent over the paper before her, and I heard the scratch of the pen. She then handed it to the Professor, who also signed.

This action was too much for Gaston. He strode

forward and caught Dupuis by the arm. He had barely touched him, however, when two of the menservants seized him and dragged him away. He stood helpless in their grasp, saying nothing, but his eyes were the eyes of a man who has lost all. The girl had seemed to ignore completely this final outbreak.

The group at the table broke up hurriedly the moment the document was signed.

"These gentlemen," said the Marquis, "can now be set at liberty."

"Certainly, Marquis," said the Professor, "and as quickly as possible."

The manner of our release was unseemly. I was still looking at the scene when someone from behind threw some kind of cloak over my head, and I felt myself seized and half carried, half dragged from the room. My hands and feet were then secured, and I was placed on the ground. I lay there in darkness, half-suffocated beneath the cloak, for about ten minutes, when I was again seized and lifted. My bearers then stumbled along, cursing softly in Spanish at my weight. A change in the atmosphere told me that I was in the open air. I was hoisted high, and then allowed to fall, bouncing heavily on something which gave, while a spring creaked and my head came in contact with something hard. Then I became aware of the sharp screech of the self-starter of a motor car and the deeper note of the engine. A moment later, a jerk threw me from the seat on which I had been thrown to the floor, where I lay mixed up with the feet of apparently two other occupants.

I heard a muffled voice, which I recognised to be that of Réhmy: "Is that you, Thomas?"

"Yes," I answered. "What next, I wonder?"

"I have no idea."

We were jolted over the uneven road for about a

quarter of an hour, during which time conversation was impossible.

Suddenly the car stopped with a jerk, and a moment later I felt myself being lifted again. Then I was allowed to fall on something hard with a bump that knocked all the breath out of me. The cloak, or whatever it was, was then dragged violently from my head. I sat up, still speechless, just in time to see a large car moving off, with the man who had released me standing on the running-board. It disappeared round a bend in the road, and I was left in contemplation of my two companions, who, in a similar plight to myself, were seated opposite me on the other side.

"Well," said I, "what do we do now?"

"We must get free and go after those devils," shouted Gaston, his arms already working behind him.

To get free did not prove a very difficult task. Indeed, I think the servants had received orders not to tie us too securely. I know it did not take me more than a few minutes to work my hands loose, and after that I undid the rope round my ankles and helped my companions to do the same. Some five minutes later found us free from our bonds and standing in anxious council.

The road, white and curving, ran down the wooded slope of a long hill. Barcelona was visible half a mile in front of us some hundreds of feet below. It gleamed in the morning sunshine, and beyond it lay the sparkling Mediterranean. For one who, like myself, had never expected to see it again, it was a grateful prospect.

"Come," said Gaston. "It's no use standing here." His eyes were blazing from his white face, and his mouth was distorted. "We must go back," he said, "we must go back, I tell you."

And he turned round and began walking as fast as he could in the direction taken by the car.

Réhmy sped after and stopped him, and the two expostulated together for a few minutes.

"It's no good, my dear fellow," Réhmy urged. "We haven't a ghost of a plan, or the means to carry it out. We haven't even a pistol between us."

I felt in my pockets, and very naturally found that the Professor had not restored to me the pistol which his servants had removed when I had entered the villa.

"You must face it, Gaston," went on Réhmy. "At present we can do nothing. We've got to keep our heads, and we've got to think."

"*Think!*" exclaimed Gaston fiercely, so utterly beyond himself that I scarcely recognised him. "You are always thinking. Do you propose to sit down and think while Suzanne is in the power of that fiend? I will go and strangle him with my two hands."

"Quietly, quietly, my friend," soothed Réhmy.

"I am going back, I tell you," said Gaston. "You can come or not as you like."

He turned and made once more to walk down the hill. Réhmy laid a hand on his shoulder, when at that moment a sound came to my ears.

"Stop," I said, "there's something coming."

The two men turned in my direction. True enough, below us, just round the hairpin bend, a large car containing what at the distance looked like a cargo of round blue boxes was coming up the hill. We drew to one side and waited. It came quickly nearer, its exhaust in full blast, and in a moment it had swept round the bend and was upon us.

And I saw that what I had taken for round blue boxes were the flat caps of half a dozen policemen.

I WAS bewildered by all the bustle and fuss. Police-men cropped up "like asparagus in May." All the men were now in the road surrounding Réhmy, with whom their chief was in rapid conversation.

"What has happened?" I asked, when I was at last able to come at him.

"Quick," he replied. "We haven't a moment to lose. These are our friends. I will explain it all to you as we go."

Already the police, who had now resolved themselves into four gendarmes and a dapper little officer in uniform, began to pack themselves once more into their enormous car.

Gaston, trembling with impatience, jumped on the running-board, and I stepped up on the other side. Réhmy wedged himself beside the little police officer, and the car was headed at once for the villa of the Marquis.

"But you said," I cried to Réhmy as we sped up the hill, "that the police would do nothing to help us."

"That was yesterday evening," said Réhmy; "but an extraordinary thing has happened. You will remember that I saw the second in command—this gentleman here (and he indicated the little officer, who bowed and smiled as far as his cramped position permitted)—and that he gave me to understand that he could not act because his chief was a friend of the Marquis. Well, his chief was assassinated this morning. There was a big rounding-up of syndicalists last night near the docks; and I gather that a regular fight took place, in the course of which the Chief Commissioner was killed by a stray bullet."

"When exactly did this happen?" I asked.

"Not long after midnight," Réhmy replied.

"*Mon dieu!*" shouted Gaston from the running-board. "Then that devil must have known all about it when he sent for us this morning. Don't you see?" he went on wildly, his eyes still piteous with the memory of what he had seen. "He set us free because he knew the police were coming. Suzanne has made her sacrifice for nothing. The whole of that business was a trick, and they were preparing to get away all the time we were there."

"Faster," he shouted to the driver.

He bent over the man at the wheel, exhorting him like a man possessed.

"Patience, Señor," said the Acting Commissioner. "Your friend tells me that it is scarcely twenty minutes since you left the villa yourself. We are going as fast as we can."

We were, indeed, running up the hill at a dangerous speed, and presently turned into a narrow road which I recognised as the one along which I had been taken the previous night. I heard Réhmy asking the Commissioner how he had found the address.

"I had it," he answered, "from the hotel proprietor, who told me that you had received a message from the Villa Las Delicias—and this is where we stop," he ended abruptly, as the car slowed down and drew in slightly under the shade of a plane tree.

The Commissioner gave some rapid orders as the police left the car, and they disappeared on either hand, rustling off through the hedge.

"They are surrounding the house," Réhmy explained. "Gaston, you might go to the left, and perhaps you, Thomas, would follow the Commissioner. I will go straight on. The Commissioner will fire two shots from his pistol when they are all in position, and then we shall rush the house."

I stumbled after two of the gendarmes, who were following the Commissioner. We went through some thick undergrowth, round a small plantation of olive trees, and eventually, by a little twisted path, reached the edge of a formal garden. It was small and enclosed with a clipped hedge of black cypress. In the middle was a fountain with a statue of Niobe and a sunken paved court bright with various tufts of sedum. Beyond rose the villa, very white and clean in the morning sunlight. The path ended in a large veranda surrounded by a wooden railing. In the background I perceived the flash of a long glass door.

We went in single file up one of the cypress hedges till we were within six feet of the wooden railing, when the Commissioner held up his hand, and we stopped dead, listening eagerly. No sound came from the house, though a thin wisp of blue smoke rising on the right, from where I judged the kitchen quarters to be situated, showed me that it was apparently not yet deserted.

The Commissioner glanced at the watch on his wrist. "I will give them two minutes," he said, "and then we must rush the house. Are you armed, Señor?" he whispered, turning to me.

"No," I replied, "they took away my pistol."

The Commissioner whispered to one of his men, who handed me in silence a Mauser, warning me that it was loaded. I received the weapon with thankfulness, and pushed back the safety-catch. My fatigue had given place to a wild excitement. I had but one thought, to see notched in the sight of my weapon the lean face of the Professor with the burning eyes, or, failing that, the dimpling countenance of the Marquis del Puente. And I knew I would not be slow with the trigger.

Two minutes passed. Somewhere within the hedge a bird was singing, and the jet of the fountain, flung high,

brought laughter and light into the garden. For a moment there was peace.

Suddenly it was broken by the pistol of the Commissioner. He fired twice, and then with a cry leapt the wooden barrier, and making for the glass doors shattered them with a single blow of his weapon.

I tumbled after him, the gendarmes running on either side. We stepped through the broken glass and found ourselves in the hall. At the same instant we heard a shot in front of the house, and the heavy main door swung open, its lock shivered by a bullet from one of the other party.

Gaston stood in the entrance, in a cloud of blue smoke.

The Commissioner, followed by one of his men, was already half-way up the staircase. I turned to the left, and made swiftly for the room in which we had been interrogated by the Professor, Gaston being close behind me. I whipped open the door, and we rushed into the room. It was empty. There was the table, just as we had left it less than an hour ago; the chairs had not been moved, and even the quill pen with which Suzanne had signed the infamous contract remained where the Professor had laid it down.

Presently we heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming from upstairs, and then a thin scream, followed by a patter of words in a reedy voice from somewhere in the direction of the kitchen. A moment later Réhmy appeared, urging forward by the arm an ancient woman. She appeared to be in the last extremity of terror. Hers was no silent fear, however; words streamed from her lips so fast that I could not follow, for she was speaking the Catalan dialect, with which I am not familiar.

Gaston, who had already broken in a door on the other side, only to find that it opened into a large cupboard, had turned to leave the room. He was brought

up short, however, by the Commissioner, who stood there, an expression of bitter disappointment on his face.

"It is no good, Señor," he said, "except for that old woman you have got there, there is not a soul in the house. We have even searched the cellars. They have got clean away."

Gaston staggered. The feverish energy which had hitherto supported him suddenly abandoned him. I helped him to a chair.

When next I turned my attention to the others, the Commissioner, talking rapidly in Catalan, was questioning the old woman.

"She says," he translated at the end, "that very early this morning the servants got orders to pack up and be ready to move immediately. Everyone was surprised, as they had been told that the Marquis was staying in the villa for several days. They went off in two cars. No explanation was given of this sudden flight, but the butler told her before they left that the Chief of Police had been murdered in Barcelona. The news had come in early that morning, and the man had himself answered the telephone and taken the message straight to the Marquis, who had appeared to be very much upset."

Réhmy and I exchanged glances as the tale proceeded.

"Did I not tell you?" said Gaston from his chair. "He knew when he set us free that if he had only kept us here a few hours longer we should have been rescued anyway."

Réhmy looked at his friend compassionately.

"You are right, Gaston," he said.

Gaston covered his face with his hands, and presently a great sob shook his frame. It was the last straw, to think that the sacrifice of the girl he loved had been in vain.

Réhmy put a hand on his shoulder. "Come, Gaston," he said, "we shall catch them yet."

"Yes," he said eagerly, grasping at the thought which alone could restore his powers of action. "We shall catch them, Etienne, is it not so?"

By this time the Commissioner had received reports from all his men. A thorough, if hasty, search of the whole villa had revealed no clue regarding the destination of its late occupants, and presently I found myself seated with Réhmy and the Commissioner at the dark oak table in the very chair which the Professor had occupied only a few hours before.

Gaston, too restless to sit, wandered about the room distractedly, listening impatiently to all we had to say. We held a hurried council of war. Already the Commissioner had tried to telephone from the villa to have the two motor cars in which the Marquis had transported his household stopped, only to find that the wires from the villa had been cut. He had at once sent one of his men to telephone from the nearest house.

"But I am very much afraid," he said, as he told us of these measures, "that the Marquis and his friends are already beyond the limits of my district."

"There is only one place where we are likely to find them now," said Gaston. "Almost certainly they have returned to Andalusia, to the Marquis's house at El Pedroso, where he will be in the midst of his own people."

"I cannot help you there," said the Commissioner. "The Marquis will be in his own country, and it will be exceedingly difficult to approach him. I will give you letters to the local police, but they are more likely to lead to your own arrest than that of the Marquis."

We decided to await the result of the Commissioner's attempt to stop the cars. If nothing were heard of them by midday, our only course would be to act on Gaston's hypothesis and start at once for Andalusia. Throughout our deliberations Gaston continued to stride restlessly up

and down the room, feverish and consumed with but one idea—to rescue Suzanne and avenge the trick that had been played upon her. The prospect of renewed action seemed to have cured him of his bodily ills.

Once we had decided what to do, I must own that my opinion of the Spanish police improved. They wasted no time. We were packed straight into the car, and driven with all speed to Barcelona, which we reached about midday. There we picked up clothes belonging to Gaston, which he had left behind him when he had gone to spy out the land some three weeks previously, and there too Réhmy and I prepared for our journey.

We found that there was no good train for Madrid until six in the evening. The long day wore on, and somehow drew to an end. Every hour or so Gaston would telephone to the police asking whether there was any news of the cars, but it soon became clear that they had got clean away.

Six o'clock in the evening found us at the railway station, where we took leave of our good friend the Commissioner before embarking upon the Madrid express. We travelled all night in a large compartment of the wagon-lit holding three beds, the carriages in Spain being larger than on any other railways, as the gauge is broader. In spite of our anxiety and excitement and the jolting of the train, I slept soundly, being utterly tired out from the events of the previous forty-eight hours. We reached the capital in the early morning.

In Madrid we had to wait three hours for a train to Seville. Réhmy took us to the sumptuous Madrid Palace Hotel, where Gaston and I were given a hot bath and the dressings on Gaston's head were changed.

Réhmy went out to do, as he said, an hour's shopping.

It was ten o'clock in the morning before we started on the second stage of our journey. We were going almost

due south, via Aranjuez, Alcazar and Manzanares to Cordoba, and so through to Seville itself. The home of the Marquis, so Gaston informed us, was on a tributary of the Guadalquivir, the Rio Biar, not far from the little hill town of El Pedroso. It was situated amid the interminable pastures of Andalusia, the breeding-place of countless generations of savage bulls, some forty kilometres to the north of Seville; and, though the town itself was served by a railway, Gaston advised us to hire a car in Seville and to approach it from the south.

It was in the train from Madrid, while we were rolling through the endless sun-baked plains, that Gaston, at the request of Réhmy, told us of his adventures.

He would have told us his tale before, but in spite of our eager curiosity to know what exactly he had discovered, we had forbidden him up to that moment to tax his brain with any explanations except those which were necessary for our immediate purpose.

It was accordingly when we were settled in our comfortable *sillones* that he began the account of his activities at the house of the Marquis. I was glad to note that as his narrative proceeded he lost something of the strained look which he had worn from the moment of our rescue. It was a good omen that he could even for a moment lose himself in his story. I know that Suzanne was never really absent from his mind during those terrible days, but he was not the man to brood, and I realised as I watched him that the danger in which she stood would act as a stimulus rather than depress his spirit.

"I will begin," said Gaston, "from my meeting with the chauffeur of the Marquis del Puente. He was a friendly little man, fond of his glass of sherry and a talk on the state of the nation. You know my way. Give me half an hour and a man who will not refuse his *petit verre*, and I am at once his comrade. He was to drive

the Graf von Konigsberg from Barcelona back to El Pedroso, starting at six o'clock in the evening, you will remember, of the 11th March. He made no difficulty about my joining him. As luck would have it, he had already been trying to get an extra mechanic to help him with the car. Naturally, he jumped at me. 'You are sent,' he said, 'by St. Christopher.' So we drank another glass to St. Christopher, and then I went and brought a livery.

"That evening it was I that opened the door of the car to the Graf, and I will confess to you, my friends, that when I saw who it was—for, of course, I recognised him immediately—I wished devoutly, Etienne, you had been there!"

"I spent the next few weeks with that same wish for company," said Réhmy.

"He hardly looked at me," Gaston went on. "He was fathoms deep in his meditations. You will imagine whether I looked at him! He got quickly into the car, but not too quickly. For I knew beyond all doubt that I had seen the devil.

"It took us three days to reach the château of the Marquis, and during all that time I did not see the Professor at all. We travelled only by night and during the early part of the morning, and we slept during the day. And you may depend upon it, by the time we arrived, my friend the chauffeur was sufficiently fond of me to do everything he could, and even a little more. So I laid claim to a knowledge of horses, and begged him to get me a job as a groom, since my services as a mechanic would no longer be needed once we arrived.

"Well, I got the job all right, and pretty tedious it was. I was one of a dozen ragged peons, a kind of ostler looking after the horses on the farm. But at least I was on the spot.

“ For four or five days nothing happened. The Professor was invisible, except for two hours every day, when he rode out for exercise, usually with the Marquis, who was for ever inspecting his bulls. I had only one consolation. You wouldn't believe it of that soft round horror of a man, but the Marquis had an eye for a horse, and a seat in the saddle which even I could respect. Also he knew a horseman when he saw one, and I was soon promoted to exercise his favourite mounts. And they were horses, my friends !

“ Then on the evening of the fifth day I had a shock. I was sitting at a little wine-booth beside the dusty road, half a mile or so beyond the château, drinking a glass of the rough wine of the country and trying to appear not too obviously bored with the conversation of my companions, when a little man came up the road. He was astride a mule, with a suit-case strapped to the pommel of his saddle.

“ My friends, it was little Adolf.

“ Now what could the Professor be wanting with little Adolf in the south of Spain? That was the question which had somehow to be answered. I had felt from the first that there was something afoot, and now I was nearly sure of it.”

“ Why didn't you send for me? ” asked Réhmy.

“ You could have done no more than I,” said Gaston promptly, “ and you would have doubled the risk. Unlike me, you were personally known to the Professor, and those eyes of his would have picked you out at once. You may be a wonder at disguise, but if the Professor had known me as well as he knows you, I don't think I should have dared to meet him. His eyes, I tell you, are not the eyes of a man: they are—my friends, I cannot tell you what they are. And now here was Adolf, who knew us both. I was in mortal terror of

being recognised, though by that time my disguise was pretty good, and I don't mind telling you that I took special pains with it for the remainder of my time at El Pedroso.

" For two days after the arrival of little Adolf nothing further happened, except that one night I had toothache. I lay in the wretched loft, which is all we peons had in the way of a lodging, with this cursed tooth throbbing, and quite unable to sleep, when I heard suddenly in the silence of the night, and above the heavy breathing of my companions, an intermittent spitting and crackling noise which at first puzzled me enormously. I rose from my bed of hay and climbed out of the loft, which is on the north side of the patio round which the Marquis's house is built, and moved along in the darkness to investigate.

" The moment I was outside, the noise was explained. It came from a wireless apparatus, and a pretty powerful one too, for I saw the aerials like strange cobwebs across the face of the moon, supported on two light masts clamped to the roof of the house. I afterwards discovered that these masts were lowered during the day.

" The operator was working in a small shed quite close to where I was standing, and I suppose I must have listened for about half an hour to this infernal crackling and spitting, cursing my luck that I could not read the code, when it stopped and the operator appeared at the door of the shed. I saw him stretch out his arms and yawn and turn his face to the sky for a moment. And again, my friends, it was little Adolf !

" For me it was good enough. Here was little Adolf using a wireless installation, carefully hidden by day, and sending out messages in code. Had the Professor been twice as fat as he is thin, I should never after that have believed that he was living a country life for his

figure. It was then, Etienne, that I sent you the message on no account to have our man arrested."

"You need have had no fear of his arrest," said Réhmy grimly.

"Two days later came another surprise. Dupuis arrived, and I need not tell you that I already knew the stepfather of Suzanne. I had met him once in Paris, and I had disliked him immediately. But it came as a shock to find him involved with the Professor.

"It was about six in the evening when he reached El Pedroso. I presumed that his coming would mean some kind of conference between the three men at the earliest opportunity, and I determined that night to get a nearer view. It occurred to me while I was washing the car that the likeliest place for such a conference would be the library. It has French windows reaching to the ground and opening on to a little paved garden surrounded by a hedge of cypresses. The problem was how to get there. The grooms were not allowed in the house. The Marquis, let me tell you, has a short way with menials."

He paused a moment, and a flush burned suddenly in his pale cheeks. He struck the light folding table with his fist.

"Some day," he said, "I hope to take a short way with the Marquis. You will understand later the kind of reckoning that is necessary.

"Well," he continued, "by the time that I had finished washing the car, I had come to the conclusion that my only hope was to get into the garden. Who knew? The luck might be good, and the windows open.

"I accordingly did not enter the hayloft that night with my companions, but invented a girl whom I was going to meet on the road to El Pedroso, and, indeed, soon after the evening meal, I set off, followed by the

laughter and heavy wit of my companions. I did not go far, however, but fetched a compass to the left, getting back to the house about half-past ten. It was quite easy to get into the garden, for there was nobody about, and I climbed through the cypress hedge and got as far as the French windows. The windows were shut and the curtains drawn, but carelessly, so that there was a gap through which I could see into the room. It was quite empty, and I waited. It was cold and damp in the dew, and during the next hour or so, my dear Thomas, I understood why you English people talk of cooling the heels.

“Then suddenly I forgot all about my heels, for at last I saw the door of the library open. In came the Professor, and he was followed by Dupuis and by the Marquis. They were talking as they entered, but I could not hear what they were saying. The Marquis and Dupuis sat down at a table in the middle of the room, while the Professor, to my astonishment, walked towards one of the bookshelves, and pulled out a large and what seemed to be a very ancient tome. This he laid on the table between them. It looked to me like some sort of chronicle, and I could see that the print was extremely old, with coloured capitals at the beginning of the paragraphs. Whatever it was, it certainly interested those three men. They bent over it, and the Professor, running along the text with his finger, seemed, as far as I could judge, to be explaining or perhaps translating it.

“Then after a time they rose from the table, and the Professor put the book back on its shelf.”

“Could you find that shelf again?” interposed Réhmy

“I could,” said Gaston. “It’s the third shelf on the south wall of the room, and the thirty-eighth volume counting from the left.”

Réhmy jotted down this information in a notebook.

“ Well, after that,” continued Gaston, “ they sat down by the hearth, and I could not see them very well, though I caught from time to time a brief snatch of the conversation. Dupuis produced a mass of papers from a despatch-case which he had brought with him into the room, and they talked for about half an hour with the documents spread out in front of them.”

Gaston paused at this point, and then continued more slowly :

“ I heard the following fragments of conversation,” he said. “ And they occurred in the exact order in which I give them. I can offer no explanation.

“ ‘ Oil at Sumatra ’ (said by Dupuis). . . .

“ ‘ It should take about two months ’ (said by the Marquis). . . .

“ ‘ Oh, you mean the Deliverer ’ (said by Dupuis, and at that remark I saw the Professor’s head go up). . . .

“ And then something that sounded like ‘ Ayugumsik ’ (said by both Dupuis and the Marquis simultaneously).

“ After that there was a long pause, nor could I see very well what they were doing. Then suddenly the Professor rose and for the first time I heard his voice. He came towards the window, and the light in the room shone full on his face. My friends, I had almost said that it was transfigured, for never have I seen such a strange expression. But it was no light from heaven that gave it that peculiar radiance. Instinctively I shrank back from the window as it came towards me, as one shrinks from a flame.

“ Then with that queer look on his face, and walking like a man in a dream, I heard him utter a strange phrase.

“ I had stood up as he moved and shifted a little to the left so that I was hidden by the curtain, but I watched him from that friendly little gap.

“ ‘ The Lord of Fear,’ he said, and his voice rang out so

that the others in the room stiffened to attention. And then again he said: 'The Lord of Fear.'

"I told you that I had shrunk back from the window as he came down the room, but now he had passed out of my sight and, eager to hear and see more of what was happening, I drew near to the window again and pressed my face against the cold glass.

"Abruptly the curtains were drawn apart, and the face of a man was printed upon the glass exactly opposite my own."

Chapter XI *I am about to Receive a Shock*

"I NEED not tell you, my friends, that was a nasty moment, for I found myself looking straight into the eyes of Professor Kreuzemark. You know what they are like, and at that moment they were lit by some devilish inspiration, and owing, I suppose, to a trick of the glass, they were larger than life, and luminous as hot coals.

"I dropped flat on the ground, and crawled off as quickly as I could down the cypress hedge, and so back to the loft which I shared with the peons, but not to sleep. It's only a fool that gives his enemy credit for no intelligence, and I felt pretty sure that the Professor would want to know something about that face he had seen at the window.

"The Professor lost no time, for I had hardly settled into my hay when the brute of a major-domo came creeping in to see whether we were all there. And the fellow knew his job; he did more than count the sleepers. He felt the heart of every one of us to see whether there might not be one that beat unduly fast. Never did man have better cause to bless a naturally steady pulse than I at that particular moment. Fortunately for me, I was

the last man in the row, so that by the time he put his hand upon my ribs I was breathing normally again, having quite recovered from my hasty retreat in the darkness.

“After that incident nothing happened for three days. No one took the slightest notice of me, and I did not once see the Professor or little Adolf.

“All that time I was haunted by the strange words uttered by the Professor in the library. The manner in which he had called upon ‘The Lord of Fear’ was almost an invocation. The phrase and the expression and bearing of the man who used it haunted me in my dreams. I am not the man to be easily hag-ridden, but *mon Dieu*, if only you had seen his eyes you would understand.”

He paused a moment and passed a hand across his face. He then continued :

“It was on the afternoon of the fourth day that the next event occurred. On that day the Marquis and the Professor went out riding, as was their custom. We peons took it in turn to follow them as groom in attendance, and that day it fell to me. We rode for two hours over those long, undulating plains that you will see shortly.

“We returned about six o’clock, and as we entered the patio of the house and I had gone to the horses’ heads, little Adolf appeared suddenly, a slip of paper in his hand. He walked towards us and handed the slip to the Professor.

“‘A message at last,’ he said, speaking in German.

“The Professor took the slip and read it.

“How was I to get a sight of the few words scrawled on that flimsy piece of paper? Of course, you must understand that all this time I was holding the horses and looking as unintelligent and loutish as I possibly could.

“The Professor, when he had read the paper, passed it over to the Marquis.

“ ‘Our man, you see, is almost due to arrive,’ he said, and I noticed that he was speaking German, though they invariably talked Spanish when together. ‘I shall have to go by train. How long will it take?’

“ ‘You will be there in twenty-four hours,’ replied the Marquis. ‘It is fortunate that he arrives at Barcelona. The head of the police there is an old friend of mine, and he would never permit himself to be inconvenient.’

“ ‘Excellent!’ returned the Professor, getting off his horse as he spoke. ‘Friends at court, or perhaps I should say at the police-court, never come amiss.’

“ Evidently the news in the telegram had pleased him. He was prepared to be even gay.

“ ‘You had better not stay in a hotel,’ went on the Marquis, ‘but at my villa.’ I will send instructions to have it prepared for you.’

“ He paused, and then added :

“ ‘Better still, I will go with you myself. My bulls are fighting in Barcelona on Sunday, and the people will like me to be there.’

“ Thus talking he had already begun to dismount in a leisurely way. He is a fat little man, as you know, and he cocked his leg with its fringed yellow gaiter and the great silver spur attached to his yellow heel carelessly across his horse’s neck.

“ All this time he was holding the message in his hand. I decided to take the chance. I glanced at the Professor, and was glad to see that he was looking away from me towards the house. Just as the Marquis was about to slip from the saddle I gave his horse a sharp dig in the belly. It was only half broken in, and it reared suddenly and then plunged wildly as the spur on the Marquis’s boot scored a furrow in its neck. The Marquis fell heavily to the ground, the paper fluttering from his grasp.

“ You may imagine that I was not slow to help him

up or to read the piece of paper which lay so conveniently under my eyes. There were about seven words on it, and I read them in a flash :

“ ‘ SS *Cabo Nero* arriving Barcelona eighteen thirty hours twenty-fifth.’

“ But now the Marquis was on his feet. I endeavoured to brush him down, and made haste to hand him the piece of paper. He was furiously angry, his little eyes glittering in his round face like over-polished boot buttons. Already the major-domo had come running out, appalled to see what had happened.

“ ‘ Take away this clumsy lout,’ said the Marquis, ‘ and never let me see him again. He can’t even hold a horse’s head. Let the lads have a go at him with their stirrup leathers. It may brighten his wits.’

“ The major-domo advanced towards me and dealt me a buffet on the left ear. It is not my custom to allow liberties of that kind, but what would you? I was no more than a humble peon, something with only half a mind—of far less value than the horse which I had so carelessly held. So the major-domo, little thinking what was in my heart, and how near death he stood at that moment, was suffered to drag me off by the scruff of the neck while I whimpered and begged for mercy. My reward for all this self-control was to hear the Marquis say as I was being thus removed : ‘ Send the fellow up with the bulls to Barcelona. We’re a man short for the job, and I’m sure he will dislike it thoroughly.’

The peons walked into me with their stirrup leathers till I could scarcely stand. Their lives were pretty dull, poor fellows, and you will understand that they made as much as possible of the few chances they got of amusing themselves. They finally kicked me out of the loft, and I spent the night aching and shivering in an arbutus

thicket. Next morning I was set to the dreary task of getting fodder for the bulls, which were that day driven into Seville and entrained for Barcelona.

"But my mind was afire. Someone of prime importance to the Professor's plans was about to arrive at Barcelona, and I was going to be there. I should be able to get in touch with you, Etienne, and I felt it would not be our fault if we failed to meet the *Cabo Nero*. And now, my friends, I am nearly at the end.

"For that was my last bit of luck. It is true that I arrived in Barcelona with the bulls, but I did not have a single moment to myself. I had to sleep with the peons in the dirt of the horse-boxes, and I could never get away from them. At first I was merely annoyed. But it was soon more serious, for I realised that beyond all doubt I was being watched, and I could only suppose that little Adolf had seen me and given me away to the Marquis. Anyhow, I was quite unable to get loose, though once for five minutes I slipped off to buy some cigarettes, and succeeded in sending that message about meeting me in the bull-ring. Then came the surprise of my life, when I saw my old friend Thomas gazing at me from a seat in the arena with his eyes almost dropping out of his head with excitement. How did you come into it, Thomas?"

Réhmy then told Gaston briefly of all that had passed—how he had gone to meet the *Cabo Nero* in my place, the subsequent attempt to murder me in the street, my encounter with Señor Cunha-Riario and our final capture by the Professor.

We spent the next hour in discussing every detail of the position exhaustively. Among other things I gave Gaston and Réhmy a detailed account of the impressions made on me by the mysterious Mr. X during the dinner on Tibidabo, and I found that Réhmy, from his observa-

tion of Mr. X during our subsequent interrogation, was inclined to attach an enormous importance to this unknown partner in the game.

"At present," concluded Réhmy, after one of his characteristic summaries of the situation, "we can do no more than ask a series of questions. On what are these men engaged? Who is Mr. X? What is his connection with the Professor? Who or what is the Lord of Fear? To what extent does the Professor intend to associate Mademoiselle de Polhac with his designs? What is Dupuis, outwardly a respectable French man of commerce, doing in that *galère*? What possible motive can the Marquis have for taking part in a criminal conspiracy?"

"There is only one possible way to find an answer to these questions. We have got to follow the Professor as closely as possible, and hold our hand till we have something definite to go upon. We must give him, as the English say, the rope with which to hang himself."

"The first thing to do," said Gaston, looking doggedly before him, "is to rescue Suzanne. Till then I don't care what his design may be. He shall have no rope at all."

He paused a moment, clenched his hands, and broke out passionately:

"Only put me within reach of that devil," he cried, "and he will never need a rope. If ever I get the chance . . ."

He broke off suddenly, and his head fell forward into his hands.

Réhmy put an arm round his shoulder.

"You shall have your chance, *mon ami*," he said. "I swear it, Gaston. But you must leave the time and place to me. Mademoiselle de Polhac shall not remain one second longer in the hands of the Professor than we can help."

It was after midnight, for the train was very late, when we drew up in the dirty, ill-lighted station of Seville. We groped our way down the tenebrous platform, through a brick archway, across a waiting-room and so out into the street.

We drove to the Hotel del Quatro Naciones, and engaged two rooms with an intercommunicating door, one of which was shared by Réhmy and Gaston. I had the other room to myself. Réhmy made arrangements at once for the hiring of a car, and we decided to start at five o'clock.

I came to the surface after what seemed æons of sleep, to find Gaston shaking me by the arm.

"Come on, Thomas," he said, and his eyes were bright with a fever of impatience. "The car is ready, we shall be starting in ten minutes."

I stumbled downstairs, where I found Réhmy and Gaston packing our few belongings into an open hup-mobile. Gaston took the wheel and without further delay we started.

"Not much of a car," said Réhmy, "but she's the only thing I could find at this hour, and she ought to get us there. Gaston says the place is not more than fifty kilometres away."

