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THE OSTREKOFF JEWELS

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

Into one of the splendid but bare reception rooms of the famous Ostrekoff Palace in Petrograd, its owner made sudden, almost precipitate entrance. A tall man—almost six feet four in his stockings—the Prince was a striking personage, with long black beard streaked with grey, deep-set but fiery black eyes, and thin, finely aquiline nose. His attire was disordered and perplexing. He wore the uniform of a general but half of his ribbons were torn off, and the flowing cape which hung from his shoulders was merely the ordinary habiliment of a junior cavalry officer. He had apparently recently escaped from some scene of wild happenings, for the smell of exploded cartridges came from the old-fashioned service revolver which he was grasping in his right hand. He stood for the first few moments watching the doorway through which he had just sprung. His nostrils were quivering, his expression tense. He was engaged in a paroxysm of strained listening, his head a little on one side, his lips parted, his eyes almost glassy in their stare. A very human Anglo-American voice broke the silence, and the figure of a tall young man, broad-shouldered and powerful, emerged from the nearer of the great suite of rooms beyond.

"Trouble getting worse, Prince?" he asked anxiously.

The latter nodded, as he lowered his revolver and turned towards his questioner. The snapping of the tension brought with it a momentary relief. At least there were no footsteps upon the stairs—the thing he most dreaded—and, outside, the fitful rumbling of artillery seemed to be dying down, the rifle fire becoming more irregular.

"The madmen have won," he announced, with angry bitterness. "The only man who might have saved Russia has preferred to save his own skin. He's in the Baltic by now."

Another voice—there had been people who had called it the most beautiful voice in the world—came from the dim recesses beyond, and Catherine, Princess Ostrekoff, advanced slowly into the room. She was small as the men were large, but her figure was exquisite and her colouring notable. Her large hazel eyes, her golden yellow hair, had destroyed the illusions of a whole school of modern art, and driven more than one great painter crazy with his hopeless efforts at reproduction. For a moment, as she stood on the outskirts of obscurity, she seemed like an exquisite piece of tinted statuary. Her husband's grim face relaxed as he saw her. There were tears in his eyes, not for his own sake, but for hers.

"We have nothing to hope for," he acknowledged solemnly. "The so-called deliverer of the people has deserted us. The butchers are grabbing the power."

"What about the soldiers?" Wilfred Haven, the young American, asked.

"I had to shoot my own sergeant to escape from the barracks," was the terse reply. "They followed me into the street and sent half a dozen bullets after me—the cowards."

"Seems to me you were lucky to get away at all," Wilfred Haven observed.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"They are not hurrying," he confided. "Why should they? There is a cordon around the city and they know we cannot escape. They are only staying their hand to be early with the pillaging. They were tearing down the Museum as I passed. To-day Russia is paying for the sins of the world."

Catherine Ostrekoff was as brave a woman as any of her Tartar ancestresses, but she loved life. There were many things upon her conscience and she wished to live.

"Is there nowhere we could hide?" she asked piteously. "Why should this rabble wish for our blood? The Ostrekoffs have always been the friends of the people."

"Of the peasants—not of this scum," her husband reminded her. "Come and look—you can judge for yourselves."

The Prince secured the panelled door which he had been guarding by turning a huge gilded key in the lock, lowered a lamp, leaving the place almost in darkness, and cautiously pulled to one side the curtains covering the nearest of the high windows. He drew his wife tenderly towards him, checking her exclamation of horror with the light touch of his fingers upon her lips. Even Haven, a young New Yorker of a particularly masculine type, gasped as he looked down.

"Why, they're mad!" he cried. "This isn't a revolution—it's a herd of the devil's children broken loose. It's pandemonium!"

"The poison has been festering for generations and the sewer holes are open at last," the Prince muttered savagely. "They're crazy with vodka and brandy, with licence and the lust for blood. Look!"

Two men had met face to face in the middle of the street below. They were apparently strangers, both clad as ordinary wayfarers, except that one wore the short cloak affected by students of the university. Question and answer flashed between them, there was a gleam of uplifted steel, and one of the two, with a terrible shriek, which reached the ears of the three watchers at the window above the spitting of the guns and the dull sullen roar of human voices, threw up his arms and collapsed in a crumpled heap upon the road. His assailant only paused to withdraw his knife, wipe it on the other's clothes and kick the body out of the way. Then he broke into a fantastic dance in the middle of the street—the dance of a trained ballet performer, as he probably was—interpreting, with fiendish precision, in those moments of madness, the bestial passions of life.... Afterwards Wilfred Haven wondered more than once whether a touch of that same madness had not in those moments crept into the Tartar blood of the stern old aristocrat by his side. At any rate, he acted like a man possessed with some silent demon. He dropped on his knees and softly raised the window sash a couple of feet. A stinging blast of cold wind swept into the room. The Prince, for one, felt nothing of it, as cautiously his right hand, with its heavy burden, stole out of the window. He scarcely paused to take aim—in his youth he had been the champion revolver shot of the Russian Army—one single pressure of his finger upon the trigger and the mad career of the fantastic dancer below was over. The song died away on his lips, he spun around once, gripping at the air with frenzied hands, and collapsed even more completely than his late victim. The Prince closed the window.

"Justice has been achieved once to-night, at any rate," he muttered.

"It was well done," the Princess approved.

The three watchers, the Prince and Princess waiting for death, and the young man loath to leave them, lingered still at the window. The dark stream of human beings below were forming into little groups, for safety's sake. They surged here and there in the square and across the street, breaking the windows of many of the houses, and streaming in, to return often in disgust from a mansion which had been already sacked. From one of the lower windows of a tall, narrow house exactly opposite, which had been raided a few minutes before by a shouting and yelling mob, came suddenly a terrifying spectacle. The window was thrown open and a man leaned out, a shrieking woman in his clutches. He mocked at the crowd below, who rushed underneath the window and held out their arms. He shook his head.

"*Nitchevo*," he shouted. "Be patient, little brothers."

He drew back. The last thing to be seen was the lustful leer of the man as he disappeared. Then the window was closed and the lights went out in the room—the woman still shrieking. Wilfred Haven clenched his fists and turned towards the door.

"My God," he exclaimed, "I can't stand this!"

The Prince gripped his arm.

"Do not be a fool," he enjoined sharply. "You might as well try to save a woman from drowning underneath the falls of Niagara. That is going on in every house in the city—it would take an army to stop it."

"It is going on in every house in the city where the women are cowards enough to stay alive," the Princess observed, gazing contemplatively at the contents of a gold and onyx box which she had drawn from her bag. "It is well that Elisaveta is safe in Florence."

"It is well," the Prince echoed.

In the midst of the turmoil came the chiming of the great clock from the Cathedral. They all listened.

"Eleven," the Prince counted. "My young friend, we must part," he added, laying his hand for a moment upon Haven's shoulder.

The latter felt every fibre of his manhood revolt at the idea of leaving the house. The Princess had sunk into an easy-chair and was delicately touching her lips with the stick from her vanity case. She looked sideways at herself in the mirror. A faint whiff of perfume reached him where he stood. She was cool enough but hers was a very obvious gesture.

"It's damnable, this!" Haven exclaimed passionately. "Look here, Prince, let's try the Embassy. We can get there by the back way, all right, even if we have to sprint across the street."

Ostrekoff shook his head.

"The place is surrounded with spies," he said. "We shouldn't have one chance in a thousand. Besides, all your diplomatic privileges have been withdrawn, except the privilege of unmolested departure for yourselves, and that ends at midnight."

"I can't leave you here," the young man groaned.

The woman laughed at him. She used conversation as a camouflage.

"You must," she insisted. "You are undertaking a marvellous task for us, as it is. I am afraid that you will have to face death many a time before it is over. As for us—Michael is a soldier, and I shall escape the ignominy of seeing the admirers of my youth slip into obscurity with the coming of the wrinkles. A Russian or a Frenchwoman, you know, my dear Wilfred, without an admirer, is a woman upon whom the sun has ceased to shine. Michael," she went on, turning to her husband, "take our young friend down to one of the back doors. He would lose himself in this prison. Remember, Wilfred," she added, turning back to him, "you will be a marked man all the way across Europe. As soon as they discover that the jewels have been taken from the bank, they will guess that it is you who have them. They are everything that is left. They will be Elisaveta's sole fortune. You will find her very beautiful and she has a wonderful character. If you succeed, you will deserve whatever she may choose to give you, and if she gives you what I hope, it will be with my blessing. Now I am going to rest for a time."

She held out both hands with an imperious gesture. He bent low and raised them to his lips, but he had not altogether concealed the moisture in his eyes.

"What a lover you will make, my dear Wilfred," she laughed, as she drew away. "You have the sensibility which our Russian men too often lack. See, I make you the mystic sign of the Tartars, the sign of the woman who sends her man to battle, the sign which she may make only to son or husband. It should take you safely to England."

Her beautiful white hand, the fingers of which were laden with the jewels which she had scorned to remove, flashed through the shadows up and down in strange circles and tangents. It finished with a final sweep, outstretched, firm and resolute—and it pointed towards the door.

CHAPTER II

The Prince led his young friend down the vast staircase almost in silence. The same thought was present in the minds of both of them. For generations this smooth marble surface had been pressed by the feet of queens and princesses, kings and ambassadors, the flower of the world's aristocracy. Now the whole place seemed abysmally empty, the stairs themselves slippery with dust, disfigured by the foul relics of an army of raiders with whom had departed practically the whole of the domestic staff. They passed through a labyrinth of passages, unheated, unlit, dank and mysterious. There were rooms full of broken furniture and china, a great kitchen with the remains of a carouse still littering in unsavoury disorder the large table. They came at last to a huge oaken door. The Prince paused before it.

"You have only to cross the street from here," he pointed out, "and you are at the Embassy.... Wilfred," he added, looking into the other's rugged but sensitive face, "both Catherine and I have grown very fond of you during these last few years. I cannot help feeling, however, that we are asking too much. You are not of our country and these are not your troubles. You will risk your life many times, I fear, before you find Elisaveta."

"If I do, what does it matter?" the young man protested light-heartedly. "I think you exaggerate the danger, sir. I do really. I have an Embassy bag, sealed with the good old U.S. stamp—I guess they won't interfere with that—waiting for me in a corner of the Embassy safe. And as for the chamois belt, they'll have to take my clothes away before they find that. I shall get away with them before midnight and when I am once across the frontier I should like to know who's going to interfere with us."

"Do your people know what is inside that belt and the Embassy bag?" the Prince asked.

Wilfred Haven coughed.

"There's no one left to trouble about such things," he explained. "Old Hayes, the Counsellor, is nominally in charge, and he's nothing to do with the diplomatic side of affairs at all. The others are juniors like me, only more so."

"Still, you know, if this comes out, you may be in trouble with your own people," the Prince reminded him wistfully. "It is an absolute contravention of diplomatic usage."

"What can that matter against such a mob as this?" the other scoffed. "Besides, I shall own up and resign as soon as we are safe. I was going to do that, anyway. I want to get into the war. I've had enough of diplomacy."

"You mean that?"

"Word of honour," was the terse but fervent reply.

There was an expression of great relief on Ostrekoff's worn face.

"You have taken a load off my mind," he confessed. "It would be very distressing, both to Catherine and me, if we thought that we had saved the fortunes of our house at the expense of your career."

"You don't need to worry," the young man assured him. "I'm going to be a soldier for the rest of the war, and after that—a banker for the remainder of my life."

The Prince smiled.

"Perhaps it was foolish ever to have imagined otherwise," he said, "when one remembers your father's amazing achievements. I do not wish you, however, Wilfred, to take your enterprise too lightly. If your train, for instance, is in any way delayed, and the news gets out that the Ostrekoff jewels have left Russia, you may find it exceedingly difficult to cross the frontier."

Haven smiled confidently.

"I'll get across, all right," he declared.

"Even when you have succeeded so far as that," Ostrekoff warned him, "remember that the jewels you are carrying are famous in every country of the world. To-morrow, when the bank is seized, as I know it will be, and they realise that the jewels are missing, there will be a hue and cry—not over all Russia but over all Europe. Every likely person who has

left the country lately will be followed and watched."

"You don't need to worry for one moment," Wilfred Haven persisted. "The Embassy seals will get us over the frontier, and after that the thing's easy."

"Elisaveta's address is in the letter with the jewels," the Prince reminded him. "She is a very bad correspondent, I'm sorry to say, but the last time we heard from her she was in a studio in Florence. You will also find the address of her London bankers."

"There's only one thing that bothers me at all," Wilfred Haven remarked, after a moment's anxious pause. "Won't it make it all the worse for you and the Princess when they find that the jewels are gone?"

The Prince unbarred the door. The grip of his fingers brought tears to the eyes of his departing visitor.

"Nothing can make the position worse for either of us," was the grave reply. "I know that our death warrants were signed this afternoon. They will come for us when they have time. What they will find, however, will be our bodies. That is arranged."

Fifty yards down a side street, dominated by the gigantic, encircling wall of the Ostrekoff Palace, followed by one dash across the broader thoroughfare, and Wilfred Haven would have reached the comparative sanctity of the Embassy and his own quarters. He strode along at a rapid pace, his hands in his overcoat pockets, his hat pushed back on his head as though to disclose his Saxon nationality, his eyes everywhere on the lookout for danger. Ahead of him, the sky was red with the reflection of a hundred fires, the air he breathed was rank with the smell of burning wood and masonry. In the not very far distance, unseen men and women were screaming and shouting—a constant wave of discordant sound like the baying of an innumerable pack of hellhounds. He shivered as he pushed onwards, desperately anxious to escape from the hideous clamour. The rioting had been in progress for almost a week, but the horrors seemed to grow rather than lessen. Then, in the middle of the boulevard, within sight of his destination, he was brought to a sudden standstill. The blood seemed to rush to his head. Opposite to him was the tall, narrow house with the flaming windows, and from behind the lower one, where the lights had been extinguished, came floating out once more half-stifled moans of agony and appeal, the cry of that still tortured woman....