We ran slowly through the outskirts of Seville along the banks of the Guadalquivir. Behind us the city was gradually taking form and colour in the growing light. The old Moorish tower, the Torre del Oro, loomed behind us, above the beautiful gardens, a black finger against the lucid sky, while above everything was the great mass of the cathedral.

Once clear of the houses we made better speed, pushing on through the silver-grey of the olive trees, past frequent shady gardens with paths of yellow sand, until we reached a broad and fairly good road bordered by small taverns

and eating-houses. Then we went as quickly as the car would go. Gaston meanwhile supplemented his former description of the Marquis's house. It was built of white stone and plaster round the three sides of a patio, and was best approached, he said, from the north, as we should thus avoid passing through a small village, an offshoot of El Pedroso, where our appearance might arouse suspicion.

After we had been going for well over an hour, Gaston turned abruptly to the left down a narrow winding track. And then, a little further on, he pointed silently.

Away on the right was a large white villa surrounded by trees.

"There is the house," he said. "We will approach it from the other side. Another ten minutes and we shall be there."

He turned as he spoke altogether off the track, and we bucketed over the grass of the plain itself, presently losing sight of the house entirely, which was now hidden by a small hill or rise in the ground, round the western side of which we drove in fetching our circle in order to avoid the village. The main road which we had left passed quite close to the house. It crossed the ridge half a mile or so to our right, the house itself being about four hundred yards from the foot of it.

We struck the road again on the further side of the ridge, which was now between us and our objective, and under Réhmy's direction we finally pulled up in a little straggling copse of trees.

"Why not go nearer to the house?" asked Gaston.

"We must be nearly a mile away from it here."

"Patience," replied Réhmy, who, to my surprise, began, as soon as the car stopped, to take off his coat and waistcoat. "Remember we are only three against a man who is in his own country and surrounded by his own servants. We can hardly walk up to the door and ring the bell."

He had already removed his coat and was now unpacking a small suit-case which he had brought with him in the car.

"I am going to spy out the land," he said in answer to our inquiring looks, "and it occurs to me that as an obvious townsman strolling along this country road in the early morning, I should almost certainly excite the curiosity of the local inhabitants.

"I bought these things in Madrid," he went on, getting into the filthiest skirt I have ever seen.

He was working rapidly as he spoke, and in a marvelously short space of time he had succeeded in transforming himself into one of those brown-faced gitanas who wander over the length and breadth of Spain and Southern France, and who claim descent from those who held in bondage the children of Israel. In some marvelous way he had contrived to obliterate his teeth, and, hanging amulets about his neck, he moved off with the slow, untiring gipsy stride, a hale old woman bent on having her palm crossed with the traditional silver.

"Come with me to the top of the hill," he said. "I will leave you there and go on by myself."

"That's a good idea," said Gaston. "I will drive you up in the car. You can see the house plainly from the top. We will lie up there, and keep you in view with our field-glasses."

We packed ourselves once more into the hupmobile and moved off to the top of the hill, stopping just below the brow. Gaston and I then left the road and looked about for some kind of cover. The ground was bare for a hundred yards on each side, but beyond that distance on the left was a small thicket of dark, twisted shrubs. We walked off towards it, and presently installed ourselves on the summit of the reverse slope of the ridge, which commanded a view of the Marquis's house, five

hundred yards or so below us. Réhmy meanwhile was proceeding down the white road towards it.

It was extraordinarily still in the clear morning air. The sun shed a pleasant warmth on my back, and somewhere just in front of me a cicala began to chirp monotonously.

I pulled out the pair of field-glasses given to me by Réhmy and focussed them on the house. Seen through the glasses, it appeared to be a comfortable though unpretentious dwelling, built, as I have said, round a courtyard. The stables and outhouses were all on this side, and I could even make out the little shed, which I took to be the building which housed the wireless apparatus.

I turned to Gaston, intending to ask him whether it was so, when he gave a sharp exclamation. Rising above the corner of the road nearest to us was a great swirl of white dust, and almost at once there came into view, only three or four hundred yards away, first one and then another car, moving swiftly towards us along the open road. Réhmy's figure, black against the dust, moved hastily towards the ditch at the side, and then bobbed a curtsy to the passing cars. I gazed at them in bewilderment for a moment. Then Gaston gripped me by the arm.

"Look!" he said fiercely in my ear. "We are too late."

And leaping to his feet, he tugged at the pocket in which his pistol rested, and made for the road from which we had just withdrawn.

"Gaston," I called, trying vainly to overtake him. "What are you doing, man? You must be mad."

But I might as well have spoken to the sea. He was like a man possessed, and the futility of trying to hold up two powerful cars driven, as we saw, at great speed,

did not for an instant deter him. He reached the road some three or four yards ahead of me, just as the two cars breasted the ridge. They were Rolls Royces, their long aluminium bodies gleaming in the sunlight. I had just time to distinguish the Professor, Mademoiselle de Polhac, and the Marquis in the first of them, when above the noise of the engines came the crack of Gaston's pistol. An instant later I felt a sharp tug at my hair, and whipping round, saw my hat, with a neat hole in it, lying on the ground ten yards behind me.

I spun round again, and now my pistol was out, but already it was too late. The cars had swept past us, and were now disappearing down the hill, up which we had climbed a short time before.

Gaston was still standing in the ditch, his pistol smoking in his hand.

"*Nom d'un nom,*" he shouted, as I moved towards him, "I missed him only by a hair."

"They missed me, too," I answered with some asperity. He took not the slightest notice of my remark, however, but started feverishly cranking up the car we had hired, for it did not seem to have a self-starter. He then got in and began turning it round in the road to face the way we had come.

He had just completed this manœuvre when Réhmy appeared round the corner, coming at a run, with his skirts pulled up above the knees, a picture which would have been ludicrous at any other moment.

"It is hopeless to follow them," he said as he came up.

"At least we will try," cried Gaston, his face set like a mask of stone.

He threw open the door of the car, and we got in without a word. Gaston let the clutch in with a jerk.

"But we shall never catch them," I protested, as we swayed and rocked down the road.

"True," said Réhmy, "but we may just be able to keep them in view, and note their direction. We can, at any rate, do nothing else for the moment."

It was, indeed, comparatively easy to keep the cars in view, for in that bare country of undulating plain it was possible to see for great distances, and, though the two Rolls Royces were already a good half-mile away, the cloud of dust made by their wheels was still quite easily visible.

We ran for about two miles, and were soon heading for another ridge, somewhat higher than the one above the house of the Marquis. The distance between us and our quarry was rapidly increasing. Indeed, the two Rolls had already breasted the ridge in front and disappeared over the brow of it before we were half-way across the flat. We went even slower when we began to climb the hill, and presently, as we drew nearer the top, Gaston was forced to change down. We reached the summit crawling along on third, and Gaston's hand was already on the gear lever to change up when he suddenly gave a sharp cry and jammed the brakes full on, a manoeuvre which flung me violently forward upon Réhmy, who was in the seat in front of me. At the same instant my ears were filled with a mighty lowing and the sound of innumerable feet.

I put my hand on Réhmy's shoulder, and stared out in front of me.

We were on the summit of the hill, and the road ran level for a short distance. Fifty yards away moved a great black mass of tossing heads, drumming hoofs and a bristling frieze of gigantic horns.

The wild bulls of the Marquis Guardalmedina del Puente were thundering towards us.

Chapter XII I am Taunted with the License of Ink

IT is difficult to give a coherent account of the next wild moments. I seem to remember Gaston yelling like a madman, erect on the seat and waving his arms, presumably in the vain hope of diverting the mad rush of the bulls. He might as well have tried to stop an Atlantic breaker. Already they were upon us. I had a vision of broad sable backs and heaving flanks and spreading nostrils and the vicious deadly horns, while above them all floated a cloud of light spring dust, through which the forms of the herdsmen with their long lances and their wide sombrero hats were seen driving them on in the background.

The car swayed and jerked almost as if it were alive. So violent was the shock that it was thrust backwards, and, moving at an angle across the road, its right rear wheel soon found the ditch. There the car hung, its bonnet to the sky and its three occupants sprawling on the floor and on the seats. It was a miracle that it did not overturn. If it had done so, nothing could have saved us. Then, with a horrid ripping sound, a great horn shot through the metal panelling of the door beside me, missing my thigh by a few inches, and so great was the strength of the brute behind it that the whole door was torn from its hinges and the great bull swept on with the herd, tossing and twisting it about above his head as though it had been made of paper.

I saw Réhmy's arm go out, a pistol in his hand. The hand jerked as a stream of shots poured from the weapon directed, as he afterwards told me, at the nearest mounted peon. I do not think any of them took effect, but they served our turn, for the man shouted to his companions, who sheered off, prodding the rearmost bulls with their long lances. In another moment they had passed behind

us in a cloud of dust. I caught sight of the last of the men as he galloped by—a tall figure swaying in the morning sunlight on his dappled horse, his legs bright with brilliant yellow gaiters deeply fringed, and with long steel spurs, while at his saddle flared a coloured *jerez* blanket.

We hastened to inspect the damage. One glance was enough. Nothing short of a crane and half a dozen skilled mechanics with a well-fitted garage would ever set that car on the road again. The radiator was pierced in several places, and the water was streaming out. One front tyre was flat, and the other burst. These were the minor injuries. Even more damage was behind. The back axle had broken, and both the wheels were hopelessly buckled.

"Na poo, fini," said Gaston, "as your soldiers used to say in the war. That is the end of the car. What is the next move?"

He looked inquiringly at Réhmy, who was shaking himself free from the bits of glass which sprinkled him, for he had received most of the wind-screen on his lap. Serious though our position was, I could not help smiling at his appearance, which was ludicrous in the extreme. The clothes of the old woman which he had worn as his disguise were wildly disordered. From beneath a bright petticoat protruded a sturdy leg in well-fitting trousers, while the wig and cap which he had worn were hanging over his left eye.

"There is nothing to be done," he said shortly. "We must go back to the house. And heaven knows what we shall find there."

Already Gaston had started off. I checked him, however, and we waited while Réhmy got rid of his disguise, which was now worse than useless. Then the three of us started down the road along which we had come, and I don't think any of us felt particularly happy. Our

enemies were now well away, the Lord knew where, in two high-powered motor-cars, leaving their pursuers forlorn with no means of travel except their own flat feet on a lonely road in Andalusia.

I could not but admire the audacity of the Professor. Clearly he was not only a master of the long design; he was equally a man of rapid decision. Witness that sudden stampeding of the herd of bulls. For this was no accident, and I had not been in the least surprised to see Réhmy firing at the herdsmen. Even in the heart of a bull-breeding country herds of savage, utterly wild beasts, are not driven without due warning along the solitary available road. No, it was only too clear. The Professor and the Marquis, easily outstripping us on the road, had met one of the Marquis's herds out at pasture and instantly the Professor had seized his chance. A word from the Marquis to the head peon, and the whole herd had been driven thundering down the road towards us.

My thoughts flew naturally to the fate of Suzanne de Polhac. I had caught a glimpse of her face, very pale in the staring sunlight, as she had flashed past me in the car—perhaps the last sight I should ever have of her. I glanced at Gaston. He was striding along on the other side of the road, his face expressionless, and one hand clenched in the side pocket of his coat. But it was all very well for my poor friend to sweep along, holding a pistol and looking resolute. There was nobody left to shoot.

We said nothing at all till we got within sight of the house. Then Réhmy stopped and motioned us to do likewise.

“Better go carefully,” he said. “We don't know who they have left behind.”

“Carefully!” exclaimed Gaston in sudden desperation. “There can be nobody now except that brute of a major-

domo. God help him, if he's there, that's all," and he grinned viciously.

Gaston was evidently in no mood to listen to any moderate counsels. But Réhmy checked him.

"Don't be absurd, man," he said sharply. "It's no good running into things blindly. We must use some common care."

"Common care be damned!" said Gaston savagely. "If it had not been for you and your common care we should have caught those devils!"

He stood in the road, his arms rigid, glaring at his friend with extraordinary hostility.

It was the first time I had ever seen them quarrel, I could see that Réhmy was terribly hurt. He said nothing, however, but moved quietly into the shadow of a small cypress hedge on one side of the road bordering a plantation of gnarled and twisted vines, beckoning to me to join him. I moved to obey, but with an obvious hesitation. Truth to tell, I sympathised with Gaston. I think Réhmy read my thoughts, for he shook his head.

"Can't you see," he said curtly, "that we must equally have failed if we had simply blundered into the house this morning without any plan or preparation. We should merely have walked straight into a trap, whereas now, though the Professor has escaped us, we at least are free."

Gaston, however, was not listening. He still stood in the centre of the road staring up the hill beyond the brow of which all his hopes had vanished.

"Who knows, *mon Dieu*," I heard him murmur brokenly, "if I shall ever see her again."

Réhmy crossed the road. He put a hand on Gaston's shoulder, saying something which I could not hear, and the flushed, half-angry, half-piteous look left the eyes of his friend. Gaston suddenly seized Réhmy's hand and wrung it, placing his free hand on the other's shoulder.

It was theatrical, if you like, but remember that these two were Frenchmen, and just as I would have said "Sorry, old boy," and shuffled off, so Gaston apologised after his own more demonstrative fashion.

The little scene was over in a few seconds. Then they turned to me, and it was Gaston himself who spoke.

"Let me go," he said, "I know the way. You can wait here, while I see how the land lies. If I'm not back in ten minutes, come after me, for you will know that I have been caught."

He swung off in the direction of the house, which was shining white a hundred yards or so away, and we watched him disappear behind a low mud wall. Réhmy said nothing, but mechanically reloaded his Mauser, which he had vainly emptied at the peon driving the bulls.

We waited a few minutes. My mind, still full of the Professor, turned over and rejected a hundred wild, impossible schemes for his destruction, when the train of my futile reverie was abruptly broken by Réhmy.

"Heavens," he exclaimed. "What on earth may this be?"

I looked up. There was Gaston walking down the road, all smiles and bows, while beside him trotted a short and, even to my untutored eyes, an overdressed woman, conversing with him loudly in rapid French. Clearly she had passed the age of forty, and she affected that archness of middle age which is more the result of despair than of conviction. I did not know whether to laugh or to be sorry for her, as she came mincing towards us beside the suddenly vivacious Gaston. I noted that she was expensively dressed in the sort of clothes you see on the Promenade des Anglais or the terrace at Monte Carlo.

It was apparent, as we went to meet her, that she had not yet got over her surprise at her unexpected encounter with Gaston.

"C'est écrasant ! c'est bouleversant ! Mais c'est chic. C'est chic alors, n'est-ce pas ?"

"Allow me, Madame," began Gaston rapidly, as they came to a standstill in front of us, "to present to you my English friend, Mr. Preston. Mr. Preston—Madame Dupuis. I believe you know Captain Réhmy."

"Why, of course," said Madame Dupuis, turning from me to Réhmy with a bright smile. "I remember Captain Réhmy very well, and I trust," she added with a simper, "that Captain Réhmy remembers me."

"Madame la Comtesse," said Réhmy, bowing over her hand, addressing her by her former title, "is not so easily forgotten."

She dazzled him with a smile that was a tribute to the progress of dental science.

"So you are touring in these parts," she went on, "and you have had an accident."

I shot a glance at Gaston, who solemnly closed one eye.

"A most unfortunate accident," I said. "Our car is almost a complete wreck."

"Accidents *will* happen," she said brightly. "And they so seldom happen at the right time. Now if this one had only happened just a little sooner, you would have met my husband. As it is, you have just missed him, and you have also missed Suzanne. It's not like you, Gaston, to miss Suzanne, is it?" and she patted him playfully on the arm.

I saw him wince, and Réhmy hastily intervened.

"Two cars passed us on the road," he said, "and I think we saw your daughter in one of them."

"Yes, Captain Réhmy," she answered, as we all three began walking towards the house, "it must have been Suzanne. How wonderfully observant you are ! Suzanne is taking a little trip, leaving her poor old mother behind,"

and she made a comic face. "But then, you know, I never could stand the sea."

"The sea!" echoed Réhmy, as we passed through an archway of Moorish pattern and entered a broad cool patio with lemon trees and a fountain.

"Yes, she is taking a little cruise with our kind host," she replied. "In fact, there is quite a party of them."

"Your host—is it not so, Madame—is the Marquis del Puente?" said Réhmy in the manner of a man politely interested.

"Of course," she answered. "Perhaps you know him, too. Such a *dear*. So very affable and considerate."

"So they have gone on a cruise?" continued Réhmy.

"Where?" said Gaston eagerly.

"How long will they be away?" I asked her simultaneously.

Madame Dupuis looked at us in surprise. It seemed we were taking too keen an interest in her daughter, and perhaps too little interest in herself.

"It is a pity you could not have come a little earlier, M. de Blanchegarde," she said with some asperity.

"I am sorry, Madame," said Gaston, "but the matter is—is—more important than you think," he ended lamely.

Réhmy came to our rescue.

"We will be perfectly frank with you, Madame," he said. "Our appearance in this part of the world is not quite as casual as it seems. We are, in fact, most anxious to see the Marquis on a matter of urgent business, and we are naturally disappointed to find that he has departed."

"That is, indeed, unfortunate," she replied. "It isn't as if I even knew where they have gone. In fact, now I come to think of it, though the Marquis said a great deal, he does not seem to have told me very much. The yacht, of course, is at Cadiz, and they were to get on board it this afternoon. Then they will go to sea. I'm sorry I

don't know exactly in what direction. But one bit of sea is very like another, isn't it? And it is all equally unpleasant."

"But didn't the Marquis say how long they would be away?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "of course he told me that."

Our three faces must have brightened considerably, for she smiled upon us in sympathy.

"Well," said Gaston, trembling with impatience, "what did he say?"

"He said that they would stay away until my husband was really well again."

Gaston and I groaned inwardly, but Réhmy, outwardly calm at any rate, took up the interrogation.

"Your husband, then, is unwell?" he politely inquired.

"He was certainly in need of a holiday," she replied. "His friends were beginning to be quite anxious about him. The Marquis suggested a sea voyage, and it was not, of course, for a wife to stand in his way, was it? So he decided to go cruising with his friend the Marquis and that charming German Count. I wonder if you have ever met him—Koenigsmark or Grafenberg, or something like that. But I always called him Count. Such an interesting man. My husband was devoted to him. They went off in such a hurry too, no proper clothes. They would not let me take Suzanne to Paris to dress her properly, and you have no idea how bad the shops are in Spain. Even in Madrid there was literally nothing to be bought."

She prattled on in this vein for some moments, Réhmy encouraging her from time to time in the hope of finding a few ears of corn among the chaff.

At last, however, he cut her short. "Excuse me, Madame," he said, "if I interrupt you, but you say that the yacht of the Marquis is at Cadiz. Can you tell me its name?"

"It was the *Seagull*, I think," she answered. "Or perhaps it was the *Sea Hawk*, or, now I come to think of it, it was the *Billiken*. No, it was not the *Billiken*. That, of course, was Uncle Adrian's yacht which he had at Port Vendres. You remember it, Gaston. You used to go for trips in the *Billiken* when you were a boy? Such a nice boat it was: the only one in which I have never felt ill; though you remember that Uncle Adrian would never have it painted."

Again the good lady was off, and I turned to Réhmy in despair. He waited for a pause in the flow, and then said with a bow: "I would ask your permission, Madame, if I may, to use the telephone."

"Of course," she answered, opening her eyes wide at him.

In an instant Réhmy was off, striding down the cool cloister, and a moment later he disappeared through a door at the end of the patio.

"Bless the man," she exclaimed. "What is he doing now? And how very determined he looks."

"We are sorry to be so unceremonious, Madame," said Gaston, "but Captain Réhmy has important business with the Marquis and with the Graf von Konigsberg. He is much upset at missing them. I think he has gone to see whether it is not still possible perhaps to catch them at Cadiz."

Mention of the Graf von Konigsberg stimulated a further flow of talk from Madame Dupuis, as she led the way to a cool sitting-room off the patio and served us with glasses of pale Manzanilla.

"He was charming, the Count. So cosmopolitan, so well informed, so gallant. I assure you," she said archly, turning to Gaston with a bright smile, not wholly unmalicious, "he made a great impression on our dear Suzanne. They have been quite inseparable these last few days."

Gaston moved in his chair, and I feared an outburst. At that moment, however, Réhmy returned. He shook his head in answer to our inquiring looks.

"The telephone appears to be out of order, Madame," he said. "I must try some other means. Is it possible, do you think, to obtain some form of conveyance to take us back to Seville? I am very sorry to be so insistent."

As he spoke a trim maid in cap and apron, strangely incongruous in that deserted house, appeared in a curtained doorway.

Madame Dupuis started to her feet, glancing as she did so at the platinum and diamond watch on her wrist.

"Heavens!" she said. "Behold me, gossiping here when it's time for my massage. Yes, Captain Réhmy, I will see that you have a conveyance as soon as possible, though I hope you will not leave me before luncheon."

She fluttered across the room as she spoke like an ungainly butterfly, and disappeared behind the curtain, followed by her maid. Hardly had she gone when Gaston turned to Réhmy.

"You say the telephone is out of order!"

"The wires are cut," said Réhmy briefly. "And the maid tells me that it is the only telephone in El Pedroso.

"There's one thing to be done before we leave," he continued. "Where's the library, Gaston? We must examine it thoroughly."

Gaston led the way. We went through a long cool corridor which two old men in blue linen liveries were sweeping. They took not the slightest notice of us, and for a second time I wondered how it was that no one molested us.

Gaston tried the handle of a door. It was open, and we passed through. We found ourselves in a low room, lined entirely on three sides with books. On the middle

of the fourth side was a pair of long French windows hung with heavy curtains of stamped Spanish velvet, drawn apart so that I could catch a glimpse of a small formal garden surrounded by a cypress hedge outside.

Gaston noted the direction of my glance.

"Yes," he said, answering my unspoken question, "that was where I hid on the night I tried to overhear what the Professor was saying."

We surveyed the room. There was not much furniture in it. I noted one or two high-backed chairs with those curious slung seats of Spanish leather, and a great desk in one corner covered with writing materials, prominent among which was a brass inkstand stuck with white quills. In the opposite corner was a large globe.

Réhmy strode to the desk and tried the drawers one after another.

They were all unlocked, and all of them were empty.

I searched the blotting-pad. It was virgin white, however, with nothing between the sheets.

Réhmy was all this time examining the books.

"Where was the volume, Gaston," he said, "which you saw the Professor take down that night from the shelf?"

Gaston pointed to a row of old calf-bound volumes facing us.

"It was the third shelf," he said, "and the thirty-eighth volume, counting from the left."

Réhmy went towards the shelf, and in a moment he had taken the volume down. It was a large folio, the last of a set of four in dark brown leather, stamped with the arms of the Marquis.

"Sixteenth-century binding," said Réhmy, as he carried it to the desk. He opened the book, and it was at once apparent that the contents were even older than the binding. The text was in Latin, printed in black letters in a double column, and, as we turned the pages, the

illuminated capitals of the chapters leapt to the eye, a gay note of colour amid the sombre blackness of the text.

I took down the first volume of the set and turned to the title page on which I read, over his shoulder, "Speculum Historiale." The date was in Latin numerals, MCCCCLXXIII.

"What on earth can it be?" I asked.

Réhmy said nothing, but began turning the vellum pages quickly.

It appeared to be, as Gaston had said, some sort of chronicle, but I could make nothing of the ancient characters. No more could Réhmy. He raised his head in despair.

"You are sure this was the book, Gaston?"

"Quite positive," answered Gaston. "I took particular note of the shelf and the volume, for I knew it was important. Besides, I remember how it looked."

Réhmy picked up the book and began to carry it towards the window to examine it better. It was heavy, however, and he had not caught hold of it properly, for it slipped and nearly fell from his grasp. In doing so, it turned over and half opened.

Gaston gave a cry, for from between the thick leaves there had fluttered a sheet of modern notepaper.

He stooped for it and picked it up, and we saw there was something written on the back of it. Hurriedly we spread the sheet on the table and all three of us bent over it. And this was what we read:—

"My congratulations, friends, on having got so far. Read, if you can, the riddle, and perhaps, if you succeed, we may meet again.

"ANSELM KREUTZEMARK."

YOU can well imagine my feelings on reading that derisive message: helpless anger at being taunted, disappointment at being checked, dismay at finding the Professor so sure of himself that, in spite of his hurried flight first from Barcelona and afterwards from El Pedroso, he could still command the time to play with us. Stronger than anything else, however, was a renewed sense of his being everywhere and foreseeing everything. I felt as though he were beside us in the room; as though he had been watching us as we searched, waiting for us to discover the sheet of paper which he had left in his foreknowledge of every step that we should take.

"Well," said I, ruefully regarding the great volume, "it's a pretty substantial hint that he's dropped, but I'm blessed if I can think much of it as a clue."

"The Professor consulted and quoted this book while he was working out his plans," said Réhmy. "It obviously has a bearing on them. Pack all four volumes, Gaston, while I go to find Mme. Dupuis. We must get back to Seville without loss of time. You might also search the library and the Professor's bedroom, though I don't suppose for a moment that he has left anything behind."

He quitted the room, and I joined Gaston in his search, but we found nothing except a small photograph, the snapshot of a steam yacht, which Gaston laid aside. Then we tried the Professor's bedroom, and there again we drew a blank. It was as bare as the cell of a monk, and, if the occupant may be judged from the furnishing of his room, that small white-washed chamber was an interesting expression of the Professor's character. It was

white, with a small truckle bed of black iron in one corner, two strips of coarse rush matting on the bare tiled floor, a table without any cloth and two wooden chairs. That was all, except that, hanging on the wall opposite the bed, was a curious picture. It represented five horsemen riding upon clouds above a murky sky. The leading one was on a white horse wearing a garment flecked with blood, a sharp sword in his mouth, and a flashing crown upon his head. Behind him were four vague shapes—one with a skeleton arm, the bony fingers clutching a shadowy spear. Underneath was written in German: "Loose the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth." And further down I read: "And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems, and he hath a name written which no one knoweth but he himself." It was a strange and curious work. I judged it to be one of those modern German half-mystical, half-allegorical pictures of the school of Böcklin, though why the Professor should have it hanging in his bedroom I could not imagine.

As soon as our vain search was ended, we went to the patio, where we found Réhmy with Madame Dupuis. Madame Dupuis was pouring out her woes, which appeared to be numerous, in a flood of conversation to our patient companion.

"It's no use," said Réhmy to me as Gaston engaged the lady in talk, "it seems that there isn't a servant left in the place except for the maid we saw and two old farmhands, who will be shutting up the house this evening. Madame is to start from Seville for Biarritz to-night, where she is to spend a few days with friends. The Marquis has left her a horse and carriage for her baggage, and she will go by railway from El Pedroso. There's a train in half an hour, and I have arranged to accompany her."

I need not trouble you with an account of our return

to Seville. Madame Dupuis drove us nearly mad with her grievances and her pleasures, of what she would do in Paris, the clothes she had bought on the Riviera in the winter, and her atrocious luck at the tables of Monte Carlo.

We could glean nothing of any value from her talk, try as we would to direct it to the Professor and his activities. We showed her the photograph of the yacht which Gaston had found, but she was unable to identify it. She had thought, she said, that the Marquis's yacht was larger, and that was all she could say.

On the way from El Pedroso we discussed what we should do on our arrival at Seville. Gaston wanted to go at once to Cadiz, but, as Réhmy pointed out, the yacht would have sailed long before we could hope to arrive. All we could do was to telephone to the harbour authorities and, with the help of the police, if we could secure assistance, have the vessel stopped for inquiries. Our story, he pointed out, would be feeble in the extreme. We should be asking the authorities to stop a boat whose name, size and appearance we did not know. All we could tell them was that it belonged to the Marquis del Puente, the most powerful and popular man in the south of Spain.

"Moreover," Réhmy continued, "I think it most improbable that they have even gone to Cadiz. The Professor would hardly have told Madame Dupuis that they were embarking at Cadiz, thus enabling her to put us on the track, if the yacht had actually been there. It will be lying off somewhere, and the Marquis will reach it by motor-boat from some small village on the coast."

Réhmy, in fact, was sure that we should be able to do nothing to stop the sailing of the yacht. He contemplated a quick return to Paris for inquiry and research, and a thorough discussion of the whole problem with his

official chief. He went so far as to tell Madame Dupuis, on arriving at Seville, that we should probably be travelling with her to the Franco-Spanish frontier. He then disappeared, after telling us to meet him in an hour at the hotel where we had all taken a room.

Gaston and I, having nothing to do, wandered about the narrow streets, and finding a small café, sat down to drink a glass of the wine of the country.

Réhmy returned to the hotel about an hour later, and he had no need to tell us that he had been unsuccessful.

"It's a mercy," he said, answering our looks, "that I was not detained as a lunatic. First I got a list of sailings from Cadiz, but no private yacht was to be found among them. Then I went to the police. They were impressed by my credentials until I told them my story. I think the Chief Commissioner finally came to the conclusion that I had got a touch of the sun. When first I asked him to telephone to the harbour police to detain a yacht belonging to the Marquis del Puente, he was much disturbed. Afterwards, however, when he had telephoned and discovered that there was not a single private yacht in the harbour, and that no one remotely resembling the Marquis and his party had been seen, he looked at me strangely, observed that the weather was very hot for the time of year, and became quite sympathetic. In conclusion, he advised me to put His Excellency the Marquis and his yacht quite out of my mind."

"To think," said Gaston, striding up and down the room, "that they are just about boarding her at this very minute (it was then about six in the evening), and that we can do nothing—nothing at all."

"We can do nothing till we get to Paris," said Réhmy.

Twenty minutes later we boarded the train, and in twenty-four hours we were crossing the frontier at Irun. At Bayonne we took leave of Madame Dupuis. We had

seen but little of her during the long journey, for she had remained in her *coupé* with the maid, only emerging for meals.

Gaston and Réhmy had on these occasions tried to discover details of the relations of her second husband with the Professor, but she could tell us nothing of any consequence. Dupuis had obviously kept her in complete ignorance of his business affairs. When at last we took leave of her at Bayonne, she was wholly absorbed by the prospect of a pleasant month or so at Biarritz.

We arrived in Paris on the morning of the 25th March. Gaston and Réhmy went at once to report to their chief, and while they were thus engaged, I wandered among the little antiquity shops of the Rue des Saint Pères in search of some trifle for Beatrice.

We met again for lunch at the restaurant Milhaud in the Rue Jacob. Réhmy and Gaston told me that their chief took the gravest possible view of the Professor's mysterious design, and that all the resources of his department were to be instantly devoted to tracing the yacht or to following up any clue which might present itself. Meanwhile, the volumes from the library at El Pedroso had been handed over for minute examination by the experts at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

"And now, Thomas," said Réhmy, "we can do nothing but wait for the results. I advise you to go back to England and do your best to put the whole affair out of your mind. I will let you know the moment we find anything, and you can then decide to join us again in Paris or not as you and as Beatrice may think best."

"Very well, Etienne," I replied. "I will return to England, but it must be clearly understood that you will really let me know as soon as anything happens."

That was an excellent luncheon, but I'm afraid we were in no mood to do it justice. To separate thus, with

nothing settled and nothing known, depressed by a sense of futility and incompleteness, was intolerable to us all, and most of all to Gaston, on whom we usually relied to brighten our creature comforts with his high spirits and love of good things.

I returned that night to England, and the following day found me back in Birmingham explaining matters to Uncle James. The old gentleman wanted to know about those bedsteads, and he took it ill that Señor Cunha-Riario should have proved to be an impostor. I told him as much of the facts as I thought good, whereupon he expressed his firm conviction that the entry of Germany into the League of Nations was the cause of it all. By what process of reasoning he arrived at this conclusion I did not inquire.

To Beatrice I told the whole story. We had only very rarely talked of the Professor during the two years of our married life, and I was dismayed to find how vividly he still lived in her imagination. I discovered also that Beatrice, without confessing it to me, had been haunted and even obsessed with the conviction that the Professor would return into our lives, and that he would sooner or later call us to a final reckoning.

"I feel," she said, "that as long as that man is alive and free, we are living on sufferance."

Anyhow she made it clear that I might, if called upon, go at once to Paris. Indeed, she kept two suit-cases of mine permanently packed with such clothes as I might need, much to the disorganisation of my wardrobe.

March gave place to April, and still I heard nothing from Paris except for one letter from Gaston saying that Réhmy was quite unapproachable and was spending his days at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Then, on the 10th April, a message came. I met the telegraph boy on his red bicycle by the gate of my house

as I was returning for lunch. He handed me the orange envelope. I tore it open :—

“ IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS. COME AT ONCE TO OFFICE. EXPECT YOU FRIDAY MORNING.

“ RÉHMY.”