The broad boulevard, in the centre of which he stood and up and down which he glanced now with quick apprehension, was temporarily deserted. Every one seemed to have travelled southwards to where the skies grew redder every moment, whence came now long wafts of hot air and the increasing roar of voices. Every instinct of Haven's nature rejected and discarded those cautionary whispers of his brain. He traversed the remainder of the boulevard in a dozen strides. He sprang across the paved yard, mounted the steep flight of steps, and pushed his way past the front door, which had been half torn from its hinges and lay at a perilous angle upon its side. Here, in the main hall of the house, he paused for a moment, breathless. All around him were evidences of wild pillage. From the upper rooms came the clamour of shouting, drunken voices, the smashing of glasses, disorder and riot rampant, a nightmare of furious licence. A paralysing indecision tortured Wilfred Haven in those few moments. Once more his brain had begun to work. He was pledged to a great and dangerous undertaking. What right had he to imperil his faint chance of success by plunging into a fresh adventure? Ostrekoff had spoken the truth. There were a thousand women being maltreated that night. A torrent of human madness and brutality was flowing which no human being could stem. The perilous mission to which he was already committed was full enough of danger and romance for any man. Already from upstairs came the sound of the banging of doors. At any moment the mob might come sweeping down. No one man could stand up against it, and his life, for as much as it was worth, was pledged. Reluctantly he turned away. He had even taken a single step towards the street when, from the room on his right, only a few yards distant, came that same pitiful, irresistible cry for help, weaker now and fainter with a pitiful despair. Hesitation after that was no longer possible. He flung open the tottering door and pushed his way inside.

It was a scene of wild confusion into which he stepped—a bourgeois-looking dining room it might have been, or the *salle à manger* of a pension. There were bottles, mostly empty, and glasses, mostly broken, upon a heavy sideboard which took up one wall of the apartment. In its centre was a long table laden with more empty bottles, plates and debris of various kinds, and—most tragical sight of all—in the far corner, nearer to the window, a girl, bound with stout cords to a heavy easy-chair. Her dark, almost black hair had become disordered as though in a struggle and there was a long stain of blood on her face. Her cheeks were ghastly pale, her already red-rimmed eyes were flaming with terror. Her once fashionable grey dress was torn and dishevelled. There was blood on her finger tips where she had been plucking

at the cords.

"Brutes!" he cried. "Don't struggle. I'll have you out of that in a moment."

He added a word of reassurance in Russian whilst he searched his pockets for a knife. To his amazement she answered him, chokingly, but in unmistakable English.

"A knife? There, by the sideboard—hurry."

He followed the slight movement of her head. A rudely fashioned peasant's knife lay amongst the bottles, already wet and suggestively stained. He picked it up and, falling on his knees, hacked at the cords which bound her. All the time the pandemonium upstairs ebbed and flowed as the doors were opened or closed. The girl was free now from her shoulders to her waist. She had fallen a little on one side and was evidently struggling against unconsciousness. He attacked the thicker cord that bound her knees. Suddenly they heard the dreaded sound—heavy, stumbling footsteps on the stairs. Whoever she was, he thought afterwards, it must have been a fine impulse which prompted her whisper.

"Better go," she faltered. "The house is full of them—they will kill you."

He laughed scornfully. Life and death during those last few moments seemed to have lost their full significance. One more twist of the knife and she was free. He stood up. She too staggered to her feet, but at her first attempt sank back into the chair. Nevertheless, she was standing once more by his side when he turned to face the owner of the footsteps. The latter came blundering into the room, true to type, a large bestial-looking man, his cheeks flushed with drink, his eyes hungry with lust. He stopped short by the table, shouting and yelling wild Russian oaths, a whole string of them, as he saw the girl free from her bondage and Haven by her side. The latter acted on an inspiration that served him well. He wasted no breath in words, but, when he saw the newcomer's long hairy fingers groping towards his belt, he rushed in before he could reach his knife, struck up the hand with his right fist and got home with his left upon the chin. The man was of sturdy build, however, and although he was momentarily staggered, he held his ground and persisted in his efforts to reach his knife. Haven, ducking low, ran in once more, hit him under the jaw this time and sent his victim crashing into a pile of broken furniture.

"Come on," he shouted to the girl. "Here, I'll help you."

He passed an arm round her waist and drew her into the passage.

"Pull yourself together if you can," he implored. "They're coming down the upper stairs now. If they see us, heaven knows how we shall get away. We've only a few steps to go if you can stick it out."

She drew a long breath and one could almost see the nerves of her body quivering with the effort she was making as she struggled towards recovery. With the great smear of blood down one cheek, her torn clothes and swollen wrists, she was a veritable figure of tragedy.

"I am all right," she gasped. "Let us—get out of this filthy house. The air of the street will revive me."

They made their way, stumbling, down the passage and over the fallen front door, his heart sinking all the time at their slow progress. Then the terror broke upon them. Behind, the stairs creaked and groaned with the weight of the howling mob which had turned the corner and come suddenly into view. They had found drink, and they had found booty of a sort, but they wanted the girl. The place rang with their clamour. Some one had lit a torch and they realised that it was a stranger who was stealing off with her. They pushed one another so madly that the banisters gave way, and a dozen of them crashed on to the hard floor. One or two of them lay still, but the others picked themselves up and joined in the onward rush. Haven knowing enough Russian to apprehend the fury behind, pushed his companion impetuously towards the steps.

"Listen," he begged breathlessly, "turn to the left here—up the boulevard, you understand. Twenty yards only and then again to the left. Fifty yards down the street and there's an iron gate—back way to the American Embassy. Hide there in the garden till I come."

"And if you do not come?" she faltered.

He dodged a burning fragment of the banisters which fell at his feet, sending a shower of sparks into the air, and held up

his arm to protect her from the stream of missiles beginning to come.

"If I don't come, it'll be because a dead man couldn't help, anyway," he rejoined swiftly. "You must bang at the doors then and perhaps they'll let you in. If you want to help me now—run."

She obeyed him, although her knees were trembling and her limbs quivering with fear. She tottered down the paved way towards the street, where the darkness hid her almost at once from sight. She became part of the gloom, a shadowy lost figure, staggering into obscurity....

Haven faced the angry crowd, now within a few yards of him.

"Get back, my friends," he shouted in Russian. "I am an American and I am not worth following. The girl is English. It pays to leave us alone."

They answered with a chorus of jeers and began to move stealthily towards him. A constant shower of missiles thrown by drunken hands he easily avoided, but a leaden weight, thrown by a man who seemed to be a blacksmith, passed within a few inches of his head and crashed into a dwarf lime tree. From the rear, a youth came running out of the room on the ground floor, shouting that Navokan, the shoemaker, who was to have had first converse with the girl, lay dead. There was a rumble of angry voices. Haven called to them again, seeking for peace, but no one wanted a parley. They wanted blood. They were stealing around him, those dark figures, and he knew that, if once he suffered himself to be surrounded, their fingers would be tearing at his throat. With a groan he drew the automatic pistol, which he had never yet discharged except at practice, from his pocket. He came of a Quaker family, but he had been brought up in manly fashion enough, though hating bloodshed. He stepped farther back, all the time gaining ground. He was almost in the road now. A piece of burning wood grazed his leg. He kicked it away, ignoring the pain.

"Don't you hear me, little brothers?" he cried. "Why should we fight—you and I? There are plenty of other women in the city—women of your own race too—whose arms are open for you."