In less than an hour I was on my way to London. Beatrice in the moment of farewell had not wavered. I carried away with me the picture of her as she bade me good-bye, pale but resolute. Uncle James was difficult, but finally persuaded himself that the world would never be safe for British bedsteads so long as the Professor remained at large.

I took the night boat and arrived in Paris at 6 a.m. As I drove through the streets of the capital just beginning to stir towards the business of the day, my spirits were lighter than they had been for many weeks. I have every sympathy with Gaston. We are, indeed, a pair in this respect, that we can neither of us bear to be inactive.

I put up at a little hotel on the Quai Voltaire, and at half-past ten I walked to Réhmy's office, a short distance away on the Quai d'Orsay. I was taken up by a *huissier* to a little room, bare and furnished with the curious inadequacy of French Government offices.

Réhmy rose from his desk as I entered, and held out his hand.

“ Well, Thomas,” he said, after the usual greetings had been exchanged. “ I have sent for you because I promised to do so, but I don't know what you will say. I have discovered practically nothing and yet perhaps everything.”

“ Tell me,” I said eagerly. “ Where is the Professor? And what did you find in the chronicle? Have you traced the Marquis's yacht? Where are they all, and what are they doing? ”

Réhmy smiled.

"One moment," he said, "I will give you everything—such as it is—in order. I will then take you in to see my chief."

"Your chief?" I echoed. "You want me to see him?"

"Yes," replied Réhmy. "I think you will want to see him too, when you have heard what I have to say."

He paused a moment, and then continued:

"I needn't tell you," he said, "that I've been pretty busy. There were three lines of investigation. First there was Mr. X. I have made all possible inquiries about him. So far I have not been able to discover very much, but I am still waiting for replies from various quarters. Secondly, there was the yacht. Here we have been rather more successful. We now know that the Marquis had a new yacht constructed for him this year by *Chenvières et fils* of Toulon, the big shipbuilders. It was Gaston who discovered this, and he only got on to it yesterday. She is a big boat for a private yacht—1700 tons—and she is fitted with the latest oil-burning turbines. The makers think she could do twenty-eight knots at a pinch. She was delivered at Cadiz on February 18th."

"And her name?" I said.

He shook his head.

"The boat was unnamed when she left the builders, but we have, of course, her full description and I have had it circulated. Lastly, there were the four volumes of the 'Speculum Historiale.' Professor Nollet, of the Bibliothèque Nationale, has been working on them for the last fortnight, and yesterday we had his report.

"The 'Speculum Historiale,' it appears, is a collection of stories from all sources, some of considerable historical value, compiled by a certain Vincent de Beauvais, and first printed in 1473. It was the 1473 edition which the Professor was reading when Gaston spied at him through

the window. Professor Nollet found nothing in the text which could have any bearing on our problem, but he did make a very important discovery."

"Yes?" I said eagerly.

Réhmy leaned across the table as he spoke.

"He discovered that a page was missing."

"Missing?" I echoed.

"Yes," said Réhmy, "a page had been removed: it had been taken from the fourth volume, the one in which we found the Professor's message. There were traces in the binding showing that it had quite clearly been included with the other pages when the whole volume was rebound in 1583 by some ancestor of the Marquis."

"And the missing page," I exclaimed, "have you found it?"

Réhmy shook his head.

"No, but I have found the facsimile. Copies of the 1473 edition of the 'Speculum Historiale' are rare, but there is one in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and it is complete. Here is a photograph of the missing page," and he pushed across to me a large sheet which I recognised to be similar to the pages of the book which I had seen in the library at El Pedroso.

I looked ruefully at the ancient script. Five years at a public school does not improve one's knowledge of languages, ancient or modern. The Latin, moreover, was contracted, and I have never tried to read mediæval contractions.

Réhmy smiled at my hopeless expression.

"I didn't suppose," he said, "that you would be able to read it, and I don't mind telling you that it beat me. But here is a typescript of the page in uncontracted Latin, and here is a sixteenth-century English translation, which the good Professor Nollet also found, and which happened to be in the Bibliothèque Nationale, classified among

'unknown papers.' It is only a fragment, about six pages in all, but it is obviously part of an English edition of the 'Speculum Historiale' translated by an unknown author. Please read them and tell me what you think."

And this is what I read. I reproduce the text in Latin and in English, which is just as Réhmy showed it to me that spring day in his dusty office :

" *Caput XCIII. DE VATIBUS ET MAGIS AULAE REGALIS ANTISTITIBUS ET DE PRAEDICTIONE MIRABILI QUIA APPAREBIT ANTICHRISTUS.*

" Scite autem quia Regem Mangu aliosque duces insignes semper comitantur Vates quidam atque Magi ad statuendum locos in quibus tentoria erigant et ad imagines et varia quae colunt idola in circulo auspicato circum domum Can disponendum. Ego vero in urbe Caracaro cum uno ex iis conversationem habui, nomine Vut, qui per artes suas insigne miraculum praedixit, quod autem patrabitur. 'Est enim,' inquit 'regnum quoddam subterraneum, oculis hominum ita reconditum, ut omnibus ignotum permaneat. Die autem quem statuet Dominus patefiet regnum quod ante occultum fuerat atque ostium quod Deus clauserat aperietur. Illius regni introitus in septentrionali parte Tartariae situs est, quo vallem periculosissimam obsident montes ita horribiles ut neque homines neque etiam ferae in illis habitationes habeant. Erat in illo regno imperator potentissimus cui nomen erat Deimanax. Is omnem mundum potestate superabat, subjectique sui prae multitudine erant innumerabiles sicut maris arenae quibus non est numerus. De quibus postea narrabo; at de imperatore isto referunt quia pro tanta gloria et auctoritate coactus est atque constrictus in media terra in loco obscuro ac tenebroso habitare, usque ad tempus quo adveniet ex Occidente Liberator quidam valde inclytus atque fortis, virginem pulcherrimam secum ferens,

quae cum Deimanax matrimonio conjungetur. In illo vero die nuptias facient maxima cum hilaritate ac jucunditate; inde statim Tartareorum turbas ex Oriente ducent ad Christianos impetendum et omni modo pessumdandum, et ad orbem totum subjungendum. Non protinus veniet iste Liberator portam noctu et obscurata luna aperiturus; vero apparebit in tempore opportuno ad vindicandum Deimanax, cui circuli tunc erunt annorum sex mille et tres menses; atqui formam praestabit hominis vix quadragenarii, corpus florens, colorem rubicundum. Dabitur ei potestas super terram, aethera, aquas, atque super omnia quae habitant in illis; quin etiam numerandus est in prophetis de quibus scriptum est "surgent enim pseudo-Christi et pseudo-prophetae et dabunt signa magna et prodigia ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi." "

CHAPTER 93. OF THE SOOTHSAYERS OR SORCERERS
THAT ATTEND UPON THE COURT OF
MANGU, AND OF THE COMING OF
ANTICHRIST.

"And ye should know, therefore, that there are Soothsayers or Sorcerers that be always about Mangu and the other great Personages to appoint the ground on which their tents must be pitched and for the placing of certain images and divers other idols in circle wise about the house of the Can. And I held converse with one whom I met in Caracarum, by name Vut. And he told me of a great marvel which shall one day come to pass. 'For there is,' he said, 'a kingdom subterrene which is hidden from the eyes of men so that they know it not. Howbeit, on a day shall that kingdom be laid bare and the gate thereof opened that was closed aforetime by the hand of God. And the gate of that secret kingdom is in the midst

of the valley perilous compassed about by the mountains in the part Septentrional of Tartaria, where dwell ne men ne beast. And over that kingdom,' said he, 'there ruleth a mighty King, Lord of Fear, the King of all the world, with subjects in number like to the grains of the sea of sand whereof I will speak anon. And they say this latter, albeit so great and puissant, is constrained to dwell in the midst of the earth in darkness and shadow until such time as there cometh from the West the Deliverer a Mighty One and a Strong, bearing with him a fair damsel that shall be wife unto the Lord of Fear. Then shall the twain be wed in the midst of jollities and delights, and both shall lead the men of Tartary Westward to gain the whole earth and overthrow all Christian men. The advent of the Deliverer that shall open the gate on a night when the moon shall be darkened is not yet, but he shall come in an acceptable time to deliver the Lord of Fear whose years shall be six thousand and three months at the moment of his delivery. Albeit he shall be lusty and of a fair hue, and something not above forty years of age. He shall have dominion over earth, air and water, and all that dwell therein, so that meseemeth he will be of the number of those false prophets of whom it is written: "*surgente enim pseudo-Christi et pseudo-prophetae et dabunt signa magna et prodigia ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest), etiam electi*"—for there shall arise false christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect.'"

I sat back bewildered when I had finished. For a moment I thought Réhmy had taken leave of his senses. What had this fantastic legend, this queer product of a mediæval mind, to do with the Professor and the fat little Marquis and the commonplace Dupuis?

I picked up the paper again, and then I laid it down

trembling, for the words danced before my eyes, and only one phrase was clear or familiar: "Lord of Fear."

I picked up the English translation and read it again more slowly. In plain terms the tale was to the effect that a man from the West calling himself the Deliverer would one day let loose the Lord of Fear, King of the Underworld. Whereupon they would lead all the Mongol tribes to sweeping and permanent victory, apparently in the manner of Genghis and Tamerlane.

"You will observe," said Réhmy, "that the Englishman who translated this knew Greek. He has rendered the name 'Deimanax' by the phrase 'Lord of Fear.'"

I nodded and resumed my scrutiny.

"The Deliverer," I said, after a time. "That was one of the words which Gaston overheard."

"Which is a proof," said Réhmy, "if proof were needed, that they were discussing very seriously every detail of the legend."

"But what," I said in despair, "has this fantastic tale to do with our problem? It is no more than a legend recorded by a crazy friar six centuries ago."

Réhmy smiled.

"I am not suggesting that the legend is more than a legend. But suppose it is believed or half believed by the tribes among whom it is current, and suppose," he continued slowly, "that there is someone who is trying to make it come true?"

I looked at him in bewilderment, my brain refusing to admit this incredible suggestion.

"I quite understand your astonishment," said Réhmy, in answer to my looks. "It was, in fact, some time before I could myself accept the idea. Once it had occurred to me, however, I could not put it aside. I am not going to persuade you of its truth. My chief will himself put the whole case to us this morning, and you will then be able to

judge and decide for yourself. At present I merely ask you to remember what we ourselves have discovered. The Professor lies hid in Spain awaiting the arrival of a mysterious Mr. X. Dupuis comes to El Pedroso with news of Mr. X, and there is a consultation. The consultation centres round this old legend, and Gaston even overheard phrases that occur in it. Shortly after the whole group disappears in a yacht, which we know to be a fast ocean-going vessel of the latest type, capable of sailing any seas. Meanwhile, we know from other sources, it has even appeared in the Press, that for some time past the frontiers of Mongolia have been closed, and that no reliable news can be obtained of what is happening in that part of the world. For the moment that is all you need to remember. But my chief will probably have a good deal more to say."

"But what," I asked, "can these men possibly do in Mongolia? What are their plans? Why should Mr. X be necessary? Why have they taken Suzanne de Polhac?"

"One moment," said Réhmy, smiling under my rapid questions. "I admit all the difficulties, but you, as it happens, have hit on some of the easier points. Mr. X, with his Mongolian servants, for little Kara is a true Mongolian, and his knowledge of Central Asia, fits in admirably. As for Suzanne de Polhac . . ."

He paused a moment and placed his hand on the papers in front of me.

"Well," he said, "read the legend again for yourself."

I looked again at the MS.

"I see," I said when I had read it through. "Suzanne de Polhac is to be the bride from the West."

We were silent a moment, and then I added:

"Have you sent this to Gaston?"

Réhmy nodded.

"But I would not talk to him about it, if I were you," he said. "The poor fellow is—— I needn't describe his feelings."

Réhmy looked at his watch.

"My chief will be sending for us in a moment," he said. "There is just one thing I ought to tell you. He will want you to remember as much as possible of the conversation which you had with Mr. X that evening on Tibidabo. He attaches great importance to Mr. X."

Even as Réhmy said this, the bell sounded sharply on his desk.

"That is our summons," said Réhmy, rising from his chair.

He pushed open the door behind him as he spoke, and passed in front of me. Beyond was a room similar to Réhmy's, but a little larger, and at a desk was seated a short man with grizzled hair, in a grey frock-coat. Beside him stood Gaston, holding in his hand a white *dossier*. His face was flushed, and I saw by his demeanour that something had happened.

The man at the desk looked at me keenly, and I recognised the "chief" to whom we had told the story of the Seven Sleepers two years previously.

He rose as we entered.

"*Bon jour*, Réhmy," he said. "Captain Preston, it was very kind of you to come."

He shook me quickly by the hand and pointed to a chair. I nodded to Gaston, and we all four sat down.

"I understand, Captain Preston," went on the chief, "that you have already come into this affair. I can only hope that your assistance will be as valuable as it was in our last encounter with Professor Kreutzemark."

He glanced at me keenly as he spoke.

"You are not wearing the Legion," he shot at me.

I was a little surprised. My Legion of Honour, be-

stowed upon me by a grateful Republic after the affair of the Seven Sleepers, was locked up safely at home.

Réhmy hastily interposed.

"It is not the English custom, sir, to wear ribbons except in uniform."

"I am sorry, Captain Preston. You have good reason to be proud of it. And now we will listen to M. de Blanchegarde, who is making a report."

"I have just received information about the yacht of the Marquis del Puente," said Gaston, "or something which makes me think that it has to do with the yacht. It is from our authorities at Jibuti. They report the discovery of a large number of drums of oil fuel in a little bay on the island of Abd el Keru between Socotra and Cape Guardafui. They were discovered in rather a curious way. The island is inhabited by a mixed Arab Berber population in quite small numbers. The British authorities in Socotra heard of disorder in the island, and sent an official there to investigate a case of murder. He reports that half the island was drunk when he got there."

I saw Réhmy's head move slightly.

"The natives," said Gaston, and his mouth trembled as he said it, "had suddenly acquired a large sum of money. They would at first give no information as to how they got it, but the island was searched and the empty oil drums were found in a small cave on the north coast. The British authorities then ascertained that the natives had acquired the money from a large yacht which had put in some days before, and filled up with oil from a dépôt which had been established in the cave some months previously. The name of the yacht was unknown, but one of the half-caste inhabitants of the place who had been a sailor was able to describe it in detail, as he had been taken on to do some slight repairs. His description, sir,

corresponds remarkably with what we know of the new yacht of the Marquis del Puente."

Gaston paused and looked at his chief.

"All that seems fairly conclusive," replied the latter. Then Gaston added :

"One of the phrases I overheard, sir, in the house of the Marquis near El Pedroso was 'Oil at Sumatra.'"

His chief looked at an open *dossier* in front of him.

"Uttered, I see, by Dupuis on the 19th March," he said.

"Just so," said Gaston, "and it follows, sir, that the yacht's next port of call, always supposing that our conjectures are right, will be Sumatra. There again she will fill up with oil."

There was a short silence, and then the man in the grey frock-coat turned to me.

"So much for the yacht," he said. "And now, Captain Preston, would you be good enough to tell us as much as you can remember of the conversation which you had with the person falsely describing himself as Señor Cunha-Riario, and who has been referred to as Mr. X."

I gave a short summary of my conversation as far as I could remember it. Bearing in mind what Réhmy had told me a few moments ago, I did not forget to mention that Mr. X had several times alluded to Mongolia and the horsemanship in that country, and how, when I had pressed him on the subject, he had abruptly changed the conversation rather like a man who had been led into an indiscretion.

There was a short silence when I had finished.

"Was there nothing else that pointed to Mongolia?" said the chief.

"Nothing," I said. "That is unless——"

I paused.

"Well?" broke in Réhmy eagerly.

"I seem to remember that the sacred sign of the Mongols under Genghis Khan was the swastika."

"That is so," said the chief.

"It may be only a coincidence," I said, "but Mr. X was wearing a large and an antique gold ring which had the swastika engraved upon it."

"Can you describe it in detail?" asked Réhmy.

I took a sheet of paper and rapidly drew a design of the ring which I had seen on the forefinger of Mr. X when I dined with him on Tibidabo. Réhmy took the paper, and, after showing it to his chief and to Gaston, folded it up carefully and put it away in his pocket-book.

"The swastika is a common sign, and it is used by a good many people who would be somewhat surprised to know of its origin," I pointed out.

"It was, indeed, a terrible sign," said the little man at the table, "a sign that meant destruction to thousands of cities and brought the Mongol hordes to the gates of Moscow and Vienna."

Then abruptly, as though shaking himself free, he turned to us with a little jerk of the head.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "what do you make of it?"

He spoke now in rapid tones, like the chatter of a machine-gun.

"You have seen the reports from our Consuls in Hangchow, Peking, Tien Tsin and Kharbin, all reporting a complete severance of communications with Mongolia. That in itself does not amount to much. Relations with that country are precarious. The roads are few, and the persons travelling upon them are not numerous. Then you have the account of the missionaries. Several of them have been lately massacred."

"Yes," I interrupted. "I saw one or two accounts of that in a Spanish newspaper about three weeks ago."

“The facts were well known,” said the chief, “but very little attention was paid to them. Missionaries are often massacred. Finally, we now have good evidence of the whereabouts of the Marquis del Puente and the yacht which sailed from Cadiz or thereabouts on the 23rd March. I have, moreover, a final piece of information. I received a telegram yesterday from Madame Dupuis informing me, in answer to direct inquiries, that Professor Kreutzemark or the Graf von Konigsberg, as he now calls himself, has several times referred to Mongolia in her presence, and that he had in his library large-scale maps of Central Asia. Lastly, you have the legend from the Memoirs of Fra Johannes Carpini, written in or about the year 1247. The evidence, you see, is slender, but it has a certain cumulative force. We have now to decide whether it is good enough to go upon.”

“It is the only evidence we have,” said Réhmy. “And it all points in the same direction. We either act upon it or we are reduced to doing nothing at all.”

The man at the table rose and took a turn up and down the room. Finally he paused beside us, a trim military figure, very correct, almost prosaic, but with eyes in queer contrast with the rest of him, eyes filled with speculation and shining at that moment with enthusiasm.

“I tell you frankly, gentlemen, that the evidence in itself isn't worth that,” and he snapped his fingers in the air. “But, as you know, in our profession we have often to look beyond the facts. The man in my service who relies upon evidence and calls for proof before he can take a decision has mistaken his vocation. He ought to be a lawyer or a professor of logic in a *lycée*. He is like the soldier who very correctly loses every battle by the rules. As you know, gentlemen, we have often had to take on even more extravagant enterprises with even less

to go upon. In any case, as Réhmy points out, you either start for Mongolia, or you do nothing at all. I am quite sure we shall come no nearer to the truth in Europe."

He paused again, but we none of us broke the silence, being all of us under the spell of this remarkable little man in the grey frock-coat. I could see that Réhmy and Gaston respected him as men respect a chief who frequently demands the impossible and often obtains it.

"Mind you," he went on, "I would not ask you to go after this man on the evidence we have if we were dealing with an ordinary criminal. Your presence in Europe is of too great value to the service."

Gaston and Réhmy bowed, and I could see that they were inwardly flushed by the tribute. The little man evidently did not waste his compliments.

"Anselm Kreuzemark, however, is not an ordinary criminal. Two years ago in a world outwardly at peace he very nearly succeeded in destroying the whole European system. I do not think that even you who defeated him can realise how very nearly he succeeded. After two years of patient work we have not yet discovered all the windings of that great conspiracy. We still come upon traces of his organisation in the most unlikely places.

"Professor Kreuzemark is so dangerous a man that I consider it essential to find out what he is doing. He has for months been making preparations on a large scale. He has neglected no precautions. A special yacht, unregistered and unnamed, has been built to take him to an unknown destination. Elaborate arrangements were made in advance for the boat to obtain fuel without calling openly at any port. The boat is on its way to the Far East. Kreuzemark is taking with him a man familiar with Central Asia, and we know that at an important conference, when discussing plans with his

confederates, reference was made to an ancient legend of Mongolia. Meanwhile, we have the reports from our consular officers in the Far East. The frontiers of Mongolia have been closed for some three weeks. On the north all communications with Siberia and the Soviet authorities have been cut, and on the south no news is allowed to pass into China. In normal times Mongolia is a country which for the modern world hardly exists. But it is larger than Europe, and parts of it are more thickly populated than Belgium. Only a few centuries ago it was a land of warriors, and its leaders conquered the greater part of the world. What is happening among the people of Genghis Khan? What unknown forces may not have been let loose in that secret region of the world?

“Twenty years ago Europe need not have cared. We were secure and prosperous. We had stable governments and a faith in European institutions. But that is no longer the case. Outwardly our Western civilisation still stands erect. But we who have to keep continually in touch with the forces of disorder and discontent know what a little thing would suffice to bring it to the ground. It is an imposing façade, but the building itself has been shaken to its foundations. Europe will sleep soundly to-night, but she slept every bit as soundly through all the many nights while from the heart of Asia the horsemen of Attila were creeping over the steppes. Europe is young, *mes enfants*, but already in her short history wolves have prowled in hunger among the ruins of the Capitol.”

He paused, and in the silence which followed I could hear outside the strident clamour of Paris, muffled by the walls and windows, the muted rattle of the great machine of modern life which seemed so secure and indestructible. Then suddenly I had a vision of great

spaces, astir with forms that were wild and vague, of shadowy hosts that waited, of a land that teemed and murmured, whose destiny it had ever been from the beginning of history to be the scourge of men.

"Messieurs," continued the man at the table, resuming suddenly his official manner, "if you go to Mongolia . . ."

But he got no further.

"But, of course we go to Mongolia," Gaston cried.

"Nothing else is possible," said Réhmy.

The bleak face of the little man lit suddenly with a smile.

"You realise what you are doing?" he said.

"I realise," said Réhmy, "that we are going to look for the Professor, who, if he has really gone to Mongolia, may be anywhere within an area of 1,250,000 square miles. But I would point out, sir, that the project is by no means so absurd as it seems. If there is any movement in Mongolia that can endanger the safety of Europe, it will be on so vast a scale that as soon as we cross the frontier we must come upon its traces. Then how are we to act? What exactly is the object of our mission?"

"You are going out in order to discover the plans of Professor Kreuzemark. You cannot arrest him and bring him to justice in the heart of Asia. It is, however, essential to come up with him, to know what he is doing. Then you will make at once for the frontier and report to us."

"But it is impossible to enter the country," I objected.

"The frontier is closed."

"You cannot close a frontier which extends thousands of miles," said the man at the table. "It is closed in the sense that all postal and telegraphic communication is broken, and all the ordinary routes are shut. The Soviet authorities at Udinsk have succeeded in sending out several patrols to make a reconnaissance. It is quite possible to enter the country."

"What happened to the patrols?" asked Réhmy.

"They did not return," said the man at the table.

He waited for us to comment on this information, but we received it in silence.

"Captain Réhmy," he continued, "I believe you have already decided as to procedure."

"We cannot go by sea," said Réhmy. "The Professor has too long a start. We must go overland by the Trans-Siberian and enter Mongolia from the north. Our best plan will be to go out as a search party sent to discover what has become of Migné's expedition to Northern and Central Mongolia, which, if you will remember, was last heard of in 1924 in the neighbourhood of the Bogdo Ula valley. They were to carry out a geological survey, if you remember, sir, and there was some trouble with the Russian Soviet Government regarding their passage through Russia."

The man in the grey frock-coat thought a little, tapping the blotting-paper in front of him with a red pencil.

"We will discuss these details later," he said. "It is decided, however, that you enter from the north. If there is no indication of any general movement in the country, it will, of course, be useless to look at random for Kreuzemark and his party. You will, therefore, return to Udinsk, where we will keep our consul informed by wireless of any unexpected developments and send you any further instructions that may be necessary. I will at once give orders for the necessary passports to be prepared."

"Meanwhile, Captain Preston," he said, turning to me, "you may rest assured that while your friends are absent we will do our utmost to see that you are not in any way molested."

I looked at him in dismay, then saw in his eye what in anyone less austere I should describe as a twinkle.

"But surely, sir," I protested, "you understand that I also am ready to start."

He broke again into one of his sudden smiles.

"Oh, you want to go too," he said, and now the twinkle was not to be denied.

"Of course," I answered. "That was settled yesterday when I started for Paris."

"Very well," he said. "Remind me, Captain Réhmy, that Mr. Preston will also need a passport."

Then, suddenly grave again, he turned back to me and said :

"I'm not sure that your decision is not the wisest you could take in the circumstances. My own view is that in Central Asia you will possibly be safer than in your own home. You may find it difficult to find the Professor in Mongolia, but the chances are that in Mongolia it will be equally difficult for the Professor to find you."

"I only hope, sir, that I may really be of use."

"Of that there can be no doubt," he answered. "Besides, I believe in fortune, Mr. Preston, and I cannot help thinking that she who brought you so unexpectedly into our service on a former occasion is now playing a similar game, and that her stroke will be equally successful."

And so it was that on April 11th, 1926, I once again entered the service of the French Republic, and found myself committed to an adventure stranger than any I had yet encountered.

Chapter XIV

I Enter the Forbidden Land

THE man at the table rose, and we understood that the interview was at an end. He shook hands with us all, and shortly afterwards we had settled down in Réhmy's office to discuss procedure. I found, how-

ever, to my surprise that there was not very much left to discuss.

"I knew you would be coming, Thomas," said Réhmy. "Here, my friend, is the passport which I have just been ordered to obtain for you."

Whereupon he opened a drawer, and taking out a document, threw it over towards me.

I examined it in some astonishment. It bore a large American eagle, and was made out in the name of Terence Hubert Pilbury of Detroit and New York City. My profession was given as manufacturer.

"You observe," said Réhmy, "that we are giving you a new identity. You may not know it, Thomas, but you have financed this expedition. You are the rich American organiser of a relief party which is going into Central Asia to discover what has become of Professor Migné. You made your large fortune from the construction of spare parts for automobiles in Detroit. Your passport is visaed for all countries, including Soviet Russia, and in that country we have taken care to spread the news that you are a friend of Dr. Nansen and Mr. Hoover, who did such a lot for them during the great famine of 1922.

"Gaston and I are pupils of Professor Migné. Gaston is strong in mineralogy, and I have written a remarkable thesis on the rocks of the Silurian epoch. This afternoon you will meet our interpreter. He is a strange being—a half-caste—French father in the Chinese Customs service and a Mongolian mother. He talks all the dialects of China and several Mongolian languages, and has spent his life in the French Intelligence Service, Far Eastern section. He lately retired, and has been living at Meudon, but he was quite willing to help us when we applied to him. Apparently he is a little homesick, and pines for another sight of the Great Wall."

I tried to take it all in. Five minutes ago I had been Thomas Preston, earning a modest competence as a seller of hardware. But now I had lost even my name. I was left little time for reflection, however. Gaston produced a cigar, which he lit for me, saying that as an American I should endeavour to look the part, and we got down once more to business.

Carefully Réhmy recapitulated every fact that we had to go upon. Especially did we puzzle over the four phrases overheard by Gaston at the library window. The first two, "Oil at Sumatra" and "It should take about two months," were now fairly clear. They almost certainly referred to the Professor's journey. Réhmy reckoned that a fast-steaming yacht could get from Cadiz to some Chinese port, from which the Professor could start his journey to Mongolia, in about sixty days. It seemed quite certain that he had established a chain of depôts at which oil fuel could be obtained, one of which was on the island of Abd el Keru, and another on the coast of Sumatra.

The next phrase, however, a reference to "the Deliverer," gave rise to much speculation. Mention was made of a Deliverer by Friar Johannes. It was the Deliverer who was to let loose the Lord of Fear. Lastly there was the word "Ayugumsik." That was a complete puzzle. It did not occur in the mediæval text, and exhaustive inquiries into Buddhistic, Burmese, Chinese and other Eastern mythologies had failed to shed any light on it.

We discussed what part would be played by the various persons in the conspiracy. As a working hypothesis Réhmy cast Mr. X for the Deliverer. Mr. X had travelled widely. He had been to Mongolia and was essential to the scheme. It was present to all our minds that Suzanne must be the bride from the West, but to

this Réhmy made no explicit reference. The look in Gaston's eyes was enough. We were thus driven to the question: Was it the Professor himself who would impersonate the Lord of Fear? We found it difficult to believe. How could a European deceive even the most credulous of natives in such a rôle? And yet it seemed almost a necessary inference.

Subsequent events showed how right or wrong we were in our conjectures, but on that windy spring day as, our conference ended, we paced the Luxembourg Gardens and watched the children of Paris sailing their boats in the great pond with the laughing fountain under the windows of the *Senat*, it seemed to me, at any rate (and Réhmy has since told me that he felt it, too), that we were no longer in any sense masters of ourselves, and I viewed with a curious detachment the strange figure of our interpreter when he presented himself to us in Réhmy's office that afternoon.

He was a short, wizened little man with a yellow face, a flat nose, and clear dark eyes. His hair was grizzled, but he did not appear to be much over sixty. He spoke an extraordinary kind of pidgin French in a high sing-song tone, and he answered to the name of François. The real purpose of our journey was not explained to him; he was merely told that he was to join a party organised by the rich American, Pilbury, for the purpose of discovering the lost expedition of Professor Migné. He confessed to a knowledge of Mongolia, mostly of the southern parts, though he had once made the trip from Peking to Kiakhta.

I spent a busy afternoon equipping myself for the journey, with the help of Gaston. Réhmy was invisible, being apparently called to another conference with his chief. We bought all the equipment with which the amateur explorer usually burdens himself—collapsible

tents, cooking utensils, fur coats, field-glasses, several rifles, pistols and a large stock of ammunition, etc.

Eight o'clock in the evening found us tired out waiting for the train to Berlin.

I feel again, in writing this tale, the impatience with which we were all consumed during the long journey that followed. I kept a diary of my impressions from the moment we left Paris to the moment of our arrival at the sacred city of Urga in the heart of Asia, but all that it brings back to me now is a feverish succession of days spent in interminable longing to be there.

I will spare you the details. My notes fill many pages, but I can only wonder now how I ever came to set them down. I can hardly imagine that my casual impression of Soviet Russia, as seen from the windows of our compartment, will be of the slightest interest, and they certainly have no bearing on the events in which we were so soon to be involved.

The long, broad carriages, heated by means of a stove, jolted interminably over the great stretch of the world which separated us from our distant goal. Civilisation dropped further and further astern. Mountains succeeded the plains, and made way again for plains even vaster that swept up to the carriage window, bare or covered with innumerable firs. There was still a good deal of snow about and little sign of spring. Occasionally the bent forms of peasants driving very primitive carts towards huts of a still more primitive construction were to be seen, and each village had its white church with a green gilt cupola.

We reached Udinsk beyond Lake Baikal on the eleventh day of our journey, and it was there, in that straggling wooden town, of an aspect desolate and forlorn, overawed by great hills covered with firs, that I first realised how remote we already were from the familiar life of

Europe. The departure of the train, which steamed away to the Far Eastern city of Vladivostock, severed our last link with the West.

There was a kind of primitive hotel at the station gates, where Réhmy, it being about eleven o'clock in the morning, left us to interview the Soviet Commissary, to whom he had letters of introduction. He was able to report to us at noon that everything possible would be done to assist us in our mission. The position was curious. Less than six months prior to our arrival, Soviet authority had extended well into Mongolia, and a Red Mongolian Government had been set up in the Sacred City of Urga. Then, a few weeks previously, came that sudden closing of the frontier. The Soviet officials had not been driven from Urga; they had simply been cut off, and the authorities in Udinsk were unable to ascertain what had happened to them.

The Chief Commissary at Udinsk was one of the intellectual type of Communists for whom French is almost a native language. He had given Réhmy politely to understand that he regarded our expedition in search of Professor Migné to be in the present circumstances stark lunacy. No one, so Réhmy was informed, had succeeded for the last month in obtaining any information of what was going on south of Kiakhta. It was apparently quite easy, as we had been assured in Paris, to get into the country, and several patrols, including one quite considerable expedition, had been despatched towards Urga by the Soviet Intelligence Department. These men had simply disappeared into the mountains and nothing further had been heard of them.

"Go to Urga by all means," said the Commissary, "and if you should by any chance return, please do not fail to let me be informed. We would give a good deal to know what is going on over there. I warn you, com-

rades, that this is a strange country. It seems to be inhabited by gods as well as by men. The men, with a little persuasion, can be converted to Communism, but the gods are less amenable."