No one took the slightest notice of his appeal. The missiles were coming faster—accompanied by a stream of oaths and terrible threats. They wanted the blood of this young man. They meant having it, and tearing his body to pieces afterwards. One of them, who had almost the appearance of a monk, in his long toga-like cloak, a giant brandishing a torch in one hand and a great knotted stick in the other, came blundering forward. He whirled the stick above his head ferociously and they all cheered him on. Wilfred Haven set his teeth. This was the end then. He shot his would-be aggressor through the chest, just as the blow was about to descend, never doubting but that the rest of them would be upon him like a pack of mad dogs as soon as they saw their leader fall. The effect of the shot, however, was in its way astounding. The man, who had felt the hot stab in his chest, stopped short and swayed upon his feet. A look of wild, almost pathetic surprise chased even the wolflike bestiality from his face. He staggered and fell face forward, rolled over once and lay quite still. Retreating slowly, Haven kept his gun outstretched, meaning to gain time for the girl and to sell his own life as dearly as possible. For the moment, however, a miracle seemed to have happened. He was completely ignored. The savage-looking mob seemed to have forgotten their lust for blood and pillage; they were gathered around the body of the dead man, weeping and lamenting like children. Every moment, Haven's eyes opened wider in amazement. Then he realised his good fortune and fled....

Incredible though it appeared to him, he passed out of the gate and along the boulevard without a single pursuer. A few yards down the cross street he caught up with the girl leaning against the high railings and partly unconscious. She tottered towards him and he half carried, half dragged her through the gate he had indicated, into the gardens. Inside, and behind the shadow of some shrubs, he paused for a moment to listen. The tumult in the centre of the city continued unabated, but nearer at hand everything seemed peaceful. He led her along a gravel path towards a formidable-looking door which he opened with a Yale key. As soon as they were both inside, he slammed and bolted it. For a time, at any rate, they were in safety.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he demanded of no one in particular as he leaned against the wall, recovering his breath.

She sank on to a divan with a little sob of relief. With one hand she pressed a fragment of torn handkerchief to her eyes; the other sought weakly for his. Wilfred Haven, who was not in the least used to holding a girl's hand, patted it awkwardly.

"Come, that's fine!" he exclaimed, drawing off his overcoat. "We're out of our troubles for the present, at any rate. I'll get you some tea or brandy in a few minutes and we'll decide what we can do for you."

Her eyes sought his, eyes of a wonderful deep blue, almost violet, eyes that were pathetically eloquent with gratitude.

"You have been wonderful," she told him. "Holy Maria, what I should have done without you!"

"That's all right," he declared hurriedly. "Somebody else would have chanced along, I expect. I say, you're in rather a mess," he went on, looking at her ruefully. "We haven't a woman in the house and I'm afraid most of the rooms upstairs are dismantled."

"If I could wash—"

He threw open the door of a large old-fashioned lavatory and bathroom opposite.

"No one uses this place," he told her. "Lock yourself in and I'll come and fetch you in twenty minutes' time. We're in a terrible muddle here because we're clearing out to-night, but the Russian servants always keep some tea going and there's plenty of wine or brandy. I'm going to leg it upstairs and get a drink myself, as fast as I can."

She smiled at him—a somewhat distorted gesture. Notwithstanding her ruined clothes and generally dishevelled appearance, there was no doubt about her beauty.

"I shall take anything that you give me, but do not be longer than twenty minutes, please," she begged, with a faint shiver. "Before you go, will you promise me something?"

"Well?"

"You spoke of clearing out. You are going away. You will not leave me in this city?"

He looked at her, thunderstruck. The possible consequence of his act of chivalry occurred to him for the first time.

"But—but, my dear young lady," he pointed out, "don't you understand we're quitting? We're off across the frontier to-night—unless they change their minds and throw us into prison instead."

She smiled at him once more through the closing door and this time it was by no means a distorted gesture.

"Across the frontier," she confided, "is just where I want to go."

CHAPTER III

Without a doubt the most thrilling moment of that hectic and amazing journey out of Russia arrived when Walter Pearson, a youth of twenty-two and the junior member of the Counsellor's staff, suddenly drew back from his place, half out of the window, and made a portentous announcement. He pointed to the line of lights in the distance towards which the train was lumbering.

"The frontier!"

John Hayes, the Counsellor and senior member of the little party, who was smoking a long cigar, was apparently the least interested. Rastall, the third secretary, the whole of whose personal belongings had been looted at the railway station before leaving, was still searching for fresh oaths and remained entirely indifferent. Wilfred Haven, who was conscious of the warm pressure of a chamois leather belt around his waist, and to whose left wrist was attached, by means of a chain, the Embassy bag by his side, shivered with excitement as he realised that the actual commencement of his great adventure was close at hand. What the girl felt was not easily discerned, but there was a vague shadow of apprehension in her eyes. She drew nearer to her companion.

"This is a terrible journey," she murmured. "If only we were safe on the other side!"

"I shouldn't worry," he answered reassuringly. "They aren't likely to turn you back. You've even got your passport, which is more than I expected."

"Passports are all very well for you," she said, "because you are foreigners and your passports have the diplomatic visas. The Russia even of these days, dare not offend you."

The Counsellor withdrew his cigar from his lips. He had been in a state of silent but simmering indignation for the last two hours.

"Well, I don't know, young lady," he objected. "I should say they'd done their best to get our backs up. Three hours we sat in this cattle truck before they let us start. Nothing to eat or drink upon the train, or anywhere else that I can discover, except what we brought ourselves. No sleeping accommodation, and one of the foulest crowds of fellow passengers I've ever seen in my life. My back's up already. I can tell you that. If ever this country gets a government again, she'll hear something from us. We may be running it rather fine, for we're the fag end of the show, but we've all got diplomatic passports and they don't call for this sort of treatment."

The girl sighed. She was wearing a neat, but shabby black dress and a worn fur coat, discarded garments of one of the Embassy typists. The only head covering they had been able to procure for her, however, was a boy's black beret, under which she seemed paler than ever. Her eyes were fixed almost in terror on that encircling row of twinkling lights.

"So long as they let us pass," she murmured. "Any country in the world, but never again Russia!"

"I think you'll find they'll be glad enough to get rid of us," Haven assured her. "If they're going on as they've begun, they won't want foreigners around."

The long train rumbled over a bridge, which was apparently in course of repair, and almost immediately came to a standstill. They were in what appeared to be a temporary station—a long shedlike building with a rude platform. A blaze of lights about a quarter of a mile farther down the line seemed to indicate the real whereabouts of the depot.

"What the mischief is this place?" John Hayes growled.

Haven let down the window to look out, but the rain had turned to sleet, and an icy wind set them all shivering. He pulled it promptly up again.

"Can't see anything anyhow," he announced. "No good worrying. Let's wait and see what happens."

On the other side of them, the outside corridor was thronged with a motley crowd of men and women of probably every nationality and class in the world, who passed up and down slowly and with infinite trouble, like dumb, suffering animals. Here and there was a person of better type, but upon the countenance of every one of them was the same expression of mute and expectant terror. They pressed white faces against the windows of the compartment, looking in

with envy at the comparative comfort in which Wilfred Haven and his companions were seated. One or two even tried the handle of the locked door. The whole place seemed to be at their mercy, for there was apparently no train attendant nor any guard. Yet on the whole, except for a couple of fights amongst themselves, which amounted to little more than scuffles, they behaved in orderly enough fashion.

An hour passed without any sign of movement. Suddenly there was a stir. Every one in the corridor crowded backwards. From the lower end of the car came the sound of loud voices and heavy footsteps. The girl shivered.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Haven whispered. "These men, after all, have a certain amount of authority. The sooner we get it over the better."

The footsteps and voices reached the next compartment. Presently there was a disturbance. The outside carriage door, opening on to the platform, was thrown open. They all gathered around the windows, and a shiver went through them. A small, thin man, with a mass of blond hair and a look of despair upon his face, was being led away, handcuffed, by one of the station police. A woman, left behind, was shrieking from the train window. The girl leaned back in her place and closed her eyes.

"I wonder more people do not go mad these days," she murmured.

Their own time had arrived. A man in some sort of a military uniform, with a red sash around it, stood over a station attendant whilst he unlocked their door. The mob of people had crept away from the corridor. In the background were two soldiers with rifles.

"Passports," the officer demanded.

Counsellor John Hayes, as became his position, took command of the situation.

"We are the last of the staff of the American Embassy in Petrograd," he announced. "Here is my passport. I am official Counsellor in Chief. One of these young men is my assistant, the other two are junior secretaries, the young woman is an English typist."

The man glanced casually at the passports and handed them back.

"What have you in those satchels?" he enquired, pointing to the Embassy bags, of which there were two others besides the one chained to Haven's wrist.

"Official papers belonging to the American Government," Hayes replied.

"You are not allowed to carry documents of any sort from the country," the official declared. "They must be sent in for inspection to the commandant."

"The documents we are carrying cannot be disturbed," John Hayes insisted. "The bags are sealed with the official stamp of the American Government, which is guaranteed immunity."

"Of that I am not sure," was the harsh rejoinder. "The Russia of to-day is a new country. We do not need foreigners here and you are welcome to go, but what you carry with you is another matter."

"Whatever form your new government may take," Hayes pointed out, "it would surely be folly to start by making an enemy of the United States."

The officer spat upon the floor. The gesture seemed to express his contempt for the United States and all other foreign countries.

"Your passports are in order," he conceded. "You are free to leave the country and stay out of it. As for your bags, however, that is different. All luggage must be examined."

"You can tell your superiors that we claim diplomatic privileges," Hayes directed a little pompously.

"Who cares what you claim?" was the scornful reply. "Those days have gone by. I shall report the presence of the bags. They will probably be confiscated."

He turned his back upon them. The two soldiers shouldered their rifles and the cavalcade moved on, the station attendant having locked the door. Hayes, with a twinkle in his eyes, pulled down the curtains and opened the bag nearest to him.

"In case of confiscation," he announced, "here are two bottles of the best Embassy champagne, ham and bread. The greater part of our troubles being over, I say—let's celebrate! What have you got in your bag, Wilfred?"

Wilfred Haven, with about three million pounds' worth of Ostrekoff jewels chained to his wrist and slung around his waist, hesitated for a moment before he answered.

"Nothing so sensible as you, sir."

Hayes was already cutting the ham, Pearson was twisting the wire of a champagne bottle. There was a gleam almost of greed in their faces. The cork popped and the glasses were filled. Hayes busied himself by laying slices of ham upon the bread. The girl whispered in Haven's ear.

"Tell me what you have in your bag."

He laughed at her, recovered as though by magic from his depression and fatigue. The tingle of the wine was in his throat, the golden sparkle of it was exhilarating; through all his veins the warm blood seemed to be flowing with a new vigour. He handed back the glass which he had emptied and Hayes replenished it.

"My love letters," he confided.

She made no comment. Her eyes studied the outline of the bag and a faint, incredulous smile parted her lips. Then she drank her wine, and, for the first time, a shade of colour crept into her cheeks.

"Well, that's done you good, anyway, young lady," the Counsellor remarked graciously. "By the by, I haven't heard your name yet."

"My name is Anna Kastellane," she confided.

He handed her over a carefully made sandwich.

"Now let's see what you can do to that, Miss Kastellane," he said.

She took it between her slim, delicate fingers and bit into it with an appetite which was near enough to voracity. She kept her back to the one uncovered window, turning away with a shudder from the sight of the white faces pressed against it. Hayes nodded sympathetically.

"There's nothing we can do about them, I'm afraid," he regretted. "I should say there were a thousand people upon this train—most of them hungry and thirsty—and the first station we come to, where there's any food, they'll wreck the place and get it. We shouldn't stand a chance. Besides, we're tightly locked in. If we wanted to give them anything, we'd have to wait till the doors were opened."

"I am hoping," Wilfred Haven said fervently, "that next time they are unlocked, we shall be free of this accursed country."

The girl ate her sandwich to the last crumb and drained the contents of her glass. Despite all her efforts, her eyes kept wandering towards the bag. She was watching the bulge as though fascinated. Haven could almost have fancied that through the worn leather she could see its dazzling contents.

"So many women have written you letters?" she reflected. "I am sorry."

He laughed light-heartedly.

"I've been in St. Petersburg for three years," he reminded her.

"They are all from one woman?" she persisted.

He passed up her glass to be refilled and offered her another sandwich.

"I will tell you their history," he promised, "the first night we drink a glass of wine together in a neutral country."

CHAPTER IV

With groaning and creaking and jerking of couplings, which sent every one momentarily off his balance, the long train started again on its crawl westward. Walter Pearson, who was aching to see a game of football or baseball, and to whom the ladies and cafés of Petrograd had made no appeal compared with the glamour of Broadway, rose to his feet and waved his glass.

"Here's a long farewell to the foulest country on the earth," he cried.

The Counsellor, who had been looking out of the window, resumed his seat.

"A little premature, young man," he remarked. "That's only a temporary station we've been in—kind of rehearsal for the real thing. The frontier is on the other side of that great semicircle of lights."

Wilfred Haven groaned. The blow fell heavier upon him than upon his fellow worker.

"Are you sure about that, sir?" he asked eagerly. "Those two men certainly belonged to the customs and there was no doubt about the passport officer."

"Positive," was the uncompromising reply. "I've done this journey a great deal oftener than you youngsters, and I can assure you that we're still on Russian soil. When you hear the whistle blow and we leave the next station, you can shout yourselves hoarse."

Haven seemed to have lost his appetite. He laid down his roll and took a long gulp of the wine. The girl by his side watched him curiously.

"Why are you so anxious about the customs?" she teased him. "Love letters are not dutiable."

"I'm not afraid of the ordinary customs," he explained irritably. "The trouble of it is that the Russians are examining all outward-bound luggage and confiscating anything to which they take a fancy. My letters might be the commencement of a great scandal."

"Then this should certainly be a lesson to you," she admonished. "All love letters should be destroyed. Your behaviour to-night is teaching me a lesson. You shall not receive any love letters from me!"

He made no comment and she abandoned the subject, leaning back in her seat and drawing a little away from him. Nevertheless, even in her new position, she seldom took her eyes from the bag which was still chained to his wrist. Haven seemed to have forgotten her very existence. His eyes were fixed upon that growing semicircle of lights. Apprehension was fastening itself upon him. There seemed something sinister in their slow progress towards the station, the curved roof of which was already in view from the window. The attitude of the officials who had recently visited them was in itself disturbing. Law, order, etiquette, diplomatic privileges—none of these things, he felt, counted for a rap in this new world, which was being born in travail and with bloodshed. Violence was the only weapon its inhabitants understood or cared to understand.