We stayed at Udinsk for two days, getting ready for our expedition. We collected ponies, and François hired two rough-looking men, whom he described as Mongols, to act as our servants. They were clad in sheepskin coats, with queer conical hats of fur, and both carried short leather whips stuck in their belts. Also, under Réhmy's direction, we got into native dress, to make ourselves, as he said, less conspicuous. You are accordingly to imagine us clad in long tunics reaching to the knees, made of a coarse kind of silk, over which we wore a quilted coat of cotton, very warm and comfortable. In addition we had shaggy coats of sheepskin, for it was very cold on the tops of the passes. A round, flat brimless hat fitting closely to the skull, with a strange white pattern running round it, covered our heads, and on our feet were boots of untanned leather reaching to the knees, into which were tucked voluminous trousers.

The evening before we left, Réhmy unexpectedly produced a ring, which he handed to me, saying that, as titular leader of the expedition, it would perhaps be better for me rather than himself or Gaston to wear it. I looked at the ring, and saw, to my astonishment, that it was a replica of the one I had seen on the finger of Mr. X, a large band of gold with the swastika deeply engraved upon it.

"Yes," said Réhmy in answer to my look of inquiry, "I had it especially made from the design which you drew for us in Paris. It may possibly come in useful."

It was a windy April morning, the 27th, as I see from my diary, when we started out from Udinsk. François with the two Mongol servants, who knew the way as far

as Urga, a track for the caravans that came to Siberia from the south, led the way. Next came Gaston, then myself, while Réhmy brought up the rear. Now we had actually started, my spirits rose. I remember particularly our first encampment, pitched among the foothills of the Tunka mountains, where, in the cold sweet air, we were able to forget our long confinement in the overheated train, our faces set towards the passes, and the wind-swept plains beyond, the great rivers and a strange folk with almond eyes and cruel mouths.

During the whole of our journey we did not enter a single large town. We saw settlements among the high pastures, and we came ever and again upon traces of an encampment, but the inhabitants were either very few or very shy of approach. I would sometimes see our Mongolian guides intently scanning the countryside, and they would often climb to some point of vantage, and looking out over the land, would stand talking together in tones shrill with excitement.

I should perhaps mention that they paid me the greatest deference, which I was puzzled to explain, until François, shortly afterwards, told me the reason.

On the evening of the day before we reached Urga we pitched our tent beside a rapid stream near a huge and silent forest. I remember that evening with peculiar vividness. For one thing we were now on the threshold of discovery. We had traversed a no-man's land of some three hundred miles, and we were now in the heart of the sealed territory. Almost within view was the sacred city of Urga, which, if anything were astir in Mongolia, could hardly fail to be a seat of activity. But what most vividly distinguished this particular evening from its predecessors was the fact that François suddenly chose to be companionable. I don't quite know what set him off, but the strings of his tongue were loosened.

It began with our arrival at the edge of the forest. Our Mongolian guides, on perceiving it, removed their hats and prostrated themselves.

"Bogdo Ol, Bogdo Ol," they explained, as they rose to their feet.

We asked François to interpret. Whereupon he told us that they believed the forest to be full of gods guarding the living Buddha, who dwelt in the midst of it.

"Ignorant menial man," said François, who prided himself on a Western education, "he think forest to be all one very holy place. Think he die if he put sole of unworthy foot inside. He pay his respects to spirits of uncertain temper."

Later, as we sat over our evening meal, François, moved perhaps in spite of himself by the nearness of his country's gods, became increasingly expansive.

"Buddha, he live always in person of holy man on earth. He divide himself in three parts for convenience and fair treatment of worshippers—three holy lamas—two in Thibet and one for Mongolia; Mongolian lama he live just over there"—and here, for all his Western veneration, François glanced apprehensively over his shoulder.

"Too many priests in my country," François continued, "clever Chinese people first build one great big wall of China to keep out fierce Mongol warriors. But soon they think of better plan. They send priests and teach warriors fighting very bad thing for everybody. All finest young men of family learn sacred books and become very peaceful, loving Chinaman as brother and think no more of great Mongol conquerors. Very good plan for China, but for hardy Mongol not good at all. End of very fine career."

François brooded a moment and a strange gleam came into his eyes.

"Big war, perhaps, change all that," he continued.

“China no more any good, cut her own throat, civil war, big man fight, small man eat opium and die plenty quick. Russia, she turn herself bottom uppermost and scuttle ship of State. Mongols soon perhaps remember old glory and recover fierce temper of ancient warrior. Many priests now tell poor ignorant Mongol story of great national heroes to restore fighting spirit. All this one very bad thing for Russian red people. Think perhaps many throats cut very soon in this part of world, and perhaps epidemic spread quickly. Mongolian man very fierce at bottom, and very brave soldier. Priests make him tame, but natural man very wild and savage.”

I remember that at one point in this curious discourse Réhmy remarked that so far we had seen very few inhabitants of the country, whether wild or tame. I noted that François did not seem to be altogether happy in his reply. He moved uneasily, and I saw his narrow eyes staring away apprehensively into the twilight.

“Mongolian peoples,” he explained, “one big rolling stone. Fancy first one place and then another. Also get strange delusions. Ignorant menial man,” and here he indicated the Mongol servants huddled a few paces off in their sheepskins, “he say all this country haunted by spirits who come in recently to keep strangers away from Mongol nation. Inhabitants all move away into sacred city, leaving spirits to snatch away souls of uninvited persons intruding into Mongol country. Ignorant menial man see smoke of camp-fires and say that we watched always by invisible host. Very frightened and often talk of going back. But he much impressed, and have great reverence for expedition because of holy ring on finger of American gentleman. Also I speak to him and very soon persuade him to proceed with important journey. Tell him we visit living Buddha, who bless him forever and make all devils sing very small.”

But it was not so much what François said that impressed me during that night on the edge of the sacred forest, as the disturbing contrast between his jaunty professions of Western enlightenment and his obvious uneasiness. His state of mind was evidently not very different from that of the "ignorant menial man" who had served him for a text. I can still see the look in his narrow eyes as he gazed towards the shadowy horizon, and the furtive glances thrown over his shoulder towards the forest as it stirred under the wind.

One other thing I remember very clearly of that last lonely bivouac. All through our journey from Udinsk through the desolate countryside, Réhmy had been more than usually preoccupied. He had ridden with his eyes on the brow of the next rise or fixed on the far horizon, like a man who hoped at every turn to come upon some sign or promise of his quarry. That evening by the camp-fire the feeling he had suppressed during those long days in the saddle burst from him in full flow. He was like a man possessed. That continual advance into an empty land had got on his nerves.

"I would do anything," he declared, his fingers clenched, a fanatic light in his eyes, "I would do anything merely to get into touch. I would seize upon any chance, take any risk. We have somehow to come up with our problem. Happen what may after that! But we must come up with it."

It was towards the end of the afternoon of the following day that we first caught a glimpse of the sacred city of Uрга. At the foot of Bogdo Ol we perceived a great building covered with greenish-blue tiles and surrounded by white walls. It was in the midst of groups of trees from which peeped the oddly shaped roofs of shrines and small palaces. The river at this point was spanned by a long wooden bridge, and beyond stretched the city

of monks, the great city of Ta Kure. On a high plateau on the left rose an old monastery, dominated by a dark red tower. This, said François, was the city of the lamas which contained the bronze statue of Buddha sitting on a golden lotus flower. Around that monastery dwelt the sixty thousands monks who were employed in guarding the sacred archives and libraries and in managing the inns for the countless pilgrims who came from China and Thibet and from the outer confines of Mongolia.

Below, near the river, was the modern part of the town, if it could be called modern. It had formerly been occupied by Russian and Chinese merchants, but most of those had fled in the troublous times immediately succeeding the Bolshevik revolution.

We entered the city as dusk fell, along the stony uneven road, passing a strange medley of adobe huts and trim modern houses built by the wealthier Russian traders, till we reached and rode through the great bazaar. It was now silent and deserted, for the business of the day was done. The strings of glass earrings and bracelets hanging on the stalls tinkled musically in the breath of the night air. Occasionally we met Buriats hurrying upon some errand, in long red coats and embroidered red caps, or Tartars in black coats with velvet caps set well on the back of the head. But dominating all were the lamas, who strolled absently about in their yellow and red robes, with yellow capes thrown over them and curious bonnets. They were seemingly indifferent to the rest of the population, looking neither to right nor left, but fingering their rosaries.

All about the town we perceived large numbers of conical tents, the *yurtas* of the travelling Mongols. Seemingly there was some sort of fair or festival in progress, which had brought in the nomads from the surrounding country. I came to know their habitations well, so I

will not pause to describe them now. For the moment I will mention only one other thing which particularly attracted my attention. As we turned a corner from the market and made our way towards the inn, we came suddenly upon a small group of Mongols or Tibetans in red coats, and I saw for the first time the sign of the swastika which they bore upon their heads and breasts. These men had a military air, and I fancied that they eyed us curiously as we passed. I turned to François, and pointed them out. He glanced at them at first indifferently, and then with an attention which was suddenly fixed and rigid.

“Who are these people?” I asked.

He did not answer, but continued to gaze at them, and then swiftly turned his head away.

“The sign,” he muttered, “the sign of Genghis Khan.”

At this moment, however, my attention was diverted by our arrival at the inn. It was a ramshackle building of brick and mud, a single storey in height, surrounding a courtyard. At the entrance we dismounted. Our horses were led through into the courtyard, while we ourselves were received by the lama innkeeper and presented with bowls of water in which we washed our hands and feet. We were then taken through the courtyard to one of the chambers or cubicles surrounding it. Each of these compartments was partitioned roughly off from its neighbour, the front side being quite open upon the yard.

I was thoroughly tired that evening. We were, indeed, glad of our rough shelter, and not a little relieved, after the solitude and desolation through which we had passed, to be once more in the midst of a human community.

We sat on our saddle-bags round a smoking fire of dry camel dung in the little partitioned space which had been allotted to us.

It was cold now that the sun had gone down, and the

sky was clear, with a hint of frost in the air. As we made our evening meal from the tinned stuff which we had brought with us, I watched, at first lazily, and then with growing attention, the unfamiliar scene in front of us. The courtyard was crowded with a strange variety of folk. There were Mongols in their sheepskin *oubshas* and conical fur caps very similar to those which we ourselves were wearing. Most of them appeared to be strong, wiry little men whose lives, one imagined, were spent on horses in the great plains. Mingling with them were a number of Chinese merchants of the poorer sort, distinguished by their wide hats with a curious button on the top and long-sleeved coats. Mingling with them all in sweet amity were camels, asses and ponies, tended by their Buriat and Tibetan drivers or riders providing them with the evening fodder.

After a while the crowd began slowly to settle down. Fires were lit in the cubicles and in the yard, and the guests began to set about the evening meal, boiling tea or broiling mutton in iron vessels over the fire. They were in the midst of these comforting preparations when there was a new diversion. A strange and weird figure made his appearance in the courtyard. He was almost naked, his only clothing being some kind of rough skin. His head was bare, and his hair long and matted. Round his waist was a girdle from which there hung a pouch. His feet were bare, and in his hand was a long staff.

He made his way through the crowd into the centre of the yard, where he stood for a moment leaning on his staff and seemingly quite indifferent to the bustle and noise around him. He was, however, not left long unnoticed. One by one the groups of seated Mongols looked up and perceived him; and, as each did so, they uttered cries and moved towards him, until in a remarkably short space of time most of them were collected

close about him, jostling the patient beasts which continued quietly to munch their fodder indifferent to all this human bustle and excitement.

"What sort of man is this?" said Réhmy to François, who was gazing like the rest of us at that strange figure.

"He one very big holy minstrel man," said François. "He tell ignorant people stories as is ancient Mongol custom."

François, obviously much intrigued by the newcomer, slipped from our enclosure and moved forward, and I noticed that several of the richer guests, who had hired enclosures like ourselves, were moving too. Then a hush fell over the whole courtyard, and I saw the unknown man climb suddenly two steps which brought him to a little platform, raising him waist-high above the crowd. This platform was in the middle of the yard, but it had escaped my previous notice.

He stood a moment, one hand outstretched, looking in the dim evening light like a strange John the Baptist that El Greco might have painted. Then he squatted down in the attitude of the Buddha, legs crossed and hands folded on his breast. In a moment there was complete silence, which endured, to my thinking, something over a minute. Then he raised his head and began to speak. He spoke quietly but strongly in a rather high tone without any great expression in it, and with no gestures whatever, and yet he held the crowd as though under a spell. So still were they all that the crackling of the fires and the slow munching of the ponies and camels could be heard in the pauses of his voice.

Of course, I could not understand a single word of what he was saying, but I could see the impression he made upon his hearers was profound, and at first I caught myself absurdly straining my ears to listen, as

though I, too, must needs understand his message. He continued for ten minutes or so, and my attention was beginning to wander, though it was still held by the curious demeanour of the crowd, when the man suddenly said a word which I could understand, a word which, as I was startled to perceive, set every individual in that crowded courtyard bowing his head. "Ayugumsik Khagan," said the lean man on the platform, bowing his head likewise. Then followed half a dozen sentences, and then he said again, "Ayugumsik Khagan," at which all the crowd bowed their heads a second time.

After this the speaker brought his performance quickly to an end; and, when he had finished, he sat silent for a while, taking no notice of the crowd, but falling into a kind of dream. A great sigh ran round the courtyard, and lost itself in the squalid rafters above our heads. Men began to move, to stretch themselves, and suddenly an excited hum of talk burst out like a millstream suddenly let loose. Many began to talk among themselves with many gestures, but the man on the platform paid no heed to them, nor did he make any sign when they crowded upon him to fill with offerings the wooden bowl which I saw lying at his feet.

Soon François returned, pushing his way through the crowd of drivers. His face, as we looked at him in inquiry, was blank as a shut door. Yet I could have sworn that he was suffering under an intense excitement, and that he was deeply shaken. He did not speak at once, but stretching out a thin hand, which was trembling slightly, he seized the brandy flask from which Réhmy had just given us an evening ration, and raising it to his lips, took a great gulp. He would, in fact, have emptied it altogether, had not Gaston put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Steady, man," said Réhmy. "Is anything wrong?"

“Nothing wrong,” said François, “all very foolish and not very edifying to educated persons.”

He spoke with a curious air of bravado, as though he were trying to comfort himself not very successfully by his own protestations.

“In that case,” said Réhmy curtly, “you will please restore the brandy bottle and tell us about the gentleman in the yard.”

The spirit seemed to have an immediate effect on François, for when next he spoke, it was in his usual jaunty manner.

“Nothing wrong,” he repeated. “Nothing to alarm superior Western mind. All one big story of tall, lean naked gentleman. Very disturbing for savage characters. Tall lean gentleman very famous holy man. He tell ignorant ferocious peoples of Mongolia ancient story about old man Lord of Fear. All Mongols believe. I also believed before I become civilised Christian man and enlightened citizen of French Republic. Now I not any more impressed by holy man.”

And our worthy interpreter, to show his contempt, spat ferociously into the fire before he continued :

“Holy man tell all peoples to look for a sign, for the Lord of Fear he wake up very soon now, when Deliverer come plenty quick from west, with beautiful smiling damsel. As he say this, all peoples much pleased at his words. But Holy Man stop all rejoicing and say it time now to fast and pray, for great test coming for Mongol peoples, and test be revealed when old man Lord of Fear wake up. Mongols must endure much to obtain great benefits.”

“François,” said Réhmy, “be frank with us. You were not quite your usual self a moment ago. What exactly was in the story you heard that particularly disturbed you?”

François looked at us sideways out of his narrow eyes. His hands twitched, and he stretched nervously for the brandy flask, which Gaston at once removed to a safer place. Then he muttered :

"He say Ayugumsik Khagan, the Lord of the Great Killing."

"Ayugumsik Khagan!" we exclaimed.

And Réhmy added :

"Who, then, is he?"

"Khagan, Mongol word for lord or king."

"Ayugumsik . . ." began François, and his face was livid now in the light of the fire.

But he was not to continue. As we looked towards him for his explanation, we suddenly perceived an expression of almost slavish subjection come over his face. Abruptly he fell on his knees, his head touching the ground.

A shadow had passed across him, and, turning our heads, we saw that someone was standing in the doorway.

Chapter XV

I Mount an Uneasy Throne

WE all stared in amazement at the remarkable person who was now before us. I saw at once that he was of the country. He was tall for an Asiatic, but I afterwards found that this was due to his boot heels, which were quite two inches high. He was a young man, well under thirty, and had that expressive Mongol face which I soon came to know so well—high cheekbones, thin lips, short nose, the whole face lightened by a pair of great and luminous eyes. He was most sumptuously and savagely dressed. His outer garment or *kalat* was of the richest silk, striped crimson and yellow, and round his waist was a green scarf, from which hung a large knife, or rather short sword, in a green leather scabbard, with a hilt of horn and ivory.

Round his neck were several chains and necklaces of gold and coral, from which amulets jingled as he moved, and on his head was a close-fitting cap of deep crimson silk, also embroidered with gold and with a single owl's feather stuck in the front. His boots, to the heels of which I have already referred, were of untanned crimson leather. In his hand he held a short leather whip with a single plaited thong. On his chest there was one thing which I particularly noted. The sign of the swastika, which we had seen on the coats of the horsemen in the market-place a few hours previously, was embroidered on the yellow silk of his under-robe, and I think that the sight of it gave me more food for reflection than the butt of the large revolver which protruded from his waistband.

He stood for a moment regarding us with quick and, to my seeming, nervous glances. They were particularly directed to my right hand, on the first finger of which was the gold ring Réhmy had obtained in Paris. He gazed at it intently for a moment or two. Then abruptly he entered. We all rose at his approach except François, who remained grovelling, and stood regarding him, uncertain what was going to happen. Then he stepped straight up to me, and placed first his left hand and then his right on my chest with the utmost solemnity. Mechanically I repeated his gesture, being, truth to tell, a little nervous of a man so heavily armed, and as I did so, a low murmur ran round the courtyard, and I perceived that every individual was gazing at us with the intentness of dogs waiting to be fed.

His face lit up as my left hand dropped from his chest, and he allowed a slight smile to twist his lips. Then "Tonilgakchi," he said, and bowed his head. Then, as I did not reply, he continued in Russian, though I could not understand what he said. Réhmy, however, who

had been an intent observer of all that was passing, pricked up his ears. Having been for a time a liaison officer on Brusiloff's staff during the war, he had a smattering of Russian, enough, at any rate, to follow the conversation.

"He is apologising for not having received you," he said quickly to me in English. "Will you let me reply?"

"Yes," I answered, "but what does it all mean?"

Réhmy said a few halting words in Russian, and indicated with a gesture the still prostrate interpreter. The gorgeously appavelled stranger glanced down, and suddenly his face became suffused with anger. Before I could imagine what was to happen next, he had raised his right hand, holding the whip, and struck the kneeling François a savage blow across the shoulder, at the same time saying something to him in what I imagined to be Mongolian.

François quivered under the lash, and uttered a strange hissing sound. Then, shakily, he rose to his feet, evidently in response to the commands of the newcomer.

The latter addressed him once more, and when he had finished François turned to me and said:

"His Excellency the Jassak (that means Governor of town), whose name is Rodo Ulustur Tasalakchi Kung, blame me for not informing him of our arrival in sacred city. I very sorry, but not know in what offence lies. He tell me to interpret and be quick about it, or get one big hiding from short, very cruel whip."

"Ask him, François," I said, "what he wants with us and why he desired to know of our coming."

François turned and with abject politeness put my question to the flamboyant Governor.

I saw his eyebrows move slowly. He answered at some length, and François turned to me, his face showing bewilderment and dismay.

"His Excellency say we expected for long time, though he thought we would come from south. He say we have been watched very close for last ten days, and guarded by His Excellency's secret soldiers."

I looked at Réhmy.

"What does all this mean?" I said. "How can we have been expected?"

The interpreter put the question, and the face of His Excellency (Rodo as I shall call him, for that appeared to be his name, all the rest being titles), expressed considerable astonishment. He said something to François in a quiet tone, but the effect on the interpreter was dynamic. The little man looked as though he had received a blow on the head, and it was a little while before he could find his voice. At last, upon an impatient movement of the Jassak, he turned to us.

"I translate literally," he faltered. "His Excellency say all men expect Tonilgakchi, that is, Deliverer. All men make arrangements to meet Deliverer and pay him honour due. He not expect Deliverer to come creeping like thief in night or criminal person. He ask me explain why I not announce to him Deliverer at once, and why I let Deliverer take unworthy cubicle in caravanserai at popular price."

"Tell him," I began, "that he has made an absurd mistake. Tell him that I am not the Deliverer."

I felt a sudden, fierce grip on my arm, and turning, I saw Réhmy, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"Tell him no such thing," he cried. "Don't you see, man? It's our best chance. At last we shall come to grips."

I looked at him, bewildered by his sudden intervention. His eyes were as I remembered them beside the camp-fire under the shadow of Bogdo Ol. Seeing me for the moment at a loss, he turned savagely to François.

"Tell the Jassak," he said peremptorily, "that Mr. Pilbury is the Deliverer, and that we came by the northern route because it was safer. If you betray us or fail to maintain the deception I shall consider that you have chosen to desert us, and you shall have a deserter's fate."

The little interpreter looked from Réhmy to the Jassak and back again. He was now between two fires. Réhmy, I could see, was implacable. One had only to look at his face to realise the fixity of his purpose.

François at last turned to Rodo, who was watching the scene with impassive eyes, and spoke to him again in the native tongue. When he had finished, the Jassak smiled, and said something, making, as he did so, a slight gesture of the hand. The interpreter again translated rapidly.

"His Excellency say he quite understand. He now offer to take Deliverer to abode more suitable for his mightiness. We less glorified persons to follow on foot."

And François glanced with a certain malevolent satisfaction at Réhmy and Gaston.

At that instant a litter appeared as though by magic in front of the enclosure. It was made of some light wood which I could not identify, elaborately carved and painted yellow. Its twin poles were borne by eight Buriat servants in red cloaks with close-fitting caps. They too had the swastika embroidered on their clothes. Inside was a chair of red lacquer, with cushions of blue silk.

Almost mechanically, for my mind had still not yet grasped the implications of my sudden impersonation, I allowed myself to be handed into the litter. As I did so, I looked over the courtyard, and was amazed to see that the whole crowd was on its knees. As I appeared in the doorway and took my place in the litter, a great sigh went up, and there was a soft shuffling sound as every

man in the place bent forward and touched the ground with his forehead.

I was hoisted high on the shoulders of the Buriats and we moved off slowly, surrounded by a number of the Tibetan guard whom I had noticed on our entry into the market-place.

As we moved through the courtyard, the litter rocked and swayed as though the pavement were uneven. I thought, indeed, that the whole thing would be overturned, and I wondered why the bearers were so unsteady. I glanced uneasily through the yellow silk curtains hanging at each side, and the mystery was explained. I saw, to my amazement, that my bearers were carrying me over the living bodies of the prostrate crowd. For a moment I thought of protesting against this barbarity, but I noticed almost at once that, far from resenting it, the crowd fought eagerly for the privilege of being trampled upon. I saw men writhing along the ground and throwing themselves before my bearers, their eyes upturned like those of a saint at prayer, with a look of ecstatic peace and satisfaction as the heavy feet trod them under heel.

Then I sat back in my chair, for a whisper reached my ear from Réhmy, who was walking beside my litter.

“Calmly, Thomas,” he said, “and look as much like an idol as you can.”

His voice rang with excitement. I had never seen him so elated. There was even a hint of grim pleasantry in his exhortation.

The litter moved slowly along a narrow winding street, leading away from the town towards a river. Once we had left the courtyard we encountered but few passers-by, but all hastened at once to prostrate themselves as the litter passed.

I was overwhelmed by the position into which I had suddenly been thrust. *The legend was coming true.* The Mongols were expecting the Deliverer, the man from the West who would liberate the Lord of Fear. The whole country was alive and expectant, ready, as it seemed, to see the Deliverer in any traveller who happened to intrude into the forbidden land.

I wondered whether the Professor and his party had yet arrived. Presumably not, or the genuine Deliverer would by now have come forward. I reflected that we should not long be left in doubt. If the Professor were anywhere in the land, my impersonation would bring matters at once to an issue. Réhmy's plan was at any rate effective so far as it went. He wanted to meet his enemy face to face. I had little doubt that he would very shortly have his desire, but I can't say that the prospect filled me with unbounded exhilaration.

I was recalled abruptly from my reflections by Réhmy's voice once more in my ear.

"You are going to his *yurta*," he said, "where you will stay the night. More than that he will not tell me. This Jassak, it seems, is a very great man indeed. He wears the owl's feather, showing him to be a lineal descendant of Genghis Khan, and is, therefore, of the most royal blood of Mongolia. But you must treat him as an equal and be as little communicative as possible."

"I am not likely to communicate very much," I answered, "since neither of us can understand a word the other says."

"At first they were surprised," said Réhmy, "that you could not speak Mongolian. But I made the interpreter explain that you were much preoccupied with your high mission, and that for many years you had not used the language. The Jassak seemed to be quite satisfied. These Buddhists know what is meant by con-

temptation, and think nothing if one of their friends does not talk for a year or two."

"That's all very well," I began. "But how on earth . . ."

"Listen to me," snapped Réhmy. "We've got to go through with this business now. We cannot possibly go back. Your first job is to learn how to behave when we get to the Jassak's dwelling. I'll tell you at once as much as I know about it."

Réhmy had evidently not wasted his time at the Bibliothèque Nationale. There and then he described to me the ceremonies which are performed by the rich Mongol chiefs when entertaining an honoured guest, and what the guest is expected to do in return. I committed it all carefully to memory for the next half-hour as we jogged along.

Presently I saw, through a gap in the curtains of the litter, a great hill blazing with lights which were reflected in the waters of the Tola. It was the lama city on the other side of the river. At the same instant the litter stopped, and the Jassak Rodo himself helped me to descend. I found myself standing at the entrance to a strange-looking kind of tent or marquee, from the interior of which a soft light was glowing. Behind it other tents of the same kind were visible. The tent before which I stood was the *yurta* of the Jassak, and was similar in construction to the many others which I saw in Mongolia. The *yurta* is the Mongol's home, a light, portable dwelling which can be moved at his pleasure, for he is a nomad, and wanders from place to place in search of pasture and game. It was constructed of *voilock*, a kind of felt made of wool and camel's hair, very light and warm. The felt was stretched over a trellis work made of willow wood, on the same principle as the trellis in an English rose garden. This trellis could be folded up like a con-

certina and packed on the back of a camel. The roof was dome-shaped, supported also on willow poles, ending in a circular hole through which light entered and the smoke of the fire found an exit. Inside, the walls were hung with rich silks, rugs and carpets, some of local make, and others brought from as far as Bokhara and Samarkand, but there was little furniture. I noticed sundry chests for the storing of clothes, a low divan covered with an exquisite Persian rug and some low tables only a few inches from the ground.

Our arrival was watched with the greatest reverence and curiosity by the servants and the retainers of the Jassak, who hastened to receive me with all possible ceremony. I had the luck to make a good impression at the outset. In the doorway of the *yurta* was a little boy of about five years old, quite naked, except for a yellow and red striped *khalet*, a miniature edition of his father's. He was absorbed in a game with a young kid, and they made a charming picture there—the sturdy child standing up boldly to the young animal, which every now and then made a spring forward and sent him sprawling with a butt of his head. I stood for a moment watching the scene, and then, forgetting my high position, allowed a smile to come over my face as a particularly vigorous butt from the kid sent the child sprawling at my feet. I picked him up. He was a sturdy youngster and he wriggled in my grasp, lifting a queer flat little face with deep brown eyes. He was not a bit frightened and smiled at me in the most engaging manner.

I heard a warning cough from Réhmy, who was just behind me, and, suddenly remembering who I was, I solemnly laid my hand on the child's head, just as a woman, whom I took to be his mother and one of the Jassak's wives, dressed in a black Chinese satin robe with a white muslin cap of which the lappets hung nearly

as low as her waist and were embroidered with red silk, bustled up, prepared to scold, and evidently in a panic lest I should choose to be offended. For all the world I felt like an earnest young parliamentary candidate ingratiating himself with the women voters of his constituency, and, as it turned out, my action could not have been more fortunate. Everyone smiled, and the great Jassak himself appeared to be highly gratified.

I was made to sit, and was offered a bowl of *koumis*, the universal drink of the rich men of Mongolia. It is fermented mare's milk and is very nasty indeed, but I drained it bravely to the dregs.

I was then taken to the back of the *yurta*, where, to my embarrassment, the wife of the Jassak herself, together with another woman, wizened and old, laid out fresh and very sumptuous garments of silk, similar in pattern to those which I was wearing, but infinitely more costly. The *khalat* was of black velvet, splendidly embroidered in silk, and it bore a large swastika sign wrought upon it on little gold plates.

I put on these clothes, and came forward again, to find that a meal was awaiting me.

A pile of cushions placed beside one of the larger chests, which had been moved to the middle of the *yurta*, was clearly the place of honour, which I assumed as to the manner born. The Jassak then appeared with his retainers, who squatted in Eastern fashion on mats within reach of the chest. The Jassak himself came before me, and with a low bow presented a long oblong strip of yellow silk cloth which I touched and returned to him. This was the *hatyk*, which is presented only to chiefs, lamas or gods. He then bent his head for me to touch and set about serving the meal.

A whole sheep had been roasted, and it was now placed by the Jassak on the chest in front of me. I took the first piece offered to me, and, remembering

Réhmy's instructions, I handed it to the small chubby child whom I had first encountered. This was a sign, universal among the Mongols, that everyone could now partake of the feast. The Jassak sat down at my right hand, and instantly the whole sheep was torn in pieces by the retainers and in a twinkling had almost entirely disappeared. The best parts, however, had been reserved for me, including the *tarach* or arrow, as the Mongols call it, a great delicacy, consisting of the covering just above the breastbone. We were then served with dried fruits, raisins and sugar candy and the Jassak saw to it that my china cup, which stood on a low table at my right hand, was continually replenished with tea.

I sat there in solemn state and in dead silence, wondering desperately what would happen next. I lived through that meal literally from hand to mouth. Thanks to the very rapid coaching of Réhmy, I was still the Deliverer, but I urgently needed his advice if the deception was to be maintained. It was accordingly with great relief that I saw the wizened face of François appear in the entrance of the *yurta* just as the meal was concluded.

"François," I said with dignity, "please inform His Excellency the Jassak that I desire to speak with my attendants."

"Western menials," said François with a twinkle, for, like all Mongols, he had a quick sense of humour, "eat tripe and inferior parts of sheep outside this very superior dwelling. I send them in to be servants to great Deliverer when supper completely eaten."

I drank yet another of the interminable cups of tea. Then the Jassak rose, and with a bow again stretched out his head for me to touch. I blessed him, and seizing my right hand he kissed the spurious ring, and left the *yurta*. A moment later Réhmy appeared, followed by Gaston. Réhmy was still under the influence of the excitement which had driven us all into this strange adventure.

Gaston, however, was grinning hugely. It was the first time I had seen him really amused since we started.

"You are a marvel, Thomas," he said. "They think you no end of a chap, whereas Etienne and I myself are less than the dust. You should just have seen what we had for supper."

"That's all very well," I said, looking at Réhmy, "but I can't keep it up indefinitely. I shall be making a bad break sooner or later. Besides, where is my bride from the West? And what about the real Deliverer? It looks as though he were a bit overdue already. I shouldn't be at all surprised if before very long we shall be listening to the honeyed voice of our dear Professor."

"One thing at a time," answered Réhmy. "I admit we are on pretty thin ice, but we have taken the only possible course. François has discovered that every white man has been excluded from Mongolia for months past. The country is under some kind of martial law, and everyone who tries to enter is arrested and shot. In fact, my dear Thomas, if you hadn't been mistaken for the Deliverer we should by now all have been as dead as the Jassak's mutton."

He began to stride up and down the tent in growing excitement.

"Do you realise what this means?" he continued. "Our wildest imaginings are sober and unquestionable fact. The legend is coming true. The whole of this vast country is waiting impatiently for its fulfilment. The Deliverer is expected to release the Lord of Fear, who will lead the Mongols to the conquest of the world. It sounds fantastic and incredible, but it is happening here, almost under our eyes. We are on the point of solving the great riddle."

"That's all very well," I observed. "But the secret is not likely to go very much further. We have got into the thick of it. But it beats me to know how we are ever going to get out again."

"One thing at a time," said Réhmy. "At present we have two things in our favour. We are first in the field, and that's a very important point when you are dealing with a primitive people worked up to believe exactly what we want. Secondly, there is the ring of Genghis Khan. These are our two strong cards."

"Which will be trumped as soon as the Professor turns up with the real Deliverer," I pointed out. "Besides, there's a point you seem to have forgotten. Where is my bride from the West?"

"Yes," put in Gaston. "It's all very well for Thomas to go about treading on people's backs and behaving like an emperor, but what is going to happen when he is asked to produce the bride?"