Inside the covered station, pandemonium seemed to have merged into bedlam. People were all jammed together, struggling even for breathing room. The train crawled along by the side of the platform until they were almost out of the station again. Then, with the same series of convulsive jerks, it came to a standstill. They gazed out of the window at the seething mob in consternation.

"Where do they come from, these crowds, and where are they going to?" the girl cried.

No one knew. They might have been exiles trying to get back to join in the political cataclysm. They might have been refugees arrived so far and anxious to continue their journey. Men and women, old and young, children and invalids, they were herded together under the low-hanging oil lamps, some of them talking fiercely, others in stolid, suffering silence.

"Say, look at the three musketeers!" Walter Pearson called out.

They gazed in astonishment at the three gigantic figures who towered head and shoulders above the mob which surged around them. They wore long, semi-military overcoats, Cossack turbans and high boots clotted thickly with snow and

mud, as though they had recently arrived from a journey. All the time it seemed to Wilfred as though by slow but powerful pressure they were drawing nearer to the railway carriage.

The attention of the little party was suddenly distracted. The officer who had entered their carriage at the last stopping place presented himself again, followed by one of the soldiers. There was a malicious grin upon his face.

"Open all bags," he ordered.

"I claim diplomatic privilege on behalf of myself and party," John Hayes declared. "The bags of which I am in charge contain only articles of no value, or Embassy papers with which I am not permitted to part."

The officer raised a whistle to his lips. The sound of groaning and shrieking came from the corridor as the advancing soldiers forced their way through the crowd.

"The Government of Russia recognises no diplomatic privileges," he insisted. "Your bags will be taken from you by force unless you open them."

The Counsellor shrugged his shoulders. All papers of importance had either been destroyed within the last few days or sent home a month before. One by one he unlocked his bags. They contained nothing but packets of worthless papers or articles of clothing and food.

"Do what you like with the rest of the things," he grumbled, "but if you take our food—especially that ham—it will mean war."

The official pushed the bags and their contents away from him contemptuously. He pointed to the satchel chained to Haven's wrist.

"Unlock that," he ordered.

Haven rose to his feet. His right fist was clenched and there was murder in his eyes. To fail so soon in his enterprise! It was incredible.

"I'll be damned if I do," he answered.

The official held up his hand and two of the soldiers pushed their way unceremoniously into the carriage. Haven looked at the naked points of their bayonets and made a rapid calculation. The situation seemed hopeless.

"The contents of this bag are not my property," he declared. "I have promised to defend them with my life and I shall do so. You can murder an American official, if you think it worth while," he added. "You'll get all the trouble that's coming to you in this world before any one has a chance of dealing with me. It's hell for the three of you, I say," he shouted in Russian.

His right hand jerked out of his overcoat pocket. With his elbow doubled into his side and his automatic held in a steady grip he stood for a brief period of madness, his finger upon the trigger, the gleaming barrel not more than a couple of yards from the Russian officer's heart.

"Don't be a fool," Hayes thundered out. "Are you mad, Haven?"

At that moment and during the moments that followed, Wilfred Haven certainly thought that madness had enveloped him and that he had passed into the world of oblivion. What had happened wasn't possible. They must have killed him and this was the nightmare of resurrection. Nothing that had taken place was possible and yet there he was. The outside door of the compartment, against which he planted his back, had suddenly been opened, and he had fallen into the grasp of two of the huge men whom they had seen battling their way through the mass of people. He was between them now, their hairy overcoats pressed against him, the weight of their bodies all the time forcing him on. In front was the third man, swinging his arms to right and to left, clearing a way for him through that surging mass of humanity. A hundred pairs of curious eyes seemed to be looking at him with indifferent wonder. No one appeared to be greatly disturbed by the fact that this young foreigner was being dragged through their midst by three officials who were probably conducting him to the nearest wall. They gave way where they could and fell upon their neighbours with groans when they were pushed on one side. From the waiting train behind came a confused sound of shouting and over their heads the bullets whistled. A not unpleasant sense of impotence crept over him. He was entirely powerless, ready to accept what fate might come. His

fingers were locked like mechanical things of steel around the handle of the bag which was still under his arm. He had concentrated so completely upon it that to him it was the only thing in life. He had long ago ceased his first struggles and was now even assisting his own progress. In the clutch of his captors, he passed through the great overheated waiting room, the doors of which were lying flat on the floor. Once under the outside shelter, they all four, Haven included, broke into a run and issued directly into the huge snow and wind-swept yard which, compared with the thronged station itself, was almost deserted. Exactly opposite the door a large automobile was waiting with flaring lights. Haven, notwithstanding his great strength, was literally thrown inside. Two of his three guardians mounted with him into the interior, the third took his place by the side of the immovable chauffeur, who appeared to be merely a mass of furs. In a few seconds they were off, bumping across the yard, out of the iron gates. They turned their backs upon the lights of the town and plunged into what seemed to be a long, evil-looking road, leading into impenetrable gloom. Haven, with the bag under his arm, and the snowflakes which drifted in through the half-opened window stinging his cheeks with their icy coldness, found breath at last to speak.

"Where the hell are you taking me?" he demanded.

The man opposite to him shook his head. The one by his side, however, answered at once in correct but guttural English.

"We are obeying orders," he announced. "There will be no danger for a quarter of an hour. American gentleman had better take a drink of this."

He produced a huge flask and filled a small silver cup full of brandy. Haven drank it to the last drop. After all, he could never be in a worse mess than he had been in on the railway train. The bag was still under his arm and neither of his two companions appeared to feel any curiosity concerning it.

"You are a brave man?" his neighbour asked.

"I don't think I am a coward."

The other was loosening his overcoat.

"Then rest tranquilly for a few minutes," he advised. "Rest is always good."

Haven leaned back in his seat and drew a long breath of relief. Somehow, his two companions, terrifying though they were externally, imbued him with a sense of confidence. He was beginning to feel a man again. The bag was there, still chained to his wrist. His fully charged automatic remained safely in his pocket. He could feel the warmth of the belt with every breath he drew. They were travelling at thirty or forty miles an hour across a great plain, a drear enough region in the daytime, he imagined, a black chaos now, with occasional pin pricks of light.

"Look out of the window ahead," his companion invited.

He obeyed, although the snowflakes stung his cheeks and the icy wind nearly sucked away his breath. Far away down the straight road, several miles ahead, was a huge electric-light standard, the unshaded globe of which was like a ball of white fire.

"Do you see the light?"

"I should be blind if I didn't."

"The frontier."

"Which way?" Haven asked quickly. "I don't know where we are. You can't mean that we shall be back in Russia."

The man by his side shook his head.

"No," he confided, "it will be Poland. Where the light flares, it is the end of Russian territory. There we shall be stopped for what we take out of the country. Just beyond, where the red light shines, are the Polish customs. Both are very dangerous to us."

"No way round, I suppose?"

"There is no way round," was the uncompromising reply. "The country for many miles here is a marsh. Under the lights

are sentinels. The Russians will fire at us, we shall fire back at them. From the Poles, we have not, I think, so much to fear. They can use the telephone and have us stopped farther on in the country—if they can find out where we're going."

"By the by, where are we going?" Haven enquired.

His companion ignored his question. He had produced an automatic twice the size of Haven's and was crouching by the window, ready to open it.