"Not too fast," said Réhmy, "the question has not as yet been asked. We've still time to account for the missing lady, which oughtn't to be beyond our powers of invention. Three heads are better than one."

"But who is going to ask me for the bride?" I said. "The Jassak hasn't made any reference to the matter so far."

"I expect you will be taken very soon to someone higher up than the Jassak," returned Réhmy, "a Hubilgan or a Huktuktu, or some other high lama dignitary. The Jassak has already sent off a messenger. He galloped away almost as soon as we arrived."

I contributed but little to the ensuing conversation. I knew from experience that the final plan would be fixed by Réhmy, who was strategically head and shoulders above us two, and sure enough, after a brief exchange of views, he began to rough out a plan. It sounded pretty desperate, and for a moment I was appalled by the part which I should be called upon to play. But I soon realised that it was the only possible course. We had gone too far now to draw back. Escape was obviously

impossible; I must either continue to pass for the Deliverer, or we must prepare at once to meet an impaling party. (The Mongols impale unpopular strangers.)

We talked, I suppose, for about half an hour, and then Etienne and Gaston left me for the night. They were sleeping in a *yurta* near by.

Almost as soon as they had left me, the wife of the Jassak entered the *yurta*, accompanied by the wizened old woman who had assisted me before. Silently they prepared for me a couch on which coverings of quilted silk had been spread. I sank thankfully upon it to rest, and soon passed into a dreamless sleep, my last thought being to con over the points of the desperate plan which I had promised to carry out.

Chapter XVI

I am asked for a Sign

I WOKE early, my wrist watch showing six o'clock, and for a moment I found it hard to remember where I was, looking with astonishment at the striped and multi-coloured hangings strewn about the *yurta* and at the bed of skins and silk rugs on which I lay. Then reality, more fantastic than the dream in which I seemed for a moment to be involved, resumed dominion, and rolling over on my back I told myself that I was the Deliverer come to accomplish an unknown mission in a savage land, "holy and enchanted," and that the lives of all of us depended on my success or failure.

I lay quiet for some time wondering what the drill was for hungry deliverers to obtain breakfast. Cries outside and the champing of horses told me that the camp of the Jassak was already astir. I wondered what Réhmy and Gaston were about, and whether they had succeeded in instilling a little very necessary courage into François. It would be fatal if he should prove unable to stand the

course, though somehow I felt that the little man would never, when it came to the point, desert us. He was proud of his Western attributes, and had a slavish confidence in the ability of Réhmy to pull us through. Besides, he was shrewd enough to realise that it was now more dangerous to go back than to go forward. Already he had been an accessory to the deception of the proud and savage Jassak, who, to judge from what I had seen of him, would flay poor François alive if the fraud should ever be discovered.

There was an inlaid stool at my bedside with a brass gong on it which I had not noticed when I had gone to bed. Finding further reflection useless, and merely depressing, I struck it twice. Hardly had the harsh notes ceased to ring when the tent flap was drawn aside and the Jassak's women entered, bearing, to my delight, hot water in big wooden bowls and cakes of very excellent European soap. I think, indeed, that nothing astonished me more in that strange land than the odd mixture of the completely modern and the entirely obsolete. My host, for instance, carried a Mauser of the latest pattern, but at his saddle-bow was strapped a battle-axe which might have been wielded by Tamerlane. His men were armed with carbines of the same pattern as my men had carried in the war, but the long Mongol spear and the heavy sword which they also carried had been the deadly weapons of the hordes of Genghis Khan.

I washed and put on the robes which had been given to me overnight, though a quilted *khalat* ornamented with gold and crimson silk threads running in perpendicular lines was added to my attire. I slung on a broad leather belt from which hung a holster containing my pistol and long sharp dagger with a two-edged blade, and made ready to leave the tent.

I have forgotten to say that on the advice of Réhmy

none of us had shaved since leaving Paris, with the result that we all possessed quite respectable beards and moustaches. Mine in fact was especially luxuriant, for the hair on my face grows quickly, and in my rough clothes I presented a picture of a brigand chief which I feel sure would have delighted the audiences of the Lyceum or the Chatelet.

While I was dressing, food was brought, and I ate heartily of a kind of doughy paste, filling but not palatable, and drank several cups of tea. During breakfast Réhmy and Gaston appeared, and informed me of the programme for the morning. It was quite sufficiently alarming. I was to be conducted at once, it seemed, into the presence of the Living Buddha.

"I hope you'll be coming with me," I said on receiving this news. "I've not yet been presented to a god, and I'm not acquainted with the protocol."

"I'm sorry," said Réhmy, "but I'm afraid you will have to go alone. The orders are that only François shall attend you. This is your own particular show, and you carry our lives in your hands. The only thing to do is to stick to our plan. Nobody suspects us. Everyone, in fact, is only too ready to believe in our mission. François tells me that the Jassak is delighted that you should have come to Urga, and thus allowed him to be the first to welcome the Deliverer."

"You've stirred them up properly," said Gaston. "All the Mongols are in a high state of excitement, and there are big doings in the town. I tried to go there this morning, but the Jassak's people would not let me pass. They kept pointing to their guns and shaking their heads, giving me to understand that if I persisted I should probably be shot."

In confirmation of what he said, the short silence which followed was broken by the sound of distant poppings, and one or two thin cries sounding very far away.

At that moment, however, the Jassak appeared, bowing and making signs that all was ready.

I was assisted respectfully to my feet by Gaston, who, for the benefit of the Jassak, showed me the greatest deference. In front of the *yurta* stood a very fine Mongol stallion, almost pure white and magnificently caparisoned. The saddle of wood, gorgeously painted, was small and high peaked, and, when I got my feet into the stirrups I found the leathers very long, so that I was forced to adopt a cavalry seat. Owing to the insistence of Beatrice, I had hunted regularly for two winters with the Warwick, so that I was fortunately able to cut a respectable figure as we parted at full gallop, surrounded by as wild an escort of thick-set Mongols with long spears, from which streamed pennons of blue and yellow silk, as could be imagined. The impressiveness of our cavalcade was somewhat marred by the behaviour of François, who was an indifferent horseman, and shot over his pony's ears as we wheeled sharp to the left on leaving the camp. He was, however, at once picked up and held in the saddle by two of the escort, who seemed greatly amused at his discomfiture, roaring with laughter and slapping him vigorously on the small of the back as they retrieved him.

Apart from this mishap, everything seemed to go splendidly. We left the town of Urga on our right, and made for the Tola, which flows round the base of the hill on which stand the city and palace of the Buddha. As we galloped forward at breakneck speed, that sense of exhilaration which fills most of us at times, especially when on a good horse, to which I am, I am glad to say, no exception, took hold of me. It was still early, about eight o'clock, and the day was bright with sunshine and boisterous with wind. Across the pale blue sky streamed a few white clouds, the flying remnant of a stricken army, and the grey dust rolled in clouds about our horses' feet. Unconsciously I touched my mount with the long Mongol

spurs upon my heels, and he bounded forward, so that, being better mounted than the rest, I outstripped them and rode alone. We were making for the long narrow wooden bridge which connects Urga with the city of lamas. It was crowded with all sorts and conditions of folk, Buriats, Mongols and wild-looking Tibetans with broad-brimmed hats. Lamas, in red or yellow robes, predominated.

A group of six of these lamas caught sight of me as I made for the bridge-head, and at once they raised a cry, which was taken up in an instant along the whole length of the bridge. "Tonilgakchi, Tonilgakchi," shouted the crowd, falling on its knees as I thundered over the wooden planks, and as I rode to the tune of that mighty shouting I realised how easy it must be for conquerors and leaders of men to become drunk with pride when their going-out and coming-in is greeted in this fashion.

I crossed the bridge alone, but, by the time I had reached the end of it, the Jassak with my escort had drawn level. We slowed to a trot, and began to mount a narrow winding street bordered on each side by wooden houses surmounted by those queer roofs with curly edges which you see in willow-pattern plates. Our progress was now considerably slower, for the road was thronged even more densely than the bridge with every sort of person eager to catch a glimpse of the Deliverer.

This was the city of lamas, the dwelling-place of more than sixty thousand monks, priests, sorcerers, diviners and lesser miracle-workers, who surrounded the living Buddha, and thrived on the pilgrims who came in vast numbers to visit the shrine of Ta Kure, second only in veneration to that of the Dalai Lama himself at Llassa. Weird figures covered with self-inflicted wounds or loathsome marks of disease swarmed beside us, their eyes shining with fanaticism and their voices uplifted in worship and praise. I noted, too, that, in addition to

these mad folk, and forming by their numbers the predominant element of the crowd, were compact groups of little flat-faced Mongols, lean and hardy, strongly armed and wearing the badge of the swastika. These were for the most part silent and looking towards me with eager eyes, until a movement of my right hand drew from them excited cries which swelled in volume as we passed along.

I was still somewhat in advance of the Jassak when, a little shaken by my wild career over the wooden bridge, I raised my right hand to settle the strange hat I was wearing more firmly on my head. This movement caused the great ring on my index finger to become conspicuous, and in a flash the attention of the crowd was focussed upon it. No deliberate gesture could have had a greater effect, and the general enthusiasm if possible increased. Yellow fingers were pointed, rifles and lances were waved, and once more the acclamation rang out: "Tonilgakchi, Tonilgakchi," repeated again and again.

We turned a corner and drew level with the main gate of a huge temple. Its walls towered to the sky, pierced symmetrically with rows of narrow, barred windows and covered with a great roof of Chinese pattern made of blue-green tiles. As we approached the gate the Jassak looked at me with a question in his eyes. I knew what it was he expected, for Réhmy had carefully instructed me. As Deliverer of the Mongols, in some sort a reincarnation of Genghis Khan, it would not be fitting for me to pass any temple without paying due reverence to the Buddha. Dismounting from my horse, I approached the massive iron gate and struck the huge brass gong hanging beside it. The metal door swung open almost before the gong had ceased to ring, and I entered the building on foot, between two lines of prostrate lamas lying motionless on either side like so many red or yellow sacks.

The interior was enormous, and in deep gloom. Vaguely I distinguished shrines of gods and goddesses, statues

of Buddhist saints and great strips of crimson silk hanging from the ceiling, motionless in the heavy air, fragrant with incense. Scraps of paper inscribed with prayers hung untidily in front of the shrines, together with quantities of "obos" or slips of coloured silk which are invariably placed by the Mongols before their altars to propitiate the demons.

Passing the low red benches where sat the lama choir, I approached the high altar, on which the gold and silver vessels and the massive candlesticks were illumined with the glow of oil-lamps in the sanctuary. Behind the altar was a curtain of yellow silk covered with an inscription. A lama drew it aside, and I perceived, in the darkness beyond it, the enormous gilded statue of the Buddha, seated cross-legged on the golden lotus. The face of the god, upon which a soft light was shining, was calm and impassive, giving no promise of hope or despair, life or death, defeat or victory.

I looked about me for the gong with which to call his attention to my prayer, this, according to François, being the proper procedure, and, finding it, I struck it twice and then fell forward on my knees. There was no turning back. I must omit no detail of the farce which I had to play.

I knelt for about five minutes before the shrine, partly to create a favourable impression, partly to concentrate my thoughts and get quite clear in my mind what I should say to the Living Buddha, into whose presence I was about to be conducted.

At last I rose and, after casting some coins into the bronze bowl of offering, I passed down the great temple towards the door.

François awaited me at the entrance. He was in a strange mood, terrified by the position in which he found himself, and yet, it seemed, proud of my success and taking

a kind of fearful, almost artistic, satisfaction in the progress of our extraordinary adventure.

"Peoples," he said, "very much impressed with Deliverer. So far all quite correct and very orthodox. Strongly advise consolidate opinion now by having fortune told by holy monks in black round temple adjacent where lives stone Buddha come all the way from India."

"Very well, François," I said, glad to note that he was evidently prepared to play the game. "I am in your hands. You must show me what to do."

I followed him out of the temple to where the Jassak awaited us with the escort.

We passed them and, turning to the right, found ourselves in front of the shrine of prophecies, a small, round building, black with age. Within it we found two lamas who intoned *sutras*, and another who turned monotonously a huge prayer-wheel. At the back was the stone image referred to by François, and over the door a sheet of copper inscribed with the signs of the zodiac.

At a word from François one of the monks rose and took a bowl in which were a number of Chinese dice. These he cast upon the low table before him and remained for some moments perusing them intently. He then swept the dice together, put them back in the bowl and cast them once more, peering eagerly at the result. It did not appear to please him, for he repeated the operation a third time. After the third attempt he raised his hands, and his face assumed an expression of mingled fear and bewilderment. He said something rapidly to François, who turned to me, obviously out of countenance.

"Holy monk say," he stammered, "that dice behave most deplorably, showing very small respect for great Deliverer. God refuse to speak though three times asked. Monk say he not understand. Almost it looks as if you not Deliverer at all."

This was a bad beginning, and throwing an offering into the bowl, I hastily left the shrine. If two simple monks could so casually presume to doubt my identity, how could I hope to deceive the Living Buddha himself?

We rode on for a short distance till we reached a small open space bounded on the further side by a wall painted with red and white stripes. A gate in the centre of the wall opened at our approach, and we dismounted. We were then ushered into a great hall, preceded now by an escort of two hundred lamas in red and yellow robes. On a dais in the middle of the hall stood a throne covered with cushions of yellow silk, and beside it were screens of the same material with carved frames of black wood.

Before the throne were a long low table of polished wood and a number of light low stools. Behind the throne were large carven doors, which presently opened to admit two very old completely bald lamas, who bowed low to me and beckoned me to pass the threshold. I moved on, followed by François and the Jassak, and found myself in a small courtyard open to the sky, at the end of which stood what seemed to be a small modern house built in the Russian style.

"The abode of His Holiness," François explained, and my heart beat more quickly at his words.

I crossed the courtyard between two rows of lamas four deep, who, unlike their brethren outside, bowed only slightly as I passed and made no move to prostrate themselves. I inferred that they must belong to a superior order of monks who presumed themselves to be almost on speaking terms even with the Deliverer himself; and, strange to relate I had become so used to being treated as a god that I quite resented their behaviour.

At the entrance to the Buddha's house was a crimson cord of camel and horse-hair, which ran along the side

of the court and over the wall beyond. I had no time to inquire its meaning, but François afterwards told me that it communicated direct with the private room of the Buddha, and that along it a current of blessing flowed. Any Mongol who touched it received that blessing, and ever afterwards wore about his neck a red thread in token of this culminating point of his pilgrimage.

I was ushered through several rooms, till at last I found myself in the private study of the Living Buddha. The room was furnished with extreme simplicity. In one corner stood a great chest containing, so François explained, the holy seals, guarded day and night by two priests. There was a table with writing materials upon it, and a low chair. The walls were bare, save for a number of inscriptions alternating with the sign of the swastika. In one corner was a brazier, and in another an altar bearing a statue of Buddha, before which two lights were burning. On the floor was a yellow carpet.

The room was empty when we entered except for the warders of the seals, one of whom informed the Jassak that the Living Buddha was engaged in prayer in his small private oratory, where no one was allowed to enter. Indeed, as I stood there I heard an unknown voice praying in an unknown tongue behind a curtain. The prayer was long, but intermittent and punctuated at intervals by a strange sound which for the moment I did not venture to identify.

We waited for some considerable time, twenty minutes, I should think, and then abruptly the curtain before the oratory was jerked aside and the Living Buddha stood before me.

I had spent some anxious moments trying to imagine what he would be like. Was I about to meet some priestly figure, remote and impassive, bowed beneath a weight of sacred vestments? Or, remembering what

François had said of the nationalist policy of the Mongolian priesthood, was I to find in him an ecclesiastical statesman of the type of Hildebrand or Innocent III? My comparatively frigid reception by the superior lamas of the antechamber had inclined me to expect the latter type of pontiff, for whom the Deliverer, in spite of his great political mission and military prestige, would be, in the eyes of the spiritual and temporal head of the Mongolian Empire, like the mediæval Emperors in Europe, either a dangerous rival or a recognised subordinate. The fact that he had kept me waiting while he finished his devotions rather confirmed me in the latter supposition. The frenzied cries with which I had been received could not fail to have penetrated into his holy refuge, but as a matter of policy, so I reflected, he must not seem to be impressed by the shouting of the captains.

I was certainly quite unprepared for the man who came forth from behind the curtain.

His Holiness Bogdo Jebtsun Damba Huktuktu Khan, Emperor of Mongolia, to give him his full title, was short, fat and clean-shaven. He wore a yellow silk Mongolian coat with black facings, rather draggled, and a large pair of horn spectacles lay across his forehead. He was fat and at the first view entirely commonplace. Most surprising of all, he had the unwholesomely puffy face and lustreless eyes of the habitual drunkard, and I was amazed to see that as he came forward he moved with the careful but uncertain deliberation of a man who was not entirely sober. The mysterious sounds which I had heard from behind the curtain were now explained. Not to put too fine a point upon it, the first greeting of his Holiness to the obsequious secretaries who hurried forward to receive him was a good, hearty hiccup.

He stood for a moment staring vaguely down the room. François and the Jassak, with all the other priests and

dignitaries admitted to the audience, were prone on their knees, and I found myself, the only person erect, looking him straight between the eyes over the prostrate bodies of the faithful. I bowed to him with awkward deference, but he took not the slightest notice.

I knew, however, that, despite his condition, he was fully alive to my presence, and I caught a strange gleam in the shrewd, almost cunning eyes, which seemed more than usually narrow under their puffy lids. There was resentment in that momentary glance, with just a hint of apprehension; also a touch, which I was coming to expect from this incorrigibly light-hearted people, of primitive humour. If this had not been the sovereign pontiff of Mongolia, I should have said he was thinking: "Ah, my fine swaggering fellow, you think yourself no end of a big noise, but you can't come it over me."

Meanwhile, he left me standing there, feeling rather a fool, while, with a grotesque assumption of dignity, in which there was, nevertheless, a quality which made it impossible for me to find it at all ludicrous, he sank into a chair, and, with a rapt expression, which might have been genuine or assumed for the occasion, he said something to one of the secretaries who stood behind his desk. The secretary approached, and, taking up a brush and a slab of Chinese ink, began to write at his dictation.

"Big sacred lama recording holy vision full of demons and very nasty," whispered François, who was kneeling in awe at my feet.

His Holiness spoke very deliberately, tripping now and then over certain words in a manner that showed him to have achieved what the old admiral in *Heartbreak House* was wont to describe as the "seventh degree of concentration." Then, abruptly, the dictation was finished, and the Living Buddha or Bogdo Khan, as I shall in future call him, dismissed the secretaries and other

dignitaries with a wave of the hand and turned his attention to us.

He extended a fat and not very clean fist across the table, and the Jassak arose from beside me and advanced towards him, François remaining where he was.

"You are welcome," said Bogdo Khan, as we kissed the offered forefinger.

For the sake of brevity I shall record our conversation as though we had both used a common language, though, of course, François had to translate everything each of us said for the benefit of the other.

This was the critical moment. The time when I must carry out the plan suggested by Réhmy was come, and I prayed heaven that my story would not sound as thin to the Living Buddha as it did to me. We looked at each other in silence when the preliminary courtesies were over, and on a sign from his Holiness I was provided with a low carved stool, on which I seated myself. François was asked to approach, and coming forward knelt beside the stool.

His Holiness at first ignored me completely, addressing a series of questions to the Jassak. François translated fragments of their talk from time to time. The Jassak, in answer to Bogdo Khan, was describing how he found me and the measures he had taken to secure my safety and that of my companions. The Living Buddha during this cross-examination looked at me from time to time, his little eyes resting upon me with a shrewd expression. At last, however, he seemed to be satisfied, for presently he turned to me and said :

"You are content with our preparations?"

"They appear, from what I have seen, to be more complete than I could ever have hoped to expect," I replied.

"You claim to be the man from the West?"

" I come from the West."

" You are the man for whom Mongolia is waiting? "

" I am."

" Pardon my ignorance in the face of heavenly mysteries. But why should the Deliverer of God's chosen be ignorant of the sacred tongue of our ancient race? "

" I have lived long in the West, and I am only a mortal instrument. The gift of tongues is denied to the servant of heaven."

" You come to fulfil the prophecies? "

" They shall be fulfilled in their appointed time."

" And you will unloose the . . ."

He paused, and now there was unmistakably a gleam of apprehension in his eyes—" the unknown? "

" That is my mission," I replied; and I saw the eyes of the Jassak gleam and his hand wander to the hilt of his dagger.

Bogdo was silent, looking at me with the hard, deliberate stare of the drunkard concentrating his wits.

" You have the ring? " he said at last.

I stretched out my right hand. He bent over it and looked intently at the heavy circle of gold deeply engraved with the sign of the swastika. Then, as though he had suddenly come to a decision, he placed his fat palm under my own, and raised it till the ring touched his forehead.

I sat back in momentary relief. My credentials appeared to be satisfactory. The manner of the man had been far from reassuring. He had shown small respect for my mission, and I felt that, for all his drunkenness, he was as cunning as a wagon-load of monkeys and obviously the sort of man who grew rather more than less suspicious in his cups.

" Forgive me," he went on, " for asking unnecessary questions. But we live in strange times. The people are deeply moved, looking for signs and wonders, and easily

led astray. Already there have been false prophets, suffering delusions and claiming to fulfil the ancient prophecy. Therefore, we bring all those who lay claim to divine authority before the Holy Council, where all the necessary forms must be observed."

He paused and added :

"The Holy Council look for the prophecy to be fulfilled exactly. You come, it is true, from the West, and you wear the ring of Genghis Khan. Is there anything else?"

And then, as I paused before replying, he looked at me keenly and said :

"There are no women in your party, only two white men and certain servants. Where, then, is the bride from the West?"

I hesitated no longer, but made ready to answer as Réhmy had planned that I should do.

"Holiness," I said, "I have, it is true, a heavenly mission to perform, but my weapons and my means are of this world. There have been difficulties."

The fat round face of the Buddha remained as impassive as a wall, but I thought I detected in his eyes a gleam of satisfaction that I should thus acknowledge the superiority of the spiritual power.

"There have been difficulties," I continued, "and there was a time when I doubted of my worthiness to achieve this great design. Almost have we failed, though I now have a firm belief that ultimately we must succeed."

"Proceed," said his Holiness, complacently smoothing his robes. "With the help of God and his chosen servants there can be no doubt of our success. We will find a way to correct all errors and misgivings."

"I have to inform your Holiness," I continued, "that there are some in Europe who, despite all our precautions, have discovered and sought to anticipate our plans. But we have not been idle, and some of them have died. Two

of our enemies, however, the most cunning and most dangerous of them all, have escaped, though they cannot escape for long. In the end we shall slay them."

"They shall die and not quickly," said the Jassak, who was following everything I said with rapt attention.

"No fate," I continued, "could be too terrible for these impious men. For they have stolen the bride from the West."

I paused, and found that his Holiness was regarding me with a fixed, expressionless stare, making a striking contrast with the Jassak, who, with flashing eyes and something that sounded very like an oath, was grasping the hilt of his dagger.

There was dead silence for a moment, and then a voice of honey, which somehow made me infinitely more uneasy than any outbreak of surprise or anger, fell sweetly upon my ears.

"I await your explanation, my son," said the pontiff. "For it seems there is much here that should be more clearly understood."

I continued at a run, realising that what I had to say had better be said quickly.

"Two leaders of German race, together with a Spanish lord who is very rich, have left Spain in a fast boat bearing with them the stolen bride, with intent, we imagine, to land at Tien Tsin or some other Chinese port and thence come up from the south towards Mongolia. One of these men, we think, will claim to be himself the Deliverer, and he will so present himself to you together with the maiden who is destined for . . ." and here I paused for a moment, ". . . for Ayugumsik Khagan," I concluded.

I noticed that the effect of that final word, even before François had translated what I said, was remarkable. The Jassak fell hastily forward on his knees, and I saw

with satisfaction that even the complacency of the Living Buddha was troubled. There was silence between us for some moments. The Bogdo Khan raised his head.

“What is the purpose of these men?” he asked. “Are they men who aim at dominion or do they seek the ruin of our people?”

“We do not know,” I answered. “I am but a simple soldier entrusted with a mission which I must endeavour to fulfil. But I imagine these men fear for the safety of the shaken nations of Europe. There is one among them who is well acquainted with the land of Mongolia, knowing it to be a land of great prosperity and anciently a land of warriors. Europe is divided and weak. She will take many years to recover from the war by which she was so nearly destroyed. She dreads the unknown power of this land. These men desire to deceive us and to bring about our ruin.”

“One of them, you tell us, will pose as the Deliverer,” said the pontiff.

“That is my belief. But he is less dangerous than his fellow, being only an instrument in the other’s hand.”

“How shall this other one be known?”

“He is of German race—a wise man, skilled in science, but an infamous son of Shaitan. He wears a yellow silken beard,” I added somewhat inconsequently.

“And why were they suffered to escape? Those who are born to fulfil a prophecy should not be liable to err like other men.”

“They fled from us on a fast vessel, and, divining their purpose by means of a vision, sent for our better guidance, we have come even more swiftly by the northern route. Hence we find ourselves most fortunately arrived before them and able to warn your Holiness and to prepare the host.”

There was a long silence after this, while I gazed at the

Living Buddha, trying to apprehend what was passing behind the slitty eyes and that heavy face. There was no doubt that I had convinced the Jassak. He had listened breathlessly to my tale, and never doubted the truth of it for an instant. His fingers still grasped the hilt of the green dagger at his belt, and I am sure that if either the Professor or Mr. X had put in an appearance at that moment they would have fared ill at his hands. His Holiness, however, was a complete enigma. I could not get from his demeanour the slightest clue to his thoughts. His eyes were now fixed in a dull contemplative stare upon the table, and so he remained for some time, as though turning slowly over in his mind the story I had told.

The silence lengthened, and I grew more and more uneasy. At last, after what seemed hours, though it was, I suppose, in reality some two or three minutes, the Living Buddha stirred. He stretched out a fat hand across the low table, and I could feel the little François, still on his knees, quivering at my side.

"It is a pity," he said softly, his eyes resting upon me with a curiously sidelong and penetrating gaze, "that the maiden has not arrived."

He paused, and was about to speak again when somewhere behind us a gong sounded three musical notes. Bogdo Khan rose heavily to his feet. He came round to the front of the table, and as he passed the Jassak, laid hands, in a blessing, on his head. Moved by I know not what impulse, I fell forward on my knees, and a moment later I felt the fat moist fingers pressed lightly on my hair.

The pontiff said something as he passed.

"Big sacred lama say he want us to come with him to venerable Council," said François in my right ear.

I rose and followed. At the door Bogdo Khan waited for me to draw level with him, and we paced through it

together, afterwards crossing the courtyard and entering the big hall.

At the table, in front of the throne, were seated eight Huktuktus or lamas of the highest grade, who formed, as I afterwards discovered, the hierarchy of Mongolia, though their powers were by no means confined entirely to matters spiritual. They rose as we entered and bowed very low as the Living Buddha mounted the throne. A chair was placed for me on his right hand, and I sat down, François standing beside me.

The proceedings opened with a long whining prayer intoned by the pontiff, which François did not translate. Meanwhile, I took stock of the dignitaries to whom I had so hurriedly been presented. They all appeared to be very old, the majority being clean-shaven, though three of them wore thin grey beards. They were clad in long maroon-coloured robes and their heads were bare.

After the prayer Bogdo Khan rose and addressed them. He spoke for not more than five or six minutes, and apparently gave them a short version of my story. François interpreted in whispers as he spoke. After he had sat down one whom I took to be the leader of the Council rose and appeared to be asking me a question.

"He ask you to tell same story all over again," said François.

I rose and repeated the substance of what I had just related to Bogdo Khan. They heard me in perfect silence, looking more like a conclave of learned doctors called upon to hear and weigh some difficult piece of doctrine than a Council dealing with a severely practical issue; and, when I sat down, a slow discussion began, each speaker bowing low to the chair before starting his speech. I could not follow the proceedings very well, as François found it difficult to translate the discussion

while it was proceeding. I gathered, however, that there were two parties in the Council. One urged that I should be asked to take immediate action (whatever that might mean); the other thought that the Council should wait until it was proved that my conjecture as to the probably imminent arrival of our enemies with the expected bride was correct. So far as I could discover, nothing was said which pointed to any disbelief in my identity.

Presently Bogdo Khan adopted a suggestion put forward by one of the councillors to the effect that the witnesses should be examined. The reference to witnesses puzzled me till the door at the further end of the great chamber opened, and Gaston and Réhmy appeared, escorted by the Jassak, who had not remained in the room while I was being examined by the Council. They were taken straight up to the table, and questioned shortly and courteously enough. Fortunately, we had all gone through the story together, and agreed upon every detail, so that both of them were able to corroborate what I had said.

As soon as this cross-examination was finished, the Living Buddha suspended the meeting for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to allow the members of the Council to exchange their views more freely among themselves, and to find, if possible, a compromise between those who called for immediate action and those who counselled delay.

I took the opportunity to confer hurriedly with my two friends. They were eager to know what had happened to me, and I gave them a short account of my triumphal entry into Ta Kure and of my reception by His Holiness Bogdo Khan.

"We've got the Jassak and the soldiermen all right," I said. "And the Council have taken us almost on trust. But I wish I could be sure of His Holiness. There is a brain behind those little eyes of his. Drunk or sober,

he's not the man to be easily hoodwinked. Frankly I don't know whether he believes in us or not."

"I quite agree," said Gaston, "Bogdo is not by any means as simple as he looks. I had a good look at him while we were being questioned. He's got some little private joke of his own."

"My own opinion," said Réhmy, "is that at present he neither believes in us nor disbelieves. The important point is that he obviously thinks it wiser, after your reception by the crowd this morning, to accept you as the genuine article. The whole country is clamouring for the Deliverer, who has so far failed to appear. All things considered, he has decided to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Meanwhile," said Gaston, "it looks to me as though there would soon be hell to pay in the sacred city. It seems that so far the Russians, though deprived of all power, have been unmolested. But I don't like the look of things at all this morning. The crowd is getting out of hand, and I believe there is bad trouble already across the river. Soon after you left we heard shooting, and there was a machine-gun performing somewhere in the town. We ourselves had notice to quit almost as soon as you had crossed the bridge. The fellow who brought us over, a Russian-speaking Mongol, said we should be safer in the lama city during what he was pleased to describe as the 'Little Killing.'"

"They have a picturesque way of putting things," I observed.

Réhmy smiled grimly.

"The man," he said, "was most polite and considerate. He mounted us well, brought us here to the monastery and showed us round. It is an interesting place, especially the wireless station."

"A station," broke in Gaston, "capable of receiving

from London, though it could not, of course, transmit so far."

"That's bad," I observed. "Let us hope that Bogdo won't be listening in to the Professor."

"I thought of that," said Réhmy, "but remember that the Professor will have left the yacht by now, if our calculations are correct, and that he will be approaching Mongolia. I hardly think it likely he is at the moment in a position to send out any message. But the ice is very thin."

Further talk was interrupted by the reassembling of the Council, and I returned to my seat with the rest. The Living Buddha, who had remained upon his throne, apparently sunk in meditation, rose to address the Council, when the door at the end of the room opened abruptly and our friend the Jassak entered hurriedly and advanced to the table.

He bowed low, but his eyes were shining and his whole demeanour showed great excitement.

He said half a dozen short sharp sentences, which immediately caught and held the attention of the assembled Huktuktus.

"He say," said François in a low whisper, "that most holy honourable Council must take quick decision. People outside growing mighty loud and ask when sign be given for the Little Killing."

Bogdo Khan motioned the Jassak to stand aside, and himself addressed the councillors.

"Were they yet," he asked, "all of one mind? Perhaps Jelyb Huktuktu, who had advised delay, would answer on behalf of his colleagues."

The dignitary in question rose immediately.

"We are all of one mind, Holiness," he said. "Let there be no further delay. Let the Holy City of Ta Kure, the first town of Mongolia to be honoured by the presence

of him who is called upon to deliver the . . ." he hesitated a moment " . . . the nameless one, strike the first blow. Let us pray the Deliverer from the West to give to our people the sign for which they are waiting."

A murmur of assent went round the table. The Living Buddha stretched out his right hand towards me, and there was something disconcertingly ambiguous in the blank stare with which he regarded me.

"Will he who has been so long awaited," he said, "be pleased to show his will? The Holy Council has asked him for a sign."

Chapter XVII

I Display the Red Triangle

FORTUNATELY I had no time for reflection. For at that moment there came a confused murmur which swelled to a roar, and came pouring in through the great open window at the end of the hall. It sounded from where we stood at the other end of that huge room like the raging of an angry sea, but the sharp crack of rifle-shots, like the impact of hailstones on panes of glass, told me that it was an angry crowd.

The noise had a visible effect on the councillors and even on His Holiness himself, for with one accord they looked away from me and down the room to the window. At the same instant the Jassak was by my side. He said something rapidly to me, nudging François with his whip, obviously urging him to interpret quickly.

"Wild, untutored Jassak," said François to me rapidly, "say he feel sure Deliverer not wish to delay any more. He beg respectfully to remind Deliverer that no need for him to take part in forthcoming exhibition of low brutality of very disgusting hordes of untutored Mongols. Deliverer, of course, only to lead mighty host to great battles.

Deliverer need do no more than give sign. This is very good for all concerned and much trouble avoided."

At the same moment he thrust something into my hand and I gazed at it in doubt, while François whispered again.

"Wild and untutored Jassak ask you to show sign to the crowd from big window, and then all quite in order and can proceed with necessary work."

I looked at what I was holding. It was a rough triangle of wood composed of three long Mongol spears lashed together and roughly daubed with what looked like red paint. From each of the angles hung a pennon of red silk. Despite its size the whole contraption was light enough and I lifted it easily. Mechanically I raised it above my head, so that the red streamers fluttered a moment, and as I did so as one man the Council rose to its feet and the stools upon which they had been sitting crashed to the ground behind them. The eyes of all were upon me, eyes shining with fanaticism and gazing as though fascinated at the symbol I held. The only man in all that great hall who seemed unaffected was Bogdo Khan, who still sat motionless on his throne, looking at me in the cryptic way which made me so uneasy.

"You have got them now," said Réhmy. "They are stirred to their depths. Keep it up, Thomas. Our lives depend upon it."

I walked slowly down the great room, holding this strange sign above my head. In a few moments I had reached the window, perceiving with a start that I was quite alone. Réhmy, Gaston and François with the Jassak formed a little group in the centre of the hall; behind them stood the shaven Council in their long maroon-coloured robes with their blazing eyes.

I advanced to the window and, passing through, found myself on a tiny balcony. I looked down. Below me was the great square in front of the temple of the Living

Buddha, and it was packed to its utmost capacity with a shouting mob. It formed one mass of tossing heads and yelling mouths, flecked with the foam of spear-points gleaming in the noonday sun.

They saw me at once, and their savage shouts died on the instant, to be succeeded by a terrible silence. Hardly knowing what I did, I held out the blood-red triangle to the full extent of my arms and waved it once, twice, three times. The crimson streamers fluttered against the blue sky. Then from beneath my feet burst such a roar of human voices as I have never heard before or since.

After that one great roar of welcome, worship, praise, I know not what, there was silence and every head was bowed. Then pandemonium broke loose again, and in every direction the huge crowd began slowly to stream away through the narrow streets, making for the bridge over which I had come in triumph that morning.

Slowly I turned back into the hall. In an instant the Jassak was by my side. He bowed very low, his eyes were shining, and in his hand was the bluish glitter of a sword. With deep respect he preceded me back into the hall.

The Council was still erect, standing in a silent half-circle some paces away, while beyond on the throne the Living Buddha sat motionless, regarding me with that indescribable air of faint mockery.

The silence was broken again by the Jassak, and it was his words that gave me, I swear, the first inkling of what it was that I had done.

"Lord," he said (I forbear to give you the version of François), "your servants will do the rest. Be assured that the Little Killing, small though it be, will be a great cleansing which shall be the first of many."

"What have I done?" I said to Réhmy as I drew level with him in the great hall. "For God's sake tell me what it means?"

"You have done the only possible thing," replied Réhmy. "If you had hesitated, our lives, which are nothing, and our mission, which is everything, would alike have been forfeit."

"But the sign," I stammered, sick with a dawning apprehension. "What exactly is this Little Killing of which they are speaking?"

Réhmy looked at me like a man who is face to face with inevitable horrors.

"It was bound to come," he said. "It needed but a match to kindle the flame, and it was you who supplied it. You have done nothing except give them the sign for which they clamoured. You have shown them the red triangle of Genghis Khan, the token that a city is given over to destruction."

"God help the Russians who are in Urga to-day," he concluded.

My face must have shown what I felt, for Réhmy added hastily and sternly :

"Pull yourself together, Thomas. You must play your part to the end."

"I must be alone," I said. "I can't stand any more of this for the moment."

Réhmy nodded quickly and said a few words to François. François translated my request to the Jassak, who, on our behalf, informed His Holiness that the Deliverer asked permission to withdraw with his suite for rest and refreshment.

Bogdo Khan beckoned us forward to the throne, and addressed us briefly.

"Big sacred lama," François explained, "say he quite understand need for meditation and comforts. Advise good hearty prayer and excellent luncheon already prepared in most convenient room adjacent. Council meet again this afternoon, but presence of great Deliverer no

longer necessary. Deliverer to start soon on long journey."

I took leave of His Holiness, suffering myself to be blessed, though I could not help feeling that, reversing the story of Balaam, it was a blessing inverted.

Presently I found myself in a small bare room, seated at a low carved table of black wood, on which an ample, if somewhat rude, repast was spread. It may sound extraordinary, but I felt suddenly ravenously hungry, and I fell on the boiled mutton, wild onions, raisins and tea provided as though I had not eaten for a week.

As we ate we discussed plans, and though it may sound strange or callous, I found myself able and willing to do so. Indeed it did not take me very long to realise that Réhmy was right, and that the horrible scenes even now in progress in the town over the river for which my action had given the signal were as nothing to the horrors which we were trying to prevent.

"The position is far worse than I feared," said Réhmy. "There can be no limits to what these people may not do. The only doubt that remains is whether they are sufficiently well equipped."

"There is not much doubt of that," put in Gaston. "Almost all of those fellows have got modern rifles of sorts. Someone has made a pretty pile out of surplus war stock, or I'm much mistaken."

"Dupuis, by Jove," I exclaimed.

"Yes," said Réhmy. "Dupuis, in all probability, though he must have found it a pretty problem to get the stuff delivered."

"Easy enough," said Gaston. "Three-fourths of China are in open civil war, and the Chinese armies are being supplied by half a dozen nations, our own and yours included. Arms are pouring into the country from all quarters. Gun-running has never been more profitable.

Heaven alone knows what you would find if you searched the bales of the caravans from Afghanistan and Chinese Tartary or the holds of the tramp steamers from 'Frisco and Tokio, to say nothing of the European ports."

We talked for some time more, but reached no further conclusions. There was but one thing obvious. There was no turning back. I was the Deliverer now, reasonably safe until the Professor turned up, and all we could do was to float blindly with the stream.

After a time François, who had left us just before our meal, returned and announced that the preparations for the journey to which Bogdo Khan had alluded were complete. Of the nature of the journey and its destination he knew nothing, nor, he said, had he dared to inquire for fear of arousing suspicion. We were to start at cockcrow on the following morning.

We passed the rest of the day in that small room. We could hear but little of what was happening on the further side of the river, but ever and again there came the distant noise of shots and shrill cries and once a prolonged burst of what sounded like machine-gun fire.

"Mongols call that the Death Stammer," explained François. "They make pretty names for latest modern contrivance."

When darkness fell we had reason to appreciate the force of this last observation of François. We could hear more of what was happening over the river. The shots were more frequent, and we heard, every now and then, the thin scream of a stricken man and the shrill crying of women. Fires broke out in the city, especially in one quarter, which soon appeared to be wholly given over to the flames.

Towards midnight I was once more summoned to the presence of His Holiness Bogdo Khan. The interview was short. He handed to me a rolled parchment, sealed

with several yellow seals, which he asked me to convey to his much-loved brother Chultun Beyli, who, he told me, commanded in the place to which I was going.

This, of course, I promised to do, and once again I received his blessing.

"Be sure," said His Holiness in parting, "that you deliver my letter personally into the hands of His Highness Chultun Beyli."

We started at dawn, Réhmy, Gaston and myself on horses, our baggage with François accompanying us in a rough wooden Mongol cart without springs. The shafts of the cart were attached to a long pole held across the saddle-bows of two wild horsemen who galloped abreast, dragging the cart between them, in a perfectly straight line with us, heedless of the bumps and unevenness of the plain or the groans of the unhappy François. There was no road, and we galloped over the wide prairie, our faces set towards the south-west. The early morning sky was sullied with the smoke of the city which was still burning at a dozen different points, and as we moved at a foot pace through a ford of the Tola, just below the wooden bridge which I had crossed the day before, I saw with horror that the water was tinged a reddish brown as though it had flowed through the red earth of Devonshire or the rich soil of the Languedoc. Only I knew that its redness had another cause.

As we approached the further bank I saw a party of Mongols riding swiftly in a direction away to the left of us. They carried aloft what looked like household mops, and as they rode they resembled nothing so much as a mounted company of charwomen moving to the assault of some incredibly dirty city.

It was some little time before I realised that the mops were human heads.

Once more we had started on our travels. I will

forbear to describe them in detail. We travelled with extraordinary swiftness, covering as much as sixty and seventy miles a day, for I was travelling *urga* as the Mongols say, that is to say with the right to commandeer the horses of any chief I fell in with on the way.

We turned due west after we had passed the ruins of Karakoram, once the capital of Genghis Khan, and set our faces towards the Khangai mountains. The great Chagan Tala, or White Plain, stretched interminably before us and around us. My recollection is of long days in the saddle galloping (for Mongol horses never go at a slower pace) through the dust of a limitless country. The dust was so fine that the least breath of wind sufficed to lift it, and the sun shone through its finer particles in the upper air, blood-red even at noonday, with an odd eerie effect. Now and again a little whirlwind would raise the dust in a tall spiral, which seemed to hang from the empty sky and which moved slowly across the bare plain as though it were pulled along by an invisible hand. These whirlwinds were thought by the Mongols to be evil spirits or to be raised by them, I am not quite certain which, and they showed great uneasiness at their appearance. Birds, a kind of great eagle and the common English lark, were frequent, as also was a fleet-footed specimen of antelope, very good eating but difficult to shoot, and a small rat on which, incredible to relate, a lark would perch and ride as on a horse for hundreds of yards, feeding on the parasites in its fur.

The nights we spent either as the guests of some wandering family of Mongols, where I was received with the utmost honour by the head man, whose title and power varied according to the size of the "family" and his own wealth and importance, or else in tents of our own, but generally speaking the vast plain was bare of all inhabitants.

On the second day out from Urga the Jassak informed me with deep respect that it had been thought best that I should travel incognito. He could give me no reason, but said he had received express orders to this effect from the Living Buddha himself. Personally, I asked for nothing better, for the strain of maintaining a public position when you are nothing but a public impostor is considerable.

Passing by Zian Chabi we reached Uliassutai on the eleventh day of our journey, and it was here that we saw the first signs of the unbelievable sight which awaited us. Uliassutai is a straggling town built largely of adobe houses or wooden huts. Before the war it was exclusively Mongolian, but on the Bolshevik revolution it became a city of refuge for many White Russians, and the battles between these and their Red enemies were frequent and sanguinary.

When we reached it the town was packed to its utmost capacity and beyond. Hundreds and hundreds of horsemen, each on his little wiry pony, each armed with lance and carbine, were encamped on that one spot, to move on rapidly, as we found, at dawn towards the north, their places being taken by an ever-increasing multitude pouring in from all sides. Each horseman was self-sufficient and carried on his saddle food for a fortnight, consisting of a rough meal made of pounded millet and the inevitable bag of koumis.

The Jassak was reticent in his information, merely informing us that we had caught up the host at last, but that these were merely the stragglers. And, indeed, we found on leaving Uliassutai for Kobdo, that our road was never free from long lines of Mongol horsemen moving steadily through the dust ever westward to the shores of the Kara Nor. The steppe here was vaster than ever. All the armies of the world could have been concentrated upon

it and yet have been but specks on this interminable waste.

"We are on the track of the Mongol invasions," said Réhmy one day as we rode side by side. "It was here or hereabouts that Genghis Khan concentrated his savage hordes six hundred years ago."

Mingled now with the horsemen were long lines of camels of a breed smaller than the Egyptian camel but hardier, of the kind that crosses the great Gobi Desert to the south, carrying the merchandise of China to the Mongols of the north. They were all heavily laden, and at one place, where we stopped for a noon-day meal, I examined a convoy which had halted for the same purpose. A camel had fallen sick and its load was being broken up and distributed among the rest. Gaston examined it with interest and returned with a long face.

"Do you know what those camels are carrying?" he said. "Machine-guns and ammunition. They are the same type of light gun which was used by the Germans just before the Armistice."

I looked at the convoy, which numbered about two hundred beasts. It was but one of many. How many, I could not say, but I think that was the first moment when I realised to the full the vastness of the enterprise which we saw daily taking shape and form before our eyes. In fact so great an impression had been made on us by the countless hordes of savage horsemen and the lines of camel transport which we had seen, that I at any rate felt scarcely a flicker of surprise when I saw three aeroplanes flying low into the sunset one evening fifty miles or so west of Kobdo.

Gaston, as an airman, was much excited, and he recognised them immediately. Two of them, he informed me, were fairly modern *Breguet* machines, and the third was a German plane.

The next morning we passed the aerodrome, and I was astonished to see the extraordinary efficiency of everything. It appeared to be run by Chinese, and I saw no Europeans of any kind. Gaston said the appliances, though not of the latest type, were modern enough. Especially was he enthusiastic about a great Fokker machine capable of carrying a crew of six and several tons of bombs. It was, he said, a passenger-carrying plane of a commercial type, skilfully transformed into a war machine.

“This is more serious than I could ever have imagined,” said Réhmy that night as we sat over our fire at the entrance of our *yurta*.

“There is evidently an extraordinary organising genius somewhere.”

“Aeroplanes, modern machine-guns, modern carbines, all in the heart of Asia.”

“They’ve also got artillery,” said Gaston. “François, who has been foraging about, tells me he has seen several batteries of light field guns parked over there,” and he pointed into the dusk to our right. “Depend upon it, we are rapidly reaching headquarters now.”

“But how did they get here?” I said. “You can’t transport vast quantities of arms hundreds of miles into the middle of a howling wilderness.”

“I should have said so too,” answered Gaston. “But it is obvious, from what we see, that you can. After all, it’s not so difficult as it appears at first sight. Don’t forget that China has been for the last five or six years, and still remains, in a state of civil war. I know for a fact that Feng’s army, to mention but one of the belligerents, is armed with American, British and Canadian rifles, French aeroplanes and Italian artillery, and that his troops are drilled by ex-German non-commissioned officers. Those are facts which are well known and have even been reported

in the Press. Well, it is obvious that, once you have got munitions into China, it is by no means an impossible task to take them a little further north into Mongolia. We have got to face it, and it seems to be about as bad as it could be. Preparations on such a scale as this anywhere within striking distance of a European frontier would give the brass hats something to think about."

"We shall have something to think about ourselves before another day is out," said Réhmy. "François tells me that to-morrow we shall enter Kobdo. Thomas will then have to present his letter of introduction to His Highness Chultun Beyli Khan. I should like to know what exactly Bogdo has to say in that little roll of parchment. We can only hope and trust that His Holiness gives you a good character, my dear Thomas."

Our ride to Kobdo on the following day gave us further cause for reflection. The whole plain was covered with horsemen of all kinds, performing strange evolutions at lightning speed. At one place whole squadrons were being instructed in the use of the light machine-gun, and I watched with amazement and unwilling admiration the skill with which these hardy little Mongols handled their modern weapons. I remembered the name which François told us was given to these weapons by the Mongols: the Death Stammer.

It was early in the afternoon when we reached Kobdo, which we found to be a city situated at some little distance from the lake Ilka Aral Nor. The great chain of the Tangnou mountains now loomed close in front of us, their shoulders wrapped in mist and their heads gleaming with eternal snow. Kobdo, like Uliassutai, was a straggling town built of mud and wooden huts. The streets were narrow and dirty, and choked with every conceivable form of Asiatic transport. The town itself was not large,

but round it was a vast and ordered camp of *yurtas*, the blue and yellow pennons of the various chiefs flying in each division. Réhmy estimated that not less than two hundred and fifty thousand men must be assembled in that vast plain.

We found that our arrival was expected, for we were met on the outskirts of the great camp by three officials—grave young men in khalats embroidered with red and yellow. They were sent, so the Jassak informed us, by Beyli Khan, and they had to take us immediately to his presence. It puzzled me at first to know how he could have learned of our coming, till I saw the spidery masts of a wireless station on the outskirts of the camp and remembered what Réhmy had told me of a similar installation in the palace of the Living Buddha.

We moved on through the crowded streets at a foot pace till, turning off the main square round which the city was built, we reached a long low building, partly of wood and partly of mud, from the roof of which fluttered a great blue pennon or triangular strip of silk. Here we entered an anteroom filled with several chiefs of varying grades, all of whom eyed us, as I noted, with more curiosity than deference.

Then once again I found myself alone with François in the presence of a Mongolian chief.

His Highness Chultun Beyli Khan was very different from the drunken pontiff of Urga. He was tall for a Mongolian, about five feet ten, with a sharp, eager face and wide eyes. He was dressed for riding, and glanced keenly at me, flicking his legs as he did so with the short leather whip which all the Mongolians carry. His salutation, though polite, was short, and had a military precision about it. I returned his greeting formally, and without further ado presented the letter from Bogdo Khan. He broke the yellow seals and looked it over in

silence. I tried to read his face as he perused the letter, but it was as impassive as an Oriental could make it, and there was nothing to be gleaned from his expression, though I could have sworn there was a flicker of amusement in his eyes as he folded it up and thrust it into a fold of his tunic.

He then made a few polite inquiries regarding my journey, but abstained from any allusion to my mission, which struck me as curious, and even alarming.

Suddenly, with great abruptness, he signified that the interview was at an end, suggesting that I should take a meal and have some rest after the fatigues of my long and arduous journey. I replied that I was not unduly tired, and boldly suggested that I should be taken to inspect the host. I made this suggestion both in order to get from him some indication of my position and standing, which so far he had refused to give me, and because it was, of course, essential for us to find out as much as possible about the preparations which were being made.

He looked at me somewhat doubtfully.

"I have no objection to your doing so," he said at last, "but I would beg Your Excellency to remember that for the moment he is incognito, and I would warn him seriously that to break that incognito would be most unfortunate."

I assured him that I was entirely in his hands, and would accept his advice in the matter.

"You must realise," he went on, "that your arrival is not quite according to plan. The host could not fail to be discouraged if they discovered that the Deliverer had arrived without the bride who is so eagerly awaited by us all."

I bowed, and gave him the formal undertaking he desired.

We were served with a meal of tea and mutton, dried apricots and kishmish (small dried raisins), and I re-

counted to Réhmy and Gaston the substance of the interview which I have just described. Réhmy summed up our joint impressions.

"The fact is," he said, "we are for the moment on probation."

As soon as we had finished our meal, we started forth in the company of a silent chieftain with four mounted men and our own friend the Jassak Rodo on the tour of inspection which I had suggested.

We had been rather surprised that the fact that we were Europeans seemed to have excited no comment on the part of the people we had so far encountered, but now we saw the reason. There were Europeans in several of the camps we visited that afternoon. I noticed several who looked like Germans, and one I thought to be an Italian. They were training the Mongol troops, and I saw various evolutions performed, some of them on the lines of modern cavalry work.

I strictly fulfilled my promise to preserve my incognito, and we none of us spoke to any of the European instructors, but received all our information through François from the Jassak. I doubt whether it would have been possible to make any independent inquiries even if we had tried to do so. Our conductors kept to us very closely, and I noted with surprise that among the most vigilant of them all was our friend the Jassak. I could not help thinking that in keeping us so strictly under supervision he was obeying instructions which he had received since our arrival in Kobdo.

I will not weary you with a description of that long afternoon, though I would refer in passing to a strange pastime, which I will describe as rigger on horseback for want of a better term, which we saw played in the evening by a company of about fifty Mongols. Two teams of mounted horsemen faced each other on the open

plain. A man rode out from one of them and halted midway between them. He was holding something in his arms, which he presently raised above his head, and I saw with amazement that it was a full-grown sheep, alive and kicking. At a given signal he galloped straight as a dart towards the opposing team, which was drawn up to defend a primitive kind of goal. The object of the rider was apparently to carry or hurl the sheep through the goal, his comrades assisting, and the other side doing their utmost to prevent it. The man with the sheep, beset by his opponents, hurled it to one of his companions and a wild contest ensued, giving astonishing opportunities for the display of crack horsemanship and bodily strength, the unhappy sheep being tossed about between rider and rider much as a Rugby football is handled by a line of three-quarters. It was at once an exhilarating and brutal sight, and it gave us an interesting sidelight into the minds and habits of these strange people.

But we had little leisure to reflect upon any of the strange sights and astonishing preparations which we saw on that first evening of our arrival at Kobdo. For everything we saw was obliterated by the event which befell us on our return to the city.

It was already dusk, and the main approach to the town was packed with people lining the road. We assumed that there was to be some procession of troops, or perhaps the passage of a popular leader or chieftain. Progress soon became quite impossible, except along a free lane down the centre of the highway between thick ranks of soldiers of every kind. Suddenly behind us was a great tumult, and, turning, we saw two figures, whom I took to be heralds or equerries, galloping down the lane and scattering all the loiterers to right and left. The Jassak drew us hastily to one side, and we found ourselves helplessly jammed in the waiting crowd.

We did not wait for long, however; for suddenly we became aware of intense excitement. Shouts and cries began to come down the road along which we had ridden. Then everyone near us began to crane forward, and at that moment we beheld a single horseman riding up the living line.

One glance at the horseman was enough.

It was Mr. X.

The real Deliverer had come, and there was no doubt as to his welcome. Nor was there any doubt that he looked every inch the man I had tried to impersonate. He was riding superbly on a chestnut stallion, and was in full Mongol dress. On his breast was the sign of the swastika, and a great light was in the clear grey eyes which I so well remembered. He had let his beard grow, which was of a deep brown flecked with grey. He turned his head occasionally from left to right as he rode, but that was his only gesture, for he received the deafening acclamations of the crowd as rightfully due to him.

"Tonilgakchi, Tonilgakchi," shouted the multitude, just as their fellows had shouted when I had ridden over the wooden bridge into Ta Kure. But his entry was far more effective than mine had been. For, with a catch of the breath, I suddenly perceived that he bore with him, lying across the bow of his saddle, rising and falling mechanically with the movement of the horse, the figure of a girl dressed in brilliant orange and violet. And, as they passed, I caught a glimpse of her face.

It was Suzanne de Polhac.

The face was very white and the eyes were closed, but there was no doubt of her identity.

Suzanne de Polhac was passing before us to her high destiny. The Deliverer had arrived, and he brought with him the Bride from the West.

I was aware of a movement beside me, and, turning, I

saw Gaston, with his hand on the butt of his pistol. I believe there and then he would have shot Mr. X, and thus brought destruction on us all, had not Réhmy caught him almost savagely by the arm. In a moment, however, the Deliverer had swept past. He was followed by two litters, which were surrounded by a guard of horsemen, the curtains of yellow silk being tightly drawn so that nothing could be seen of their occupants. Then the whole cavalcade turned a corner of the street and was lost to sight. The crowd broke up behind it, and we found ourselves firmly wedged in the seething mass, still, as I noted, closely accompanied by our escort.

I turned to Réhmy.

"What are we to do now?" I asked.

"We have no choice in the matter," said Réhmy. "We must go through with our original plan. We must return at once to Beyli Khan and denounce the impostor. There will presumably be some kind of investigation, and we shall at least gain a little time. For the moment escape is quite impossible."

And, to give point to his remarks, he indicated the Jassak and the attendant chief who had taken us round the camp. They were watching our every movement, and were obviously ready to act upon the first sign of any attempt at evasion.

We assented to Réhmy's suggestion, and he turned at once to François, who sat his horse beside us, white and trembling.

"Tell His Excellency, the Jassak," said Réhmy, "that we demand to be taken at once to the presence of His Highness Beyli Khan."

François, in a voice that quavered with fear, interpreted our request, to which the Jassak, with a face devoid of all expression, at once assented.

We passed through the streets, eyed curiously, though

as far as I could see without hostility, by the crowds of soldiery, until we reached a small house in a narrow street remote from the busier thoroughfares. There we were ushered into a small room, and asked to wait while the Jassak went for instructions.

He was not absent for more than a few minutes, and all this time we were closely watched by our escort.

The Jassak, when he returned, addressed a few words to François.

“His Excellency Mighty Jassak,” quavered François, “say you three follow him at once to headquarters; me stay here.”

We followed the Jassak into the street outside, where we found two lines of dismounted guards standing motionless, their hands on their long lances, and on a signal from our guide we walked between them for about fifty yards, the guards eyeing us indifferently as we passed along.

The double line of guards ended in the door of a great *yurta*, larger than most I had seen, which had been set up in the square in front of the house in which Chultun Beyli Khan resided.

The Jassak drew aside the felt curtain, but he did not enter. We passed alone, one by one, into the *yurta*, Gaston going first, followed by Réhmy, myself coming last of all. Just as I was making to enter I heard within the tent a cry from Gaston, and the sound of a scuffle. Instinctively I dashed forward, but no sooner had I crossed the threshold than I found myself helplessly in the grip of two wiry little men, and looking round saw Gaston and Réhmy, to the right and left of me, similarly held. Thongs were passed rapidly round our arms, and in a moment we were standing helplessly side by side.

There came a harsh order from the Jassak, who stood in the doorway, and the men who had assaulted us immediately withdrew. The tent-flap fell behind us, and

we found ourselves quite alone, gazing at one another in mute astonishment.

The great tent appeared to be empty, but it was very dimly lit by two oil lamps, and we did not immediately get our bearings very clearly. Then suddenly, in the gloom, I perceived an old woman standing at the further end of it, her back towards us. She was dressed in a kind of brown tunic stretching to the ankles, and on her head was the great white turban worn by Mongol women, with lappets which fall below the shoulders, and pass under the chin, rather like the dress of a nun.

The old woman appeared to be making her toilet. Slowly she unwound the enveloping headdress, while we watched her with curious eyes.

It disclosed a head, the hair of which was thin and of the colour of light gold mingled with grey.

She turned to us as she removed the last of her wrappings, and we saw that on the chin was a yellow silky beard.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Professor Kreutzemark.

Chapter XVIII

I Meet the Lord of Fear

"THIS is an expected pleasure," said the Professor, and he motioned us to three stools placed in evident readiness for our reception.

Despite his womanish attire, he looked more dignified than I had ever seen him. His long dust-coloured robe had something of the high priest about it, so that he looked like the celebrant of some blasphemous mysteries, or sinister parody of a priest. He was evidently in the highest spirits, and I, for one, was determined to submit in silence to the inevitable rigmarole which he was bound to deliver.

“So you have read the riddle aright,” he began, “and I hope you will allow me to compliment you on the achievement.”

He paused and smiled with courteous malice.

“It seems always to be my fate,” he continued, “to open our little interviews with an explanation of how we come to meet, and I feel that in this particular instance to omit such a formality would be tantalising for you and unfair to myself.

“I first heard of your activities, my dear Captain Réhmy, on my arrival at the port of Tien Tsin, when I was informed that you were due to start for a long journey across Europe by the Trans-Siberian Railway, accompanied by your two friends and an interpreter. It was not difficult to divine your object or your destination. I accordingly issued orders that you and your party were to be watched, but not molested. I was starting myself for Kobdo, and it was some little time before I got further news of you. It was at Keber on Lake Chagan that I first heard of the very natural mistake of that simple warrior, the Jassak Rodo. I own that for the moment I was disturbed, especially as His Holiness Bogdo Khan, as you probably observed, practises the doctrines of Omar, and is an implicit believer in the glimpses of heaven within the tavern caught. I was the more perturbed as the wireless instruments which I carried, while enabling me to receive news, were not sufficiently powerful to allow me to transmit instructions, and I consequently followed your extremely picturesque impersonation of the Deliverer, Captain Preston, with interest not unmixed with anxiety.”

I felt my anger rising, but stuck to my resolution to say nothing. I knew from bitter experience that any comments I might make would only serve to encourage the Professor.

“Fortunately for our plans,” he continued, “His

Holiness Bogdo Khan, despite, or possibly as a result of, his libations, is not a person to be easily deceived, and he was, of course, suspicious from the very first. It was true, Mr. Preston, that you wore a very passable imitation of the ring of Genghis, but you did not speak Mongolian, and, what was even stranger, you had seen fit to arrive without, as the legend so quaintly puts it, 'the fair damsel that shall be wife unto Deimanax.' Your explanation of this deplorable omission, though ingenious, was, I am afraid, a little unconvincing. His Holiness, however, realising the value of your presence and the effect that it would have in exciting the ardour of the Mongolian inhabitants of that part of the world, wisely determined to leave the task of finally deciding as to your credentials to his colleague, Chultun Beyli Khan. He accordingly sent him a letter, which you were good enough to carry, explaining his suspicions and recommending prudence. And it is upon that letter that Beyli Khan has acted in sending you to me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Professor," said Réhmy, and his head went back. "I must congratulate you, not indeed for the first time, and in the circumstances I am not surprised that you should feel yourself justified in airing your vanity at our expense."

"A little weakness of mine," smiled the Professor, "which, I fear, you have had reason to deplore on more than one occasion, but as this is, perhaps, our final interview, I hope you will allow me to indulge it once again."

The Professor was silent for some little time, gazing at each of us in turn.

"You *thréé*," he began abruptly, "have always stood in my path. Curiously enough, however, I no longer bear you any very serious ill-will on account of the past. During the long journey between Cadiz and this outland-

ish city my feelings towards you have undergone a certain modification. Your presence here shows a tenacity of purpose and a faculty of reasoning which compel my admiration, and the scheme on which I am now embarked is so immeasurably vast that it leaves me no room for private animosities. My attitude towards you will henceforth depend entirely on the extent to which you are likely to hamper or to endanger my great design. I am no longer subject to the ordinary human passions. I have come to regard myself as a dedicated instrument.

“No, Mr. Preston,” he said, turning suddenly to me as though he read my thoughts, “I am not mad—any more than Alexander or Napoleon was mad. You already know something of my plans. It is my intention to fulfil literally and exactly the legend which you discovered in that engaging compilation of the pious Vincent of Beauvais. I have not sought this mission. It has been thrust upon me. It is, in fact, my peculiar destiny, to which I have been led almost without any conscious will of my own.

“Two years ago, just after my escape from Hanover, I had the good fortune to meet a man of the highest attainments, a man who is destined to make a considerable mark on the history of the world.”

“You mean Mr. X,” I broke in, unable to keep silent any longer.

“Mr. X, as we have hitherto agreed to call him, or Konrad von Hefflebach, to give him his real name.”

Réhmy leaned forward.

“Not the man who was on the German General Staff in 1918?” he said.

“That was the man,” said the Professor. “His great gifts were throughout the war devoted to the service of his country. He was, in fact, our leading expert, behind the scenes, on all Far Eastern questions. All his life has been spent in the East, and particularly in this strange

and wonderful land of Mongolia. Something simple and primitive, something almost childlike, in the habits and outlook of these nomad shepherds, appealed to him, and his understanding of their ways gave him a great ascendancy over them in the absence of any national leader of their own. He learned their language and rose rapidly to a position which few men have ever occupied in a foreign country. For some years he was, indeed, the uncrowned king of Mongolia, and his name became almost a legend from the shepherd huts of the Altai mountains to the fishermen of Koko Nor. It was this man, my dear Captain Preston, that you had the temerity to impersonate, and I am sure that you cannot be surprised at your failure. Indeed, the only wonder is that you could have been successful so long. Had you chosen any other part of the frontier for your entry except at Ta Kure, I fear you would have all been immediately assassinated, but, as I have already explained, fortune led you to the one spot where your presence was at any rate of temporary use to us, and where, as it happened, von Hefflebach was not personally known. But this is a digression.

“After the war von Hefflebach returned to Mongolia, but he found that conditions had changed. The Bolsheviks were endeavouring to get control in Urga, in Uliassutai and along the northern frontier, and were hoping to inherit the influence formerly enjoyed by the Chinese over the whole of the country. Fighting was going on everywhere between the Red and White Russians who had taken refuge in Mongolia. You are, of course, familiar with the amazing career of the madman Baron Ungern von Sternberg, who took advantage of the prevailing anarchy to make himself supreme in Outer Mongolia. He it was who first began to rouse the Mongols to a sense of their ancient glories, and to remind them of the time before the Chinese had undermined their military

spirit and before the Russians had encroached upon them from the north. For a time, even, some saw in him the expected Deliverer. Baron Ungern failed, however, as is recorded in your newspapers and year-books. Indeed, I regret to say that the Soviet authorities buried him alive. But he had started a movement the importance of which was never realised by the wooden-headed officials of Europe. He had dreamed of a Mongolian Empire as great as that which stretched under Genghis from the Yellow Sea to the gates of Vienna. He had not the wit or the stability to accomplish his mission, but his place, gentlemen, was taken by Baron Konrad von Hefflebach, who, two years ago, after a secret interview with all the more important chieftains of Mongolia, came back to Europe and got into touch with me.