"You have a gun," he muttered. "I felt it."

"Yes, I have a gun," Haven admitted. "I'm not sure whether I could hit much going at this pace."

"Keep in the bottom of the car. You take my place or Ivan's if we are wounded."

"I wish to God you'd tell me who you are and where we're going," Haven complained. "All the same, I'll take a chance."

They seemed to be nearing, if not a town, some sort of a settlement. The lights flashed past them. Suddenly they came within the arc of that great white circle of illumination. Haven caught a glimpse of men tumbling out in huge overcoats from a square white stone building at the side of the road. There was a challenge, unanswered—a shout—a shot—then a fusillade of shots. The side windows of the car were smashed to pieces and Haven felt his cheek cut by one of the flying fragments. All the time their own automatics were barking out. There was the swish of a bullet through both windows of the car, piercing the astrakhan turban of one of the kneeling men.... They were outside the circle of the white light now, travelling at a tremendous pace, swaying from side to side of the road, surrounded by a perfect tornado of snow thrown up by the wheels. The bullets from behind were coming more scantily. A single challenge reached them from underneath the red light. The men in the car withheld their fire and passed safely.

"Are either of the two in front hit?" Haven asked breathlessly.

His immediate companion let down the window and talked to the chauffeur for a moment. When he drew back there was a look of relief upon his heavy inexpressive features.

"It is good news," he announced. "Neither of them are touched. In a quarter of an hour we leave the main road. Once we have done that, no one will find us."

Haven lit a cigarette and addressed himself to his English-speaking friend.

"Now look here," he began firmly, "you're giving me a jolly good run for my money and I must admit that you got me out of a nasty hole at the railway depot, but who are you? How do you come to be mixed up in my affairs? For whom are you doing this?"

The man by his side was unexpectedly solemn. He lifted his hand in a salute. His companion, as though automatically, followed his example.

"We are Ostrekoff men," the former confided. "Three brothers. Alexis is my name, Ivan there, Paul outside. We have formed the bodyguard of His Highness since he became Chief of the Imperial Household. Before that we were rangers here on His Highness' estates in Poland and down in Georgia. Those days are over. Russia is a lost country. This is the last time we work for our master."

Haven felt a new and delightful sense of security. But for the dignity and aloofness of their own manners, he could have almost embraced his three companions.

"And where are you taking me now?" he asked.

Alexis suddenly sprang up, threw down the window and looked out. He talked rapidly to the driver and their speed diminished. Presently they turned abruptly to the right, continued for about a mile along a villainous wagon track, and stopped. There was no building to be seen, not a house anywhere in sight, nothing but a bare, barren plain. Then lights flashed out scarcely a dozen yards ahead of them, and, drawn up by the side of the road, they saw another and even larger automobile. Alexis waved his hand in triumph.

"Descend, Master," he begged Haven. "It is here we change."

"And afterwards?" Haven asked, as he buttoned his coat up to his throat.

"An hour's drive and then there will be safety. Wait till Paul has cleared the snow, then descend."

A spade had been produced and a way made clear. Quickly everything was transferred to the other car. Then they all turned their attention to the deserted one. On the right-hand side of the road was a drop of about twelve feet into the marshes. The driver turned the wheel, the three giants pushed. In a few seconds the great vehicle slid over and fell with a crash of breaking glass and splintering wood-work. With less than ten minutes' delay they were off along the new road, travelling more slowly now but also more smoothly. The three brothers were all inside, the other chauffeur having taken the front seat. Haven looked at them in amazement. Ivan, the shortest of the three, must have been six feet four, Paul was at least an inch taller, and the English-speaking Alexis, his immediate guardian, was little under seven feet.

"If you have been the Prince's men all your lives, what will you do when you leave me, now that the Prince and Princess are dead and the estates are broken up?" he asked them.

A moment before they had all been laughing and chatting volubly with the vivacity of children. Paul had been snapping his fingers and humming the tune of a Russian folk song. They were suddenly dumb.

"You will go back to Russia? You have wives and families perhaps?"

"We have wives and families," Alexis groaned, "but whether we shall ever see them again God only knows. It is a dunghill which we have left. There is no Russia."

"You don't believe in the new freedom then?" Haven asked.

"What does that mean to those of us who have served the Prince?" Alexis growled. "The people are mad. They have red poison."

"When we leave you," Paul confided in broken English, "we shall go south. In Georgia there may be hope. Around Moscow and in Petrograd we are known as the Ostrekoff men who have sometimes guarded the Tsar. There will be nothing but a prison or the wall there for us."

Their progress grew slower as the snow storm became denser. Sometimes the runners of the car became blocked and they had to stop while huge chunks of frozen ice were cut away. Haven, lulled into a curious sense of security, and worn out with the excitements of the day, began to doze. He woke from a fitful sleep to find Alexis rubbing the window clear with his coat sleeve. They had just passed between two great iron gates, with a lodge on each side, and were travelling up what appeared to be an avenue bordered with tall trees, ghostly white. At the end of about half a mile they pulled up in front of a square stone house of great size. Alexis sprang to the ground. The others tumbled out after him. Notwithstanding their height and weight, they all seemed to have the vitality and light-footedness of boys.

"We are arrived!" Alexis exclaimed. "American Master will be glad. There will be fire and food. It is a great journey we have made."

Strange-looking peasant servants opened the door and came out, bowing and curtseying. One, who seemed to have something of the dignity of Alexis and his brothers, and was evidently a sort of major-domo, led Haven across the stone hall to a great dining room, bare except for an enormous table and a score or more of fine oak chairs, all emblazoned with the Ostrekoff arms. The walls were panelled with some ancient wood which showed everywhere signs of decay. At the farther end was a musicians' gallery, empty and dilapidated. The place was marvellously heated by an immense stove, set in front of a fireplace, upon which an ox might easily have been roasted. Haven threw off his overcoat and stretched himself with a delightful sense of returning animation. He dipped his fingers in a porcelain bowl presented by Paul, passed them over his forehead, wiped his face and hands on fine linen offered by Ivan, and drank a glass of old vodka tendered by Alexis. In the background, the little company of servants were still peering and gesticulating.

"Where are we?" Haven enquired.

"It is the shooting lodge of an estate belonging to His Highness," Alexis explained. "Once there were bear here and His Highness would come for the shooting. Now the farmer and the farm hands live near by. The Master will be safe. We shall watch. There is food coming."

Haven flung the water once more over his eyes and conquered for a time his deadly sleepiness. He sank into the chair which Alexis had placed at the end of the table. Half a dozen servants had been running back and forth, but the place was now deserted. In front of him stood a huge brown dish full of some sort of stew. Alexis removed the cover. A deliciously appetising odour escaped with the steam which floated upwards toward the ceiling. There was a loaf of bread, and a great chunk of butter on one side; on the other, a bottle of whisky, a bottle of red wine of Hungarian growth, and a jug of water.

"American Master is served," Alexis announced.

Later on, in a room almost as large as the banquet hall, and on a bed the size of a tent, Haven slept like a log. Outside on the landing, with his back to the door, Alexis, with his gun on his knees, also ate his stew, smoked his pipe and watched through the night until he was relieved by Ivan. Downstairs, in the centre of the hall facing the front door, Paul too, with a rifle by his side, ate his stew and watched.