“For two years we have worked together indefatigably. *Si monumentum quaeris . . .* the result you see all around you—this great host, these armies of men, all equipped with modern weapons, the lineal descendants of the hordes of Tamerlane who lived by war and conquered half the world.”

He ceased and for a moment there was silence. He had seemed, as his tale proceeded, to become almost unaware of our presence. He was looking now, not at us, but at some monstrous vision of conquest and power. This was no longer the Professor who had delighted to mock his adversaries in gentle periods, for he had now a purpose and an ideal which transformed him. We all felt the change, even Gaston, who since his scuffle with the Mongol guards had sat, white and dazed, staring before him, as I knew, at that remembered picture of Suzanne, carried across the saddle-bow. Réhmy looked like a man whose worst anticipations were being inexorably fulfilled. I myself, less quick to be convinced than they, was the only one of us who still was inclined to be sceptical. A

dozen questions rose to my lips, and I forgot in my eagerness that I had resolved to remain obstinately silent.

"But how did you collect your army?" I asked. "Where did you get these aeroplanes, this artillery, these machine-guns? And who on earth is going to pay the bill?"

The Professor started from his dreams, and smiled as he answered. His tone changed, and he returned to his more normal manner.

"It has taken us two years, Mr. Preston, and I think you will agree that the result is not so bad. Most of it we owe to the very opportune unrest in China. Every armament firm in Europe has been snatching at contracts to supply her warring generals. What was easier than to take advantage of this state of affairs?"

"But the money," I objected. "You cannot equip a modern army for nothing."

"There was no difficulty about money," he said with a dry smile. "You are forgetting, perhaps, that little affair of the Seven Sleepers. My plans on that occasion were financed by the seven richest men in Germany. For two years the French and British Governments have tried to lay their hands on those secret funds—naturally without success, since I alone knew where and in what form they were deposited. I think your tour of inspection this afternoon will have shown you that we have known how to draw on them to good purpose. Have I said enough?"

I do not know what the others were thinking, but I know I tried to take it all in, to grasp this new project of the Professor in the cold light of reason. I could no longer dismiss it as the dream of a megalomaniac, for I had now the evidence of my own eyes. I had seen the hordes of soldiery. I had been myself acclaimed by twice ten thousand men. I had heard them at their

butcher's work in Urga and had watched them practising with the most modern weapons. And all around us we could hear the murmur of a mighty host.

"And why have you told us all this?" burst out Réhmy.

The Professor did not answer at once. He looked at us in turn with an odd, but curiously serene expression in his eyes.

"You defeated me once, Captain Réhmy. Is it not natural that I should wish you to realise the full extent of this infinitely greater achievement? You should be the last to grudge me a triumph which levels the score between us."

"There is one small detail which you have so far omitted to mention," Réhmy said.

"Indeed," said the Professor. "And what is that, may I ask?"

"What exactly," Réhmy inquired, "do you intend to do with us?"

The Professor looked at us for a moment.

"That," he said, "necessarily depends on your present attitude towards myself. I have said enough to convince you that I have lost whatever feelings I may once have had of revenge and personal animosity. You have shown yourselves to be brave and tenacious. One of you at least is not lacking in intelligence. In fact, if it were at all possible for us at this eleventh hour to adjust our difference, I should be personally glad to welcome your collaboration."

We could none of us believe our ears, and I found myself looking at the man as though he had taken leave of his senses. Gaston, usually so prompt to take offence, seemed utterly bewildered, and only Réhmy was sufficiently collected to reply.

"Professor Kreuzemark," he said, "this is an affront

which seems hardly in keeping with the compliments which you were so kind as to address to us only a moment ago."

The Professor looked at us, and I could swear that when he spoke it was with genuine regret.

"You will forgive me, gentlemen," he said, "but I suppose it was foolish of me to attribute even to you that detachment from the commonplace virtues which is essential to any real greatness of mind. My offer was a compliment higher than any you are ever likely to receive. I was assuming that it might conceivably be possible for you to rise above a slavish loyalty to certain fixed ideas. You might be of inestimable service in this great enterprise . . ."

"Let us at least know in what capacity," interrupted Réhmy. "I for one should like to understand how such very insignificant persons as ourselves could ever help you to change the course of human history."

"You know the fable of the lion and the mouse," answered the Professor. "You have probably noticed that there are some Europeans in this army of mine, but I have with me now only a very few men who are capable of assuming responsibilities on a large scale, especially as M. Dupuis and the Marquis del Puente are needed in Europe, to which they have already returned. You, Captain Réhmy, have the necessary intelligence. You would be a valuable asset on our General Staff. You, M. de Blanchegarde, are, I believe, a flying officer of some distinction, and to you would be allotted the control of our air forces which, I assure you, are not inconsiderable. Your gifts, Mr. Preston, are not those of a specialist, but I have an almost superstitious regard for your unfailing ability to be on the right spot at the convenient moment, and I am sure that we should be able to turn even your most brilliant blunders to good account."

"You propose, then," said Réhmy, "that we should

assist you to fulfil the Mongolian legend recorded by Friar de Plano Carpini? "

"With the object of destroying the nations of Europe," I interrupted.

"The nations of Europe are destroying Europe for themselves," said the Professor, who in his fantastic robes and the sombre light in his eyes looked like some strange prophet of the Apocalypse. "I shall do no more than disencumber the ground of her ruined institutions in order to build her fortunes anew."

I had till then thought of the Professor as a clever criminal—admittedly with strange powers and an unusual mind, but belonging to the underworld, morally an outcast, a man who might trouble the existing social order, but who could never be seen in the light of a great historic figure. But now, as he spoke with calm assurance of his vast plans, I began to be persuaded that they were not only feasible, but were part of an inevitable process, ordained, perhaps, to be the next chapter in the immemorial feud between East and West. I knew suddenly that this man was big enough to be a modern Attila.

"I shall strike through Russia first," he said, "following the track of Genghis and of Tamerlane. The wandering tribes of the Kirghis Steppes, the Great, Middle and Little Hordes will rise and join us as we pass. The great host will cover thirty miles a day. Between us and the confines of Europe stretch endless plains and steppes covered with herds of game and cattle, and we shall find ample provision for our needs on the way. We shall live, like the armies of Napoleon, on the countries through which we march. Russia will either join us as, equally with her, the enemies of the old order, or she will become an open conquest. Then all the little pasteboard states of Eastern and Middle Europe will go down. Are Roumania or Czecho-Slovakia or Poland likely to prove effective barriers

to men who still know how to fight as their ancestors fought six centuries ago? ”

He spoke as one inspired of the ancient race who were to be the instruments of his great design, dwelling on their contempt for death and worldly goods, on their hardihood and skill in war, on their endurance and extreme frugality. Passages of his discourse reminded me of Henley's "Song of the Sword."

The sword singing—

The song of the sword from the heart of the sword
Forth from Time's battlements,
His old and magnificent song.

"The old and outworn," he said, "must give place to the new. I have at my command a force which none since Timor has possessed. This savage race is ruled through its mind and its imagination. That old legend which you affect to despise is to every Mongol spearman a living and tremendous truth. They are waiting for a sign, and a sign shall be given to them. They are looking for the Lord of Fear, the god that shall come up out of the earth and lead them to endless and enduring victory. And they shall not look for him in vain."

He paused a moment and looked at each of us in turn.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "you have shown a certain amount of interest in my plans. Am I to assume from this that you will at least consider whether it may not be possible for you to join us? "

It was Réhmy again who spoke for us, and he did not need to look to us for confirmation of what he said.

"I will answer you at once, Professor Kreuzemark. Everything you have said merely confirms me in my original opinion. I regard you as a dangerous lunatic—so dangerous, in fact, that if ever I had the opportunity I would shoot you with as little compunction as you will doubtless dispose of me."

The Professor gave a sad little shake of the head, and I saw that nothing we could say could ever disturb his equanimity.

"Do you all agree in substance with Captain Réhmy?" he asked.

"Captain Réhmy speaks for me," I answered.

"For God's sake," Gaston broke out, "why are we sitting here? I'd rather be the sheep we saw this afternoon tossed about among the Mongol warriors, than listen to this man as though we were at a tea-party."

"A dangerous suggestion," said the Professor, "which I hope will not be reported to the warriors themselves. They might possibly act upon it."

He reflected for a moment.

"I have assured you," he said, "that I personally bear you no further malice. Unfortunately, however, your fate does not rest with me. Had you been willing to join us, our General Staff would have found some means of saving you. As it is, you must remain, I am afraid, the prisoners of the host, and with the best will in the world it will be difficult to find any good reason why you should be spared, for Mr. Preston's impersonation of the Deliverer was a somewhat striking misdemeanour. I cannot very well intervene on your behalf, as I am for the moment incognito, and all arrangements are necessarily in the hands of Mr. X."

He paused for a moment. Then suddenly he raised his head and an odd rapt expression came into his eyes. It almost seemed as though he had again forgotten us.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must now take leave of you. I have to prepare myself for an important ceremony in which I am destined to be the principal figure. You will already have divined in what capacity."

And, as we all three looked at him in horrified amazement, he added in a voice that rang :

“The Lord of Fear will come forth. I am this Lord of Fear.”

Chapter XIX

I Fall from my High Estate

THE effect upon us of this announcement was not less startling because it was an expected conclusion. We had all of us already guessed what part the Professor would play in the great *dénouement*, but the fact that we had guessed it did not blunt the sensation of hearing it admitted and proclaimed.

We had no time, however, to dwell upon the significance of what we had heard, for there was a sound of horsemen just outside the tent, and a moment later the flap was lifted. I heard from where Gaston was sitting a quick intake of the breath and a voice that broke:

“Suzanne,” it called.

It was Suzanne de Polhac who had entered, outlandishly beautiful in her Mongolian dress.

“You here!” she exclaimed. And for an instant they looked at one another.

Quick as thought, however, she looked away from him and towards the Professor, who was watching them intently.

“Tell me,” she said, “what does this mean?”

“It means,” he replied, “that M. de Blanchegarde and his friends are rather more enterprising than we gave them credit for. Of their own free will and quite unaided they have followed us here, and they are now, owing to their rashness, the prisoners of the Mongol host.”

She turned, not, as I observed, to Gaston, but to Réhmy for confirmation.

“Is this true?” she asked. “Did you come here of your own free will, or was it in any way under compulsion?”

"We came here," said Réhmy, "to discover the plans of Professor Kreuzemark."

She was silent a moment, her face giving no clue to her thoughts. Then she turned again to the Professor.

"Forgive me," she said, "if for a moment I doubted you. It is so incredible that they should have come to this place, which is half the world away from where you set them free, that, for a moment, I thought . . ."

She hesitated, and the Professor completed for her the sentence in which she had paused.

"You thought that I had re-captured and brought them here myself."

"They are your enemies," she said. "And possibly they are dangerous. It is only natural for you to take precautions."

"You wrong me," he protested with an odd gentleness and a sincerity which I could swear was not assumed. "I set these men free at your request. That was a gift from me to you, and I do not wish to take it back. I was, indeed, assuring Captain Réhmy and his friends only a moment ago that I have no desire whatever to continue the feud between us. I set your friends at liberty in good faith. It is not my fault if they have again put themselves in a position of serious danger."

"That is a lie," said Gaston. "You set us free because you knew that in another moment the police would have spared you the necessity. Your sacrifice, Suzanne, was all in vain; it was wrung from you by an infamous trick. You are in no way bound to this man. We did not accept your sacrifice. Never for a moment have we accepted it."

She looked him full in the face as she answered.

"Gaston," she said, and her eyes were stern and hard, "I asked you once before to accept my decision. You have disregarded my wishes, with the result that you

are now in a completely false position. Professor Kreutzemark is no longer under any obligation to intervene on your behalf. I am sure, however, that he desires to keep his promise to me in the spirit as in the letter, and that he will do his utmost to save you from the consequences of your folly."

"You believe *that*?" said Gaston pitiaibly. He was like a man stunned, staring at Suzanne as though he could not believe in this strange relentless creature.

"I believe that he will keep faith with me to the end," she answered.

"Do you yet realise what that end is to be?" asked Réhmy.

"I know everything," she answered. Her voice was clear and firm, but she was very pale. "Have I not just been carried through the Mongol host by the Deliverer?" she continued, looking straight in front of her with a strange smile on her lips. "Professor Kreutzemark once referred in your presence to my high destiny. I know now what that destiny is to be."

"I cannot believe it," said Gaston. "You cannot possibly help this man. You do not realise what it means."

She looked at the Professor with a queer expression, in which there was certainly admiration with a hint of something else which I could not fathom.

"I realise better than anyone else what it means," she answered. "I have had more occasion than any of you to understand and to appreciate my opportunity."

And crossing the tent she laid a hand on the Professor's shoulder, as though declaring once for all her true allegiance.

The Professor touched the hand that rested on him, and she smiled upon him as at a friend and ally. Gaston took a step forward, his face dark with anger, but miserably helpless with his bound arms.

But the Professor had no further eyes for any of us. He was looking at Suzanne with a strange eagerness.

"In a few days—on the fifth night from now," he said in a low voice, at the moment of the eclipse, "it will be accomplished."

"On a night when the moon shall be darkened," Réhmy whispered.

"Till then," continued the Professor, "I must remain in this tent hidden away and in disguise. Afterwards . . ."

He paused, and breathlessly I watched the girl, who was gazing at him like a creature fascinated and overcome.

"Afterwards," he went on, "I shall be a person in whom millions of people believe and to whom millions turn for hope and salvation. I shall be the King of Terrors, Lord of Fear, and I shall fulfil the prophecy."

He sprang eagerly to his feet, and stretched out his hand towards her, but she turned with a flutter of strange garments, and passed quickly from the tent.

Gaston, bound as he was, made blindly to follow her. The act was instinctive, and I do not think he knew at all clearly what he was doing. Before, however, he had taken more than a step, the flap of the tent was again lifted and a figure stood in the entrance.

It was Mr. X, or rather Baron Konrad von Hefflebach as I suppose I must now call him. He stood silent for a moment in the doorway of the *yurta*.

"Well, Professor," he asked, "have you finished with these gentlemen?"

"They decline to be associated with us in any way," said the Professor.

Von Hefflebach turned to me.

"Permit me to assure you," he said, with a slight bow, "that this is no more than I expected."

He turned again to the Professor.

“What do you propose to do with them?” he asked.

“They are under your protection, Baron,” said the Professor. “They are the prisoners of the host, and for the host I do not yet exist. If you can produce them to me later when I am in a position to speak with authority, I should be grateful. They are now quite harmless, and I am still sufficiently human to hope that they may witness the success of the project which they have sought to ruin. Mr. Preston might even like to chronicle these somewhat striking events.”

And without another word or look in our direction, the Professor turned and disappeared behind a crimson silk curtain on the far side of the tent.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Mr. X, turning to us with a wintry smile, “it seems that I am made responsible for your well-being. I think the best I can do in the circumstances is to put you safely under lock and key.”

“One moment,” said Réhmy.

Von Hefflebach jerked his head.

“You are, I understand, the Baron Konrad von Hefflebach who served on the German General Staff during the war?”

“That is so.”

“You will pardon my curiosity,” said Réhmy. “But it would be some small consolation to me, as the loser in this somewhat remarkable game, to know why a German soldier of repute should have embarked on an enterprise which will result in the destruction of his own among the other countries of Europe.”

Von Hefflebach looked at Réhmy with his steel blue eyes.

“Some day,” he said, “we may be able to talk of this, though personally I should not have thought it strange that a man who worked for imperial Germany should have small regard for the republican ally of Russia. Another time, gentlemen. For the moment you must

excuse me," and with a curt bow he left the tent, giving an order in Mongolian to the guards outside as he went.

We were immediately led forth.

Dusk had fallen and the air was chill. Our guards had evidently been told to separate us, for Gaston and I were taken off in one direction and Réhmy in another. After about ten minutes' walk through some twisting lanes, we—that is, Gaston and myself—eventually stopped before a small wooden house with a rudely carved doorway. It was thrown open, and we were thrust into an empty and very dirty room. The door was locked and we were left to our own devices.

We spent the next few hours miserably enough. Gaston, indeed, was in a pitiable state of mind. He had now to face the fact that Suzanne had fallen irretrievably under the influence of the Professor, and as I watched him where he sat huddled in his corner of the room, his eyes full of silent misery, I pitied him more than I can find words to describe.

I tried hard to find excuses for the girl who had so cruelly abandoned us. I reflected that she had spent long weeks constantly in the company of the Professor, during which time he had doubtless exercised to the full his peculiar charm. Or perhaps she had not even consciously given way to him. It might be that he had deliberately concentrated upon her that strange, magnetic power which he knew how to use with such effect. I could only guess. These and similar thoughts went round and about in my tired brain, till my head began to nod, and, despite the discomfort of my position and the numbness of my arms, I fell into a troubled doze.

I awoke with a start, feeling a hand on my shoulder. "Quiet," whispered a voice in my ear.

I was in deep gloom, though the moon shone through an uncurtained window, lighting the room in patches.

But I could hear the soft breathing of someone close beside me, apparently kneeling on the dirty floor.

"It is I," came the voice, "Suzanne de Polhac."

I felt her hands as they crept about my wrists, and then, presently, I heard her voice again.

"You are free now," it said, "and I found that my arms were no longer bound, but so numb that I had not even felt her cut the thongs.

"How did you get here?" I whispered.

She did not answer my question, but said even more urgently than before:

"Tell me now, where is Gaston?"

"I am here," said Gaston's voice from the other side of the room. "Who is that?"

"It is I, Suzanne," she answered with a catch in her voice, and she went towards him, and I could see her plainly as she crossed the patch of moonlight on the floor.

"Quick, Gaston," I heard her say as she reached him. "Turn round and I will have you free in a moment. There is not much time to lose."

But Gaston did not move.

"Why have you come?" he muttered, more to himself than to her.

Then I heard her soothing him in tones that revealed to me that she was indeed with us, heart and soul, and that her recent scene with the Professor had been a masterpiece of deception.

"Gaston," she was saying, "how can you be so blind? Surely I have not deceived you as well as all the others?"

"It was plain to see," said Gaston. "That man has won you by his infernal tricks. I will do you the justice to believe that you do not wish to be under his influence. But that only makes it more bitter for us all. Leave me here. I will not accept my freedom from you. I only hope that I may never see you again."

"Gaston," she pleaded, "listen to me. Every moment is precious. You must believe in me and realise what I have had to do. Imagine what it has meant, to be for days in that man's company. He has greater power, greater force of character, than anyone I shall ever meet. And all the time I have had to fight him inch by inch, day by day, and all the time I felt that I must lose."

"Leave me, leave me," repeated Gaston sullenly.

"How can I persuade you?" she urged. "Never for a moment have I yielded. I have had to consider my every word and gesture. He is not the man to be easily blinded. If I had just crudely pretended to be altogether on his side, he would have suspected me at once. I have had to be rather more subtle than that. He thinks now that I unwillingly admire him, that I am just a little attracted. I have allowed myself to be slowly persuaded, and he now firmly believes that I am prepared to go through with him to the end."

"But why have you done this?" asked Gaston, and I could now detect in his voice pity—or was it a dawning hope?

"I had to be above suspicion," she answered. "Otherwise I should not now be here. I always felt that the time would come when I might be of use."

"And if we had not come?" Gaston still objected.

"Even then I needed freedom to act."

"But what could you have done?"

"I should have done what Etienne Réhmy said outright that he would do. The Professor made no secret of his plans, and I knew the moment might come when there would be only one way to save the world."

"You would have killed him?" said Gaston.

You will observe that all this time they had both of them quite forgotten my presence. I was no more than a piece of furniture in that dirty room. I sat there, feebly

rubbing my numbed and swollen arms, with for the first time in weeks something like joy in my heart. Gaston was getting swiftly away from the pit of despair in which his spirit had lain for long days and nights.

"You arrived only just in time," she went on. "I do not know how I should have stood the strain for another day."

Her voice broke, and Gaston turned clumsily towards her with a low cry.

The two shadows became one, and I knew that Gaston at any rate had reached the end of his quest.

I retreated towards the window, leaving them together. Hope had returned to me. Suzanne had contrived to free us. We would get away and we would hide in the hills. All might yet be well. If only we could make a clear escape, we should at least be in advance of the great army and be able to warn Europe of her peril.

The narrow street on which I looked was empty, and in the moonlight the details were surprisingly clear, even down to the neat piles of refuse which the orderly mind, doubtless of Konrad von Hefflebach, had caused to be collected in what for centuries had been an indescribably filthy Asiatic town.

The town was surprisingly silent considering the fact that I was in the middle of a great host. I could hear only the barking of a dog and the distant hoof-falls of some troop of horse going to relieve a distant post.

I turned to the two who had forgotten the world, who had changed our prison into an Aladdin's palace, into King Solomon's cedar bower, into Roi René's white castle of love.

They came towards me, and I put a hand on Gaston's shoulder.

"Ah, Thomas," he said, "fortune is kind at last."

"But we must not linger," I urged.

"For you," said Suzanne, drawing back a fold of her silk tunic and looking at a very modern wrist watch, "there is no hurry. I have yet to find Captain Réhmy."

"But, Suzanne," protested Gaston, "can you do this? Is it safe for you to go about among these people?"

"I am absolutely free," she answered; "it is for that I have worked and schemed during all these weeks."

"Are you not even guarded?" I asked.

"I have a bodyguard, but they obey my instructions without question. They are waiting for me now not far from here."

"And how did you dispose of the men who are guarding us?" I continued.

"Koumis," she answered briefly. "They are drinking with a friendly chief at a post about half a mile away. These men will do anything I ask. The only person I am at all afraid of is Adolf Baumer, who watches me continually, but I think I have given him the slip to-night."

"Do you know where Etienne is confined?" said Gaston.

"In a house at the other end of the town," she answered. "I will go there at once, and send away his guard as I sent away yours. Then we will meet and make our escape together."

"It will take me, perhaps, half an hour to free Captain Réhmy," she continued. "I will meet you on the outskirts of the town at the place where you first saw me when I was carried in by Baron Konrad. It is now one o'clock. I fix the rendezvous for a quarter to two, so that you needn't start from here immediately. Stay here for a quarter of an hour and then I will bring Captain Réhmy. After that we must find horses and ride."

"One thing more," she added. "Here are pistols," and she held them out towards us. "I took them from Adolf Baumer, and they are loaded."

We thrust them into our belts, and I for one was not sorry to feel again the cold hardness of a pistol butt.

"One moment," I said, as she moved towards the door. "What has become of François? He will be almost indispensable."

"He is with Captain Réhmy, I think," replied Suzanne, and I will bring him with me too. Let me see, how are you dressed?"

She regarded us critically in the moonlight.

"We are all in Mongolian clothes," said Gaston. They gave them to us yesterday, and they are much like. I do not think we shall be recognised, though I seem to remember François complaining that he had lost his hat."

"You will pass very well in the moonlight," said Suzanne. "Remember, a quarter to two. I do not think you will meet anyone, but if you do, the word to-night is 'Ayugumsik'; but I should not say anything except in an emergency."

She moved off, and Gaston went with her for a short distance into the street. I heard a murmur, and when a little later looked out from the door, she was gone.

We waited beside the house for about a quarter of an hour in an agony of impatience. Gaston was now beside himself with excitement and happiness. He poured out to me his praise of the incomparable Suzanne.

Punctually at half-past one we slipped into the street, and, keeping to the side of the road, moved in single file under the shadows of the houses till we reached our destination. During our silent walk we met no one, though all around us, in a great circle, were spread the camp-fires, and in the south was a delicate skein of spears outlined against the moonlit sky.

We reached the place of rendezvous five minutes ahead of the time appointed.

We stood in the shadow of a small half-withered fir

tree, the last of a straggling host that stretched away into the darkness behind and formed a little spinney distant some hundred yards from the first houses. At our feet ran the rough track up which we had ridden on the previous day. The nearest picket was some hundred yards away. All around us lay the host, a living wall about Kobdo, through which we must somehow pass.

Then suddenly I heard hoof-beats on the road down which we had come. We crouched behind the fir and peered cautiously out. They sounded nearer, and the half a dozen dark riders burst into view.

At the same moment I heard two or three shots in rapid succession and a sharp cry. Then into the moonlight sprang a horseman. It was Konrad von Hefflebach and he was shouting. An instant later the riders came full into view, followed by two horses, the saddles of which were empty, though behind the last something dragged and bumped along the ground.

"My God, there is Suzanne," cried Gaston, dragging his pistol from his belt, and there, indeed, I saw her mounted herself, struggling between two Mongol horsemen.

"Back, back," she cried, as Gaston emerged from the shelter of the pine. "Réhmy has gone."

But it was too late for us to profit by her advice, even if we had wished to do so. For with a shout the horsemen were upon us.

I pulled my pistol and fired, once, twice, thrice. I saw one man topple and fall, but von Hefflebach, at whom I aimed, was unharmed. He wheeled his horse and, shouting something in Mongolian, galloped straight for Suzanne, heedless of the bullet sped after him by Gaston.

In another instant he had grasped her round the waist, lifting her clean from the saddle of her horse, while the two Mongolians with whom she had been struggling dropped to the ground and came at a run towards us.

Then he threw her across his saddle and galloped away into the dark of the city.

And now they all were upon us, and I settled down to selling my life as dearly as possible.

"Back to back, Thomas," said Gaston, and I felt him pressing against my shoulder-blades, while his pistol poke again.

The men attacking us did not return our fire, but advanced with their spears and swords. They were quite oblivious of death, and I laid three of them on their backs before my pistol was empty. Then we fought desperately in a close grappling struggle. I had no time for thought. I was out only to kill. I dashed my empty pistol in the face of the nearest man as he came to me. He staggered and fell towards me. I seized him round the knees and lifted him, for he was a small man and I am over six feet, and I threw him bodily at three other men who were coming up on my right. They crashed to the ground, and I turned to meet the rest of them.

But suddenly a black cloud covered me, and I knew nothing more.

Chapter XX

I Hear the Death Stammer

I RECOVERED consciousness to find myself lying on the trampled earth floor of a *yurta*, though it took me some little time to realise where I was. I lay on my back and gazed stupidly at the smoke-blackened hole in the apex of the roof. My head throbbed intolerably, and my fingers, tenderly exploring the back of it, touched matted hair and dried blood.

Then I felt hands under my shoulders. They gave a sharp tug and I staggered to my feet and stood swaying. Consciousness was coming back to me, and it giddied my aching brain with memories. I saw again the white face of Suzanne and heard her warning cry, then Gaston

with his pistol out and his white eager face, then the rush of the Mongol horsemen and the sound of hoofs—clop, clop, clop. Would they never stop drumming on the hard ground? It seemed as if all the horses in all the world were galloping past monotonously one by one, each hoof striking the ground a foot from my head.

I sank back into oblivion, but came to again after an interval to find myself stretched upon a couch with the face of Konrad von Hefflebach bending over me. There was an acrid taste in my mouth and a faint smell of brandy, but I felt suddenly much stronger.

The Deliverer stood looking down at me, a grim smile on his face.

"Well, Captain Preston," he said as I sat up, "you have not done so badly. There are four dead out there, and two more won't live till morning. You have earned quite a name for yourself among my guards. They call you the son of Shaitan."

"Where's Gaston?" I muttered.

"He's safe enough," replied the Deliverer. "You will see him presently."

"Mademoiselle de Polhac?"

"She is in her quarters," he replied dryly. "After this occurrence I am afraid we shall have to curtail her liberty. I am in charge now, as you know, and I do not care to run any further risks."

He paused, and I sank back on to a pile of cushions. My head was still aching too much for me to ask why I was being treated with such consideration, and I lay quiet for some time, too concerned with my physical ills to worry much about anything else. Then suddenly through the mists that seemed to crawl about my brain, a question stabbed like a ray of light.

What had become of Réhmy? And then I remembered what Suzanne had said to us as she was dragged away.

"Réhmy," she had cried, "has gone." What did she mean by that?

But now von Hefflebach was speaking, and I tried to listen and understand what he was saying.

"You are to lie there, Mr. Preston," he announced abruptly, "till we move in the morning. The Professor desires your presence till all is accomplished. I shall not ask you or your friends for your parole. You are harmless, and escape is quite impossible. But I warn you that, free though you may seem, you will be very closely guarded, and it will go hard with you, very hard indeed, if you make any further attempt to interfere with us."

He said this in the sharp, incisive tone that was his normal mode of speech, and turning he prepared to leave the tent. He was only half-way to the opening, however, when there came a sudden noise outside, and two of the guard entered.

He addressed them sharply in Mongolian, asking, it seemed to me, what the disturbance was. They answered him shortly in triumphant tones, and one of them, I saw, held a short sword slightly curved, the keen blade dulled with red. He tossed something onto the floor, which rolled unevenly towards the feet of the Deliverer. It was round and covered with a close-fitting cap of dark felt curiously embroidered in white, with ear-flaps of fur. I recognised it at once. It was the cap that Réhmy had worn throughout the journey. The cap which he had bought at Udinsk, and it was still upon his head.

I saw von Hefflebach draw himself up. In two strides he was face to face with the man who carried the sword, and who stood grinning, in evident anticipation of reward. But the grin turned swiftly to dismay. Von Hefflebach raised his right hand, in which was gripped the Mongolian whip stuck normally in his waistband, and slashed the man heavily across the face, hissing something in Mon-

golian. The man cowered back and fell on his knees. Then von Hefflebach turned and made straight for me.

I was sick with horror.

"The savage fools," he said. "They have killed your friend, Captain Réhmy."

Then, after a quick glance at my face, he turned to a little table on which, incongruously enough, stood a syphon and a bottle of whisky, saying, as he did so, a few words over his shoulder. The man whom he had struck came forward, picked up his grisly trophy and retired with it from the tent.

This then was the end for one of us. My mind refused its office, and kept repeating blankly, "Réhmy dead, dead. That's his head you saw just now bumping about like an ill-made football." And suddenly I felt faint again and saw as in a mist von Hefflebach come towards me with a tumbler in his hand.

I drank mechanically, and after that I remember nothing more till I awoke some hours later to see the sun streaming in through the opening of the *yurta*, and to find the unpleasing figure of little Adolf standing by my couch.

"You are to get up," he said abruptly. "We start from here in ten minutes."

I got heavily to my feet. My head no longer ached but there was a tightness about my forehead. My mouth was dry and I was very thirsty. I walked to the centre of the *yurta*, where there was a brass tray on which stood a large tumbler of tea. I drank it thirstily, and then prepared to do as I was bid.

I moved mechanically, and took no notice at all of little Adolf, who, however, was at no pains to conceal his enormous delight at being master of the situation, and who informed me incidentally that it was owing to his vigilance that von Hefflebach had been able to forestall us on the previous evening. I was, indeed, supremely

indifferent to everything now. Réhmy was dead, and for the last time we had failed.

Well within the required ten minutes I was ready, for indeed I had no preparations to make. My clothes were already all on my back, and Adolf evidently considered that washing materials were unnecessary. All I had to do was to put on a hat with which little Adolf provided me.

Outside the tent I found the inevitable guard of Mongols sitting their horses beside the entrance of the *yurta*. A horse was led up to me, and I clambered on its back.

"Hallo, Thomas," said a voice, and I looked round to see Gaston by my side. He looked pale and drawn, but, like me, he was free from bonds.

"Well," he said, "thank God that at any rate we are together. You put up a good show last night, Thomas. It's a pity we could not have ended it then."

"Like Réhmy," I said heavily.

"Réhmy?" he said.

"Réhmy is dead," I answered briefly, and told him in a few words what I had seen.

Gaston said nothing. He stared bleakly out over his horse's head.

"He has only preceded us by a little," he muttered. "But I wish we might have gone together."

And at that moment, without another word, we started on our journey.

We rode through the narrow streets of Kobdo, curiously silent, until we came out on to the great plain beyond. Here all was astir, but there was no confusion. The great host was moving slowly, but for so savage an army with wonderful method and discipline, each tribe following the banner of its leader.

The tribes, as I afterwards learned, were four in number, and they constituted the four leagues of outer Mongolia

—the Tushetu, the Tsetsen, the Sain Noin and the Dzasaktu. Tribe by tribe and *hoshun* by *hoshun* they moved off towards the north, as wild an array as had ever started under Genghis to be the bane of Europe.