CHAPTER V

Morning dawned without visible signs of its coming. Huge banks of black clouds still held the earth in darkness. Haven sat up in bed with a shiver. Alexis was busy piling logs into the stove. He looked around with a cheerful smile.

"All day long it will snow," he announced. "It is good."

"The devil it is!" Haven grunted. "Why?"

Alexis stood up. He was dressed only in shirt and breeches and a huge mass of tousled hair almost covered his face. The eternal smile was there, however, at his lips.

"Our tracks here," he explained, "all buried—all lost. The car feet deep in the snow. No one will find."

"But who do you suppose is looking for us here?" Haven enquired.

Alexis drew a little nearer to the bedside. His expression became grave.

"Early this morning," he confided, "we had word by telephone that a body of Russian revolutionaries had crossed the frontier. They come by order of Starman, the peasant miller, the man who is now sacking Petrograd. They have special passports, with an appeal to the authorities here: they come in search of you—American Master."

"Good God!" Haven exclaimed. "What about pushing on?"

Alexis shook his head ponderously.

"Too much snow," he said. "Here they will not find us. We are hidden. The world is hidden. The road along which we travelled is part now of the marshes."

"But it is late in the season for snow like this," Haven pointed out. "It can't go on. Surely we should be safer if we got farther into the country and then made for one of the towns?"

"Safer here, American Master."

Haven considered the matter, frowning.

"What about telephoning to the nearest barracks?" he suggested. "Russian revolutionaries have no right this side of the frontier."

"Telephone went at five o'clock this morning," Alexis announced. "Either broken or cut ten minutes after we received our message. Paul has been out to examine. He thinks cut. What does it matter? We have food and wine and we are three who have broken up a mob. We shall protect young master. Those were our orders from His Highness. There is nothing else left to us in life."

The fire was roaring in the stove. Haven turned over in the bed. He felt the belt around his body, he patted the satchel chained to his wrist.

"I suppose you know best," he muttered drowsily and slept once more.

Haven awoke from an aftermath of sleep, marvellously refreshed and acutely aware of two strange happenings. The one was a positive blaze of sunshine, filling the crude, but stately apartment in which he lay with soft and almost unnatural illumination, and the other was the distinct crack of a rifle which seemed to him to come from immediately below his window. He slipped from his bed and peered out. Some forty yards away, from the centre of a circle of what, in the summer time, might have been turf, a youth in the costume of a Russian peasant, but wearing a grey military overcoat, was crawling on all fours. Under the trees of the avenue a little gathering of men were moving restlessly to and fro, talking and arguing together. Presently one of them emerged with a white handkerchief tied to the end of a stick. He paused to speak to his comrade, who was now limping back to shelter, and helped him for a few yards in his progress.

Then he approached the house, waving his white flag vigorously, and came to a standstill about a dozen yards from the front door.

"Who will speak with me?" he called out.

Haven was on the point of completely opening the window, in order to hear better what was going on, when he felt a couple of mighty arms around his waist. He was drawn back by an invincible force.

"The master must not show himself," Alexis insisted. "It is for him they come, this rabble."

"Are these the men you spoke of?" Haven asked. "Who are they? Where do they come from?"

"They have crossed the frontier after you," was the grim reply. "They are Russian revolutionaries, men of Starman the miller."

"But they can't follow me here," Haven objected. "This is Poland."

Alexis shook his head.

"The great war wages," he said solemnly. "Men do strange things. There is Starman, and there is a little Jew who loves money, fighting for power in Petrograd. What does trouble with a sister country such as Poland mean to a country in the making, like Russia, when the laws are all upside down and an honest man does not know whom to call his master? It is money alone which counts and money which they must have."

Haven looked straight into the blue troubled eyes of the senior of his three guardians. How much did they know, he wondered? And, if they knew everything, how much did they fear?

"Why should they expect to find money here, Alexis?" he asked.

"The young American master knows," was the calm rejoinder.

Haven walked the length of the room and back again. The satchel was tucked securely under his arm.

"Who is talking to them below?" he enquired, as he neared the window again.

"It is Ivan," Alexis confided. "He is better at words and it is he who is on guard there. If only the snow had not suddenly stopped, they would never have reached us. If the young master would hear what Ivan says, he must remember always to keep himself invisible."

Alexis lifted the window sash a few more inches and Haven, kneeling down, listened.

"We tell no lies," he heard Ivan say. "We are not men who deal with anything but the truth. We are Russians as you are and we love our country as you do. But we have with us one who is in our charge—an American who carries with him papers belonging to his country. Him we shall conduct to safety, as we promised to our only and great master—the noble Prince Ostrekoff."

The man who stood feet deep in the snow chuckled. He had an evil face, a mouth like the mouth of a fox, narrow eyes and straight black hair almost reaching to his shoulders.

"You have no noble master," he jeered. "Michael Ostrekoff was sentenced to be shot yesterday in the fortress by order of the new Government. He chose to blow out his own brains. Wise man! There were many who would have been glad to kick the corpse of an Ostrekoff."

"Then the new Government may stew in hell before I stir a finger to help it," was Ivan's fierce reply. "Be he dead or alive, we carry out our master's orders. You have crossed the frontier and broken the law. Soon the Poles will be here to whip you and you will wish then that you'd stayed where you belong."

"We waste breath," the man in the snow declared, with signs of wicked temper in his expression and tone. "Give up the young American and what he carries with him, or we will set fire to the house and massacre every one within it."

Ivan laughed, and when he laughed it was as though the timbers of the house behind were creaking and the boughs of the

trees swaying in sympathy. It was a roar of mirth which set even the muscles of Haven's mouth twitching and which brought a grin to the face of his guardian.

"We in this house are the Prince's men on Polish land, in which country our master is also a noble of great account," was the sturdy reply. "If you move a finger against us, those of you whom we do not kill will hang from the trees in the avenue when the Poles arrive. Get back over the frontier if you want to save your skins."

Ivan, with a gesture of contempt, turned around and strode back into the house. The emissary of the marauding band made his difficult way to the shelter of the avenue. The conference was at an end.

Alexis rolled a cigarette of black tobacco, which he emptied into the palm of his hand from a horn box.

"A little fighting," he grunted, "will be good for the muscles."

Haven moved into the anteroom, broke the ice in the zinc bath and, hanging his belt carefully in front of him, stripped and washed.

"The worst of fighting nowadays, Alexis," he remarked, as he crossed to the front of the stove, rubbing himself vigorously, "is that it all consists of little spits of fire, a pain in the chest, a hospital and a coffin."

Alexis nodded gloomily.

"Nevertheless," he argued, "there is also a thrill when the finger caresses the trigger and the eye works from the brain. Paul, Ivan and I, when we were striplings, before the master called us to his personal service, were rangers on his shooting land. We knew where to find wild boar and bears and we could smell the wolves whenever the wind moved. We learnt to shoot in the dark or in the light. Even if the battle comes to us that way, we are better than other men, American Master."

Haven, who had secured his belt and was completing his toilet, glanced out of the window.

"Well, it seems to me we shall soon learn something about a new method of fighting," he said. "You see how they are spreading out, Alexis? What about the back of the house?"

Alexis smiled contemptuously.

"The back of the house," he confided, "is solid stone for twenty feet high with neither foothold nor fingerhold for any human being. There is not a door or a window in the whole wall. Remember we are close to the frontier