Our guards took us along at a smart canter towards a little hillock on the outskirts of the town, on which I perceived that the Deliverer had taken up his stand, surrounded by a number of magnificently dressed and superbly mounted Jassaks and other high chieftains, who were apparently holding a review of the troops as they started upon their journey. Beside him in an open litter was Suzanne. She looked pale, but she held her head high and appeared exquisitely lovely in her barbarous clothes with her strange white headdress. Behind her was a closed litter, doubtless containing the Professor.

Our guard halted at the foot of the hillock, and we sat our horses for a whole morning, while we gazed at the host that streamed past. As each squadron or troop (for want of a better name) rode up they raised their long lances and waved them, shouting and saluting the Deliverer where he sat his horse above them on the summit of the hillock, gazing with impassive eyes on the vast movement which he himself had done so much to create.

During all that time Gaston and I said nothing. We were both too tired, too numb with the shock of events, I think, to comment on what we saw passing before our eyes, or even to note anything beyond the general effect. But I can still see those endless companies of upright horsemen, straight in their saddles, moving past us in tens of thousands. They were dressed all alike, wearing, as the day was still cold, their coats of horse or sheepskin. Their officers and lesser chiefs were distinguished by red cloaks, and one or two of the greater men, whose banners they followed, wore, I noticed, the owl's plume in their caps. I saw no artillery, or any attempt at a baggage

train, but this was soon explained, for little Adolf, who was by my side, kept up a running commentary. This, so Adolf informed us, was not yet the beginning of the expedition. These were only the picked men of the host, who were going a four days' march into the mountains, for there, in a secret valley, Ayugumsik Khagan would be revealed. Then they would return, pick up their artillery, and the whole army would start upon its way.

"Ayugumsik Khagan," I said, mindful of the number of times which we had discussed the meaning of that strange term. "That is the Lord of Fear."

"Yes," replied Adolf. "It is one among many names by which he is known. He is called also the King of Agarti or the underworld. He will appear to the host on the fourth day from now at midnight, when the eclipse will be visible if the night is fine."

At midday a meal was served, which we ate in the saddle, and shortly afterwards we began to move off in the wake of the main body of the army, though many thousands followed us. We rode all that day, and in the evening we encamped by the Kobdo river at the foot of a spur of the Ulangom mountains.

As we rode into camp we saw beside the road half a dozen figures on their knees. They were bending unnaturally forward, their hands tied behind their backs. It took me a moment to realise that they had no heads. They had been executed, so little Adolf informed us, for the crime of disobedience to a subordinate officer. The code administered throughout the host was that drafted by Genghis himself—the Law of the Steppe, under which, though most offences were lightly punished by the infliction of fines in cattle or valuables, disobedience was invariably punished by death, even though the difference in authority between the disobedient servant and his master was small.

Gaston and I shared a blanket on the ground that

night about the camp-fire of the personal bodyguard of the Deliverer. Our supper consisted of the inevitable mutton from the countless flocks which followed the host. The flocks were driven without dogs or shepherds by the mounted spearmen, who hustled them rapidly forward with their long lances.

We had talked but little that day. Our thoughts were too full for many words. Gaston seemed openly less affected by the death of Réhmy than I had expected, not because his horror was any less than mine, but because he had firmly persuaded himself that we were shortly to follow him ourselves. He found, indeed, an odd kind of comfort in the certainty of our approaching end. He had fallen into that mood of patient fatalism which I have so often found beneath the ardent surface of the French character. He was even happy in the thought that he had been able to declare his love before it was too late, and that the girl to whom he had given his heart would follow him in death rather than live as the bride of the Professor. I was far from sharing his resignation, though during the four days of our march I too was insensibly affected by the thought that the end of our adventure was imminent, and that death awaited us all.

We discussed perfunctorily (for any discussion was really futile) whether there might even yet be some way of defeating the Professor. We turned over and rejected various futile plans, our least impracticable being a project to tear aside the curtains of the enclosed litter and reveal the Professor to a startled host. But the litter was guarded day and night, the guards being informed that it contained the mother of the bride, who was sick, and even if we had succeeded in revealing the Professor, we should have been quite unable to explain who he was, for we had not a word of Mongolian between us. It was hopeless, and we knew it.

From time to time during the long journey we saw von Hefflebach, who, when he came within speaking distance, never failed to greet us, and who on more than one occasion gave special instructions to our guards that we were to be treated with respect. I was somewhat puzzled by his attitude. I had not lost the interest, the regard even, which he had inspired in me during that unfortunate evening on Tibidabo. I remembered how little he had liked the part he had been required to play on that occasion, and his comparatively friendly attitude towards Gaston, Réhmy and myself during our subsequent examination by the Professor. I recalled too his sudden wrath towards the murderer of Réhmy. Thus might Cæsar have dealt with the officious eunuch who displayed to him the head of Pompey on the sands of Alexandria. The man was clearly not without generous instincts and a chivalrous respect for his opponents. At the same time, I felt that towards anyone who might seriously endanger his plans he would be quite pitiless. I imagined him to be a man who, though he would never be needlessly cruel, was passionately a realist who could find no place for the pretty delusions of the modern world. I remembered his enthusiasm for the shepherd horsemen of the Khirghis, and I had seen him since, with an expression of proud achievement on his face, watching the long lines of Mongol warriors filing past beneath him under the little hill. He loved these simple people, whose virtues he understood and whose childish brutalities offended him less than the calculated discretion of softer races.

Towards Gaston and myself he certainly felt no sort of animosity. Indeed, on the second day of our journey, when we were encamped on a high pass from which we could look down on the lake of Ubsa Nor gleaming in the far distance, he sent us an invitation to dine with him in his *yurta*, and during the meal he was extraordinarily frank with us about his plans, describing the march on

which the host was to start at the beginning of May. He would, he said, march down the Black Irtysh, crossing into Russian territory somewhere near the junction of that river with its tributary the Koba, and then on, past the southern shores of Lake Zaisan, to Sergiopol, near which town he expected to have to encounter Red troops, which would probably be rushed down on the railway from Barnaul and Semipolatsk. The host, brushing these aside, would then move due west, across the great Kirghis Steppes, skirting the northern shores of the lake of Dengiz, and so through the country of the Great Horde to the mountains of Kara Tau, making a big detour to the south to avoid the deserts of Hiti Konur and Kara Kun. They would, in fact, follow the course of the Sir Daria, the ancient Jaxartes. From thence they would slip between the southern spurs of the mountains of Kara Tau and the Caspian Sea, and so into Russia itself.

Such a route provided for most of the way illimitable pastures for the horses and ample supplies of food for the host, apart from the vast flocks of sheep and goats which were to accompany them.

The whole population of outer Mongolia was moving. The army itself numbered over half a million men, and what we had seen of it formed but the advance guard. There were twice that number of women and reserves who would follow in its tracks, and every Mongol "family" had, on pain of death, been ordered to give up its entire wealth of flocks and herds to feed the host, retaining only the minimum necessary for its own support.

The equipment of the host was much the same as that with which Timor provided his armies in 1390 for his campaign against Toktamish, a spare horse to every two men, a tent to every ten, with two spades, a pickaxe, a saw, an axe, an awl, a hundred needles, eight and a half pounds of cord, an ox's hide and a strong pan.

I will not burden you with the hundred details of which he spoke. I remember he explained in a quiet way that the organisation was not so difficult to achieve as might at first be imagined. The Mongols were the one fighting nomad race left on earth. To them a journey of some thousands of miles was as nothing. They would pass over the surface of the land like locusts, leaving nothing behind them save the marks on the grass where their *yurtas* had stood and the bones of their victims.

Later in the evening, as we sat beside the camp-fire which blazed not far from the entrance to his tent, von Heflebach became more personal, and I took the occasion to ask, as Réhmy had asked on the night of our arrival at Uliassutai, how it came about that a man who had been serving his country only a few years before should now be seeking to ruin her. He did not resent my curiosity. On the contrary, he seemed to welcome it as giving him an opportunity to put himself right with the world. I do not know why he should have been moved to open his mind to us, but can only imagine that he seized even this relief from the appalling loneliness of his strange position. He had little or nothing in common with the Professor beyond the purpose which united them, and though a Mongol by adoption, he could not altogether deny the call of his race. Certainly that night he was homesick for his country and his kind—odd as this may seem in a man who was leading an army to their destruction.

"Yes," he said, taking from his *khalat* a snuff bottle of green jade, for he had adopted the Mongolian habit, almost essential to social intercourse in that country, "there are times when I would give all this wonderful free life out here just to ride once more down the Linden, to watch Fritz making pancakes for me in the silver chafing-dish at Horcher's in the Luther Strasse, or to smell the wood smoke outside my shooting-box in the

Hartz mountains, or see the women in their carriages under the pink chestnut trees at Munich in carnival time," and I saw that the man's face was sombre and drawn and that suddenly he looked his full tale of years.

"But those times are gone for ever," he went on, "and there you will find the answer to your question. I loved in the old Germany the simple virtues which I have sought and admired in every region of the world, and which you will only find universal to-day in this forgotten land—humour and faith and courage and hospitality. Where will you look for these virtues in Europe to-day? Least of all in the country for which ten years ago I was fighting, for it is an inexorable law that there can be no virtue in the weak. 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness,' and it can never be otherwise. It was the glory of my country that among the modern nations she alone had some dim perception of this truth, but she mistook her hour, and now that she is defeated, Europe is morally bankrupt. The strongest and most valiant of her nations is now the most pitiful of all, holding a place on sufferance among the rest. I believed my race to have been chosen to carry the gospel of the strong to the ends of the earth, to teach the nations of Europe the meaning of discipline and courage. But that was a task too great for Germany, or for any nation that has been corrupted by modern Western ideas. There was only one race so far untouched by the democratic malady, the people I had known and admired for the better years of my life, and I realised that only they could achieve the task in which Germany had failed. History must repeat itself. There must be a scourging and a cleansing, and it must come, as always before, from the cradle of the world, from the unchanging heart of Asia, from a land which is as old as Genesis."

I have compressed into a single speech the gist of a long and rambling conversation which extended far into

the night, and which left me with no doubt that the man was utterly sincere. He was, indeed, a practising disciple of the German evangelists of whom we used to hear so much during the war, Treitschke, Bernhardi and the like—men who derived their inspiration from Nietzsche. With them, however, the doctrine was bound up with an intense national feeling for Germany as the chosen instrument whose might would be right because it was the might of the Fatherland. Von Hefflebach went further than they; he believed in the doctrine itself. The world must be redeemed by the sword from the softer virtues.

One thing further I should perhaps mention. He dwelt again and again in the course of our conversation on the faith of the men he was leading. I got the impression that among all that multitude none, save perhaps a few of the more sophisticated priests and politicians, would have the smallest doubt of the truth of the legend which was about to be fulfilled. The Lord of Fear would come forth, divine, invulnerable, omnipotent; and they would follow him to the ends of the earth.

“But surely,” I objected, “if this is your strongest it is also your weakest weapon. Professor Kreuzemark is a very remarkable man, but he cannot possibly live up to his divinity. Besides, he may fall sick or be thrown from his horse. He is liable at any moment to be exposed as an impious fraud.”

“You do not seem to have well understood your history,” said von Hefflebach. “All the great conquerors of the world have been divine. Alexander was a god. And have you never read of *divus Augustus*? Even Napoleon had his star. And God is always with the big battalions.”

“Then look well to the Professor,” I retorted. “Don’t forget that one day Alexander took a cold bath and died.”

“Not before he had sighed for other worlds to conquer,” smiled von Hefflebach. “But set your mind at rest.

We are taking good care of the Professor, and he will remain invulnerable till the task is accomplished."

It was on the evening of the fourth day, two days after our talk with the Deliverer, that the host encamped, to the number of more than one hundred thousand men, on the northern shores of Ubsa Nor. Right above us now loomed the gigantic peaks of the Tangnu Ula mountains. The plain on which we pitched our tents was wild and deserted, and the lake half-choked with weeds, while away to the south the dust storms, which we had met with on our journey from Urga, whirled and twisted. It was indeed an enchanted land, very desolate, a land, to use the words of the legend, "where there dwelled ne man ne beast."

All that day the host had been preceded by a number of extraordinary-looking men, wearing hideous masks, their clothes sewn with innumerable strips of cloth and silk till they looked like walking ragbags. These were the devil dancers, and they were viewed with great awe, for it would be their task, so little Adolf informed us, to dance before the entrance to the cave out of which would come the Lord of Fear. They jogged along on foot, weird and ungainly in their hideous trappings, and quite oblivious of everything around them. I could not tell whether they were young or old, or even of what sex they were, for the great masks covered their faces and the cloaks completely enveloped their forms.

That evening about five o'clock, soon after the host had ended its day's march, Adolf came to us with a message from the Professor. It was to the effect that he had asked Baron Konrad to arrange for us to witness the ceremony which was to take place that night in the valley.

This, then, was the expected hour, and it was not long before we noticed that something unusual was afoot. The host did not, as was its custom, settle down for the

night. There was a great deal of noise and bustle over the evening meal, and I saw that liberal quantities of koumis were issued to the men, with the result that a general air of festivity soon prevailed. Then, shortly after nine o'clock in the evening, amid scenes of clamour and excitement, the host began again to move forward under a dark sky.

We marched for about an hour and a half, and I found presently, when the moon rose and we could see something of the country, that we were moving up a long narrow valley which appeared to end abruptly in a wall of mountains that towered far above us. There was apparently no practicable exit at the head of the valley, for suddenly a halt was called. The vanguard had stopped, but behind it the whole host pressed eagerly forward till the whole of that vast gorge was packed with rank after rank of serried men.

This, then, was the valley perilous.

We had not seen von Hefflebach since noon, but a Jassak came running towards us and bade us go forward on foot. We followed him in silence, and were taken up a narrow winding path, which had apparently been recently prepared among the great rocks and boulders at the head of the valley, until we stood on a rocky ledge or platform about fifty yards broad, and as many deep, on which were already assembled the chief princes and leaders of the Mongols. The platform was small, and there were no guards that I could see. No one, indeed, save the leaders of the host could find room upon it. It ended in a narrow cleft, inky black in the darkness, for the moon, which was at the full, could not penetrate its recesses. The cleft was high, some sixty or seventy feet, I judged, and very narrow, not more than six or eight feet broad at the most.

We took our stand among the chiefs, tall for their race, though none of them was above five foot five or so, and

dressed and armed much like the Jassak who had welcomed us at Urga.

About ten paces to the left stood a single curtained litter. It was there that Suzanne awaited her fate. I could not see Konrad von Hefflebach, though I looked well about me among the princes and Huktuktus assembled on the platform. For the moment, at any rate, the Deliverer was invisible.

We waited thus among the leaders of the host for some considerable time. No word was spoken. The princes stood as though graven in stone on that high ledge, perched above the heads of the great array. The host beneath us was silent, so silent that, save for the jingle of bit or snaffle when a horse tossed his head, or the scrape of a hoof on rock, there was no other sound. All the superficial excitement of our festive departure was chilled; the air was heavy; the mood of the host was grave and still. Its countless warriors stood below us in the bright moonlight like an army of silver ghosts, while all about them rose huge piles of ruined stone, bearing under the cold radiance a terrible resemblance to what might have been the houses and castles of a forgotten race.

Anything might happen now. I was one of a hundred thousand men waiting in that narrow valley to behold the miracle of miracles, the coming of a mightier than the sons of men. Only once did I move my head, as with a soft rush of beating pinions a great eagle moved heavily into the upper air across the face of the moon. Had Gabriel already set his trumpet to his lips, and was all heaven astir behind that black cloud which had risen unperceived and was hanging curtainwise across the eastern sky?

A great sigh rose from the darkness of the valley, and somewhere out of sight a drum began to beat softly. It throbbed steadily louder and louder like the beating blood

in a pulse. It was taken up and joined by others, until the whole valley was astir with their rhythm, faint and hollow and persistent. Then, as though in obedience to their invocation, there moved into the clear space before the entrance of the underworld a dozen ghastly figures, tall and ungainly, seeming twice the size of men. They moved, waving slowly to and fro in an odd unison, as though blown by an unseen hellish wind. They rocked and swayed as the drums throbbed from the heart of darkness below.

Mechanically I found my brain repeating, "These are the devil dancers that you saw all yesterday, they are merely men dressed up." But nothing could remove the horror in which I was now sunken.

The tall painted figures were moving faster now. They slipped and swayed in the maze of a weird, unlovely dance. No sound came from the grim masks, but we could hear the pattering of their naked feet on the hard rock, the swish of the tattered cloaks about their loins, and the bright tinkling of the pieces of metal sewn loosely among the shreds of silk and cloth which hung from their waving arms.

"On a night when the moon shall be darkened," I muttered. "Will he never come?"

Then suddenly a shadow fell across the platform. I looked up and saw that a black crescent had bitten into the side of the moon, which, even as I looked, dwindled and shrank so that the silver ghosts about me turned brown and withered. The eclipse had begun.

Rapidly the darkness grew till only a thin edge of silver remained in the sky. The stars shone with a sudden brilliance, and were multiplied. Then, as though extinguished by an invisible hand, the light of heaven went out, and I could not see even the peaks which a moment before had towered above us all. The hard rock on which I stood, the chieftains in their silks and colours, the drawn

face of the friend at my side, the curtained litter with all it contained—these were phantoms, and they had vanished. There was only one reality. It lay where the mountain wall with its hidden cleft loomed as a darker tract upon the dark.

The drums were still beating and the dance of the witch doctors was in that moment of total darkness at its height. Vainly I told myself that this was merely an eclipse, an entirely natural phenomenon, predicted for years in advance by the astronomers. I was one with the awe and terror of the host that stood in the valley.

That moment of darkness was brief as time is measured, and almost at once the eclipse began to pass. The first faint moonbeam fell upon the rock at my feet. Abruptly the dancers fell in heaps across the platform, the drums were silent.

It was then that I first saw the Deliverer. He stood almost in the mouth of the gorge, a solitary dark figure fronting us all. His sudden appearance quite alone, the only man whose face was turned towards us, made him for an instant the embodiment of all we felt and expected—a figure such as Milton saw, for “on his head sat horror plumed, and in his hand what seemed both shield and spear.”

He was dressed in deep black, with only the sign of the swastika on his breast to lighten the sombreness of his attire. Just as the first ray of the moon struck the platform he came towards us, moving slowly and with great dignity. He approached the litter, drew the curtain aside, and amid utter silence helped out the girl and stood or a moment waiting for her to advance with him.

The eclipse was now passing, and the moonbeams shone full on her face. Suzanne was deadly pale, but she held herself bravely, her Mongolian headdress like a strange white bird that perched upon her hair.

Then, as she moved forward slowly, her right hand

held in the left of the Deliverer's, there sounded from somewhere in the darkness the low clear notes of a flute playing a plaintive mountain air. The notes fell one by one like drops of clear water, and the effect was impossible to describe.

Slowly they advanced till they had covered a little over half the space which separated the princes from the mouth of the cave.

Then at a sign from him she stopped, and he went forward alone. The moment she halted, the flute ceased to play, and it was in the midst of complete silence that the Deliverer continued on his way. I saw his short straight figure disappear into the gloom, and then the stillness was broken by three loud knocks as of a wooden mallet striking a door, and a voice cried a single sentence in an unknown tongue.

Abruptly the darkness of the cave was rent in two by a livid sword of light, and I found myself in my excitement gripping Gaston's arm.

Then with a dull roar the darkness blazed, the opening of the cave crumbled away, and in the midst stood a single figure brilliant in cloth of scarlet and gold, his hands stretched out in benediction.

The Lord of Fear had come.

A great sigh swept up to us from the waiting host beneath, and all the princes fell upon their knees.

Slowly the Professor advanced, and I could see his every feature in the light that still streamed from the cave. This was his hour. His face was expressionless save for the eyes, the eyes which I could never meet. They were bright and luminous with triumph. He walked like a man in a dream straight towards Suzanne, who was standing perhaps twenty paces away, silently regarding him.

But first he reached the Deliverer, who on his first appearance had kneeled down with the rest. The Professor

raised him and embraced him solemnly, whereat the whole host sighed again and the princes got to their feet. The Deliverer then moved aside and the Professor came slowly on, the Lord of Fear about to greet his bride.

The blaze in the mouth of the cave had now died down, and our eyes, relieved from that sudden splendour, were again adjusted to the light of the moon. The Professor was within ten paces of the girl who awaited him, and I found myself subdued to the mood and expectation of the host for whom this was a miracle and the fulfilment of a prophecy. There stood the Lord of Fear, the promised leader, splendid, invulnerable, predestined to destroy all his enemies and to rule over the whole earth. And there stood also the bride from the West, pledge of his return from the shadows to the world of men. He had only to advance a little and to take her by the hand, and all would come to pass as had been foretold.

Complete silence had again fallen, but suddenly it was broken by a queer stammering chatter from the mouth of the cave. At the same instant there came a shrill cry, and, on looking round, I saw an old Jassak some yards to the left of me turn wildly about, his hands to his head, and fall heavily against the man standing beside him. Then, again, I heard that queer chattering from the cave.

I looked at the Professor. Either he had not heard the sound or it was a part of the ritual, for he still advanced. And then suddenly he stopped, and his hands groped for his breast, where for the first time I noticed that he wore a dark, irregularly shaped ornament.

It grew and spread, while into those eyes, which now stared fixedly before them, came an odd questioning look.

Then, twisting slightly to the right, he pitched stiffly forward on his face.

FOR the moment no one moved. The princes upon the platform stood, cold with horror, gazing at the prone figure which I knew to be Professor Kreuzemark, but which to them was the god omnipotent and invulnerable, lying dead before the gateway of his kingdom.

There came a single cry from someone in the host, and then a great roar broke from the assembled men beneath us, a roar so savage and despairing that, unmindful of all else, I turned my head.

Below us was a wild chaos of men, the moonlight glinting on their spear-points and the barrels of their rifles, and already the valley shook and trembled under the beating hoofs of those who led the panic. They had come to find life and victory, the fulfilment of a hope of generations. They had found death and defeat and disappointment. In a moment they had been transformed from an inspired army into a mob blind with fear and moved only by one ungovernable impulse—to get away at all costs from that stricken place.

What exactly had happened? I did not yet know, but it was time to act. Already Gaston had leapt forward to where Suzanne stood swaying slightly and gazing with wide eyes at the glittering body of the Lord of Fear.

In an instant I was beside them.

“To the cave,” shouted Gaston, and we all three ran quickly towards the narrow cleft.

Behind us were the Mongol princes who had not yet moved, while in front the only figure was Konrad von Hefflebach, standing as in a daze, his face livid and inscrutable.

Then from behind us came a savage cry and rush of feet. I whipped round to see the leaders of the host with swords drawn, advancing towards us. Their faces were terrible to behold, and there was a look in

their eyes which I did not dare to read. They were within twenty feet of us, when a voice, ringing strangely from the hollows of the rocky cavern, cried to us suddenly in French:

“On your faces. Fall flat.”

Instinctively we obeyed, and, as I fell, I heard again that queer chattering sound, but the mystery was now explained. I knew of only one thing that it could be, a machine-gun firing a rapid burst from somewhere close in front of us. Behind came sharp screams, and there was a sudden pause in the rush, and looking round I perceived half a dozen still or writhing figures on the ground. One was within ten feet of where I lay, and I saw a pair of wide-staring Mongol eyes, already glazing, as the man swayed slowly from side to side on his knees, his sword falling from his hand to the rocky floor.

Then again I heard a voice from the cave:

“Quickly . . . Gaston . . . Thomas . . . into the cave.”

I rose and turned blindly in the direction of the sound. I was past the threshold now, and found the interior still lit faintly with flickering bluish flames, the remains apparently of magnesium flares.

Gaston and Suzanne had entered in front of me, and I stumbled after them along a narrow broken floor covered with boulders until, turning to the left, I found myself looking straight down the barrel of a light machine-gun.

“Quick,” said the man behind it, “get round there and help Gaston to shift those boulders.”

I did as I was bid. My ears told me that Réhmy was speaking, while my mind told me that Réhmy was dead. I started to help Gaston move a great boulder to the edge of the narrow ledge half-way up the side of the cave on which Réhmy had taken up his position. We worked in silence, Suzanne helping us as best she could. We got the boulder well into place and started upon another.

But suddenly Gaston paused.

"Look," he said, and pointed to the mouth of the cave.

I looked in the direction of his outstretched hand, and this is what I saw.

Konrad von Hefflebach, the Deliverer, was standing in the entrance. His back was towards us, and he was facing the ring of chiefs who were closing in upon him. In the clear moonlight I could see the movement of their lips and the threat upon their foreheads, but I could hear nothing owing to the noise of the fleeing host in the valley. The Deliverer stood black against the light. In his right hand he held a curved sword, and at his feet lay the body of Professor Kreuzemark in its splendid robes.

"I would save him if I could," said a voice in my ear, "but the gun has jammed," and Réhmy tugged at the bolt action.

Gaston turned to help him, while I watched the scene beyond us. There was nothing I could do, though I shouted in German to von Hefflebach as Réhmy had shouted to us, to run into the cave. I do not know whether he even heard me. At any rate, he paid no heed to my shouting, but stepped forward to meet the line that closed in a half-moon about him. Then I heard the crack of the pistol in his left hand. It spoke twice, but they were on him now, figures that looked as though they had sprung from some Asiatic tapestry, in their strange garments and their turned-up hats. A sword flashed in the moonlight, and there was a shower of sparks as it met the blade of von Hefflebach.

It was over in a moment. Three of the figures fell, but the rest were upon him like hounds about a stag. A spear was thrust forward, a sword clattered upon the rock and Konrad von Hefflebach, the Deliverer of the Mongols, fell dead across the body of the King he had sought to raise.

I imagined that nothing now remained but to sell our

lives as dearly as possible, but, to my astonishment, the men who killed the Deliverer fled hastily upon his fall.

Whether it was a superstitious fear of ground sacred to the gods such as our Mongol servants had shown beside the forest of Bogdo Ol, or respect for Réhmy's machine-gun which kept them from entering the cave, I do not know, but they made no attempt to molest us. The noise of the host died away, a deep silence fell upon the whole valley, and when at dawn we ventured cautiously out on to the rocky platform, we found that of all that great host nothing remained but the litter of its flight, spears, swords, carbines, pistols, odds and ends of clothing and accoutrement—evidence of the confusion and panic which had driven it headlong from the spot.

Meanwhile, as we waited in the cave, Réhmy told us his story. Both he and François had been set free by Suzanne as she had planned, but Little Adolf had apparently given the alarm, and the Deliverer had already started out to look for her. Von Hefflebach was only just in time, however, for already they had stolen horses for our flight. Suzanne and François were mounted, and Réhmy on another horse was leading two more for Gaston and me, when the guards of Konrad von Hefflebach galloped up and surrounded them. Réhmy let go the horses he was leading to defend himself, when the horse on which he was riding bounded suddenly forward and galloped madly away with him. It was some little time before he was able to regain control, and by the time he had done so and turned about, it was too late. Von Hefflebach, with Suzanne across his saddlebow, was galloping down the street with his guards behind him, and the headless body of François, a foot caught in one of the stirrups of his horse, was dragging heavily along the ground.

"I owe my life to you, Mademoiselle," said Réhmy with a rustle of his quilted sleeve as he turned to her.

"You struck my horse on the flank and caused him to bolt just as von Hefflebach appeared."

"It was our only chance," she answered. "I knew Gaston and Captain Preston must be almost certainly taken, but, if you were free, there might still be a chance for us all."

"I passed without any difficulty through the host," continued Réhmy, "thanks to the password 'Ayugumsik' which Mademoiselle had given me. Except that I was without a hat, I looked just like any other Mongol trooper."

"That explains it," I said. "You had given your hat to François," and I told him of the grisly trophy that had been brought to the tent of the Deliverer.

"The little man, you will remember, had lost his own," answered Réhmy. "He seemed so distressed and complained so bitterly that he would be cold without it that I gave him mine. That's how you came to make your mistake."

"As you may imagine, during the next few days things looked pretty desperate. I did not see in the least how I was to come to your assistance. I had, in fact, only one thing in my favour. In the saddle-bags of the horse which I was riding was food for ten days, millet meal, very nasty, but sufficient to sustain life."

"I followed the host as best I could, keeping well away from the troops, so that I looked like one of the horsemen looking after the sheep which accompanied it. The host reached Ubsa Nor, you remember, in the early evening, and I knew that the ceremony would have to take place within a few hours because of the eclipse. So I waited and watched, riding forward to the valley, which seemed to me to be the likeliest place for the event. I was rewarded by seeing no less a person than little Adolf slipping away from the host and coming up the valley towards me. He was quite alone, and was carrying a large

leather box strapped to his saddle. I followed him to the cave, entered after him, and hid behind a boulder. The little man unpacked his leather box and proceeded to fix up a complicated arrangement of magnesium flares. Shortly afterwards the Professor arrived and helped him in his task. I lay within a few yards of them, and could hear everything they said.

“When the moment came, little Adolf was to touch off the magnesium flares, and the Professor would then advance to the opening. Then, to guard against any possible surprise, Adolf was to take up a position on this ledge of rock and cover the entrance of the cave with the light machine-gun which the Professor had brought with him.

“With the assistance of little Adolf, the Professor arrayed himself in those gorgeous clothes which, from what I could gather, he had specially designed for the occasion from old Buddhist MSS., showing pictures of the King of Terrors. They then settled down patiently to wait.

“You must remember that I had no weapons, but there in full view was the machine-gun, and I knew how to work it. I had already formed my plan, and now I could only wait for an opportunity. It was pitch dark in the cave except for little Adolf’s electric torch, which he used to guide his steps in clambering up to the ledge. I forgot to mention that before putting on his robes the Professor had assisted Adolf to hang before the mouth of the cave a black felt curtain. I gathered from what they said that Adolf had painted across it a zigzag line of petrol and gunpowder mixed, so that a light put to either end of the line would cause the curtain to be rent in half by a leaping line of flame. It was the Professor’s idea, and he seemed uncommonly pleased with it.

“They talked but little during that long wait, and they never suspected my presence for a moment. Every now and then the Professor looked at his watch. At

last, muffled by the felt curtain, noises began to come through to us from outside, the murmur of the approaching host, the assembling of the chiefs on the platform, and at last the throbbing of the drums.

"The Professor rose and stood ready in the entrance, and I heard the notes of a flute. These ceased very soon, and then came three knocks as of a wooden mallet hitting a board.

"The Professor gave a quick order to Adolf, who at once pressed the electric connection and set light to the flares. This was my signal for action. I had taken over an hour, I should think, to creep, with infinite precautions, up the cave until I had got a little behind the ledge on which he was sitting. The moment the light burst out, I sprung upon the ledge and had my hand on Adolf's throat before he even knew I was there. It was the only way, for if he had cried out we should all have been lost. But it did not take very long. He grew limp in my hands, and dropping him to the floor I seized the machine-gun.

"By this time the Professor had passed out of the cave, and I could see him just embracing von Hefflebach. My first burst of fire went wide, but with my second I got the Professor, and the rest you know."

But little more remains to be told. We made our way back to Kobdo, and no one molested us. The disorder which had spread through the host was indescribable. Each man fended for himself, and the whole vast plain of the Chagan Tala was covered with horsemen, each making his way back to his own *yurta* and his own flocks. Kobdo itself was on fire, and most of the European instructors had fled.

It was Gaston who suggested stealing an aeroplane. It was not a difficult enterprise, for we found the air park entirely deserted, the Mongols having broken up into

their several units. Most of the planes, in fact, had already been taken by the Europeans of the army, but luckily two had been left, and of these one was a large bomb carrier, a German machine which Gaston knew and which with some little difficulty he got into the air.

It took us seven hours to do the five hundred odd miles separating us from Semipolatsinsk, for there was head wind. After that our Soviet passports sufficed and a month later we arrived in Paris.

At the time of writing Dupuis and the Marquis Guardalmedina del Puente are still at liberty, both having retired to a South American Republic without extradition laws. Dupuis is a bankrupt, and I fear that Madam Dupuis, the former Countess de Polhac, is finding life somewhat tedious in the château near Orthez, living on the moderate fortune which the late Count had been able to leave her.

Suzanne and Gaston have a charming flat in Paris where Beatrice and I are staying at the moment, and Gaston has bought a new and a very large car. It seats five persons, and we are about to take a trip to the lovely land of Provence.

But as I sit here looking out over the quiet Seine and all the bustle of Paris, my mind is drawn to another picture. I see once again our dead enemy in his robes of scarlet and gold, the dark body of the Deliverer lying across him, behind him the empty, staring cave, and beyond the valley perilous, and the boundless plains over which a people "like to the grains of the sea of sand" have returned to wander leaderless as through the centuries.

THE END





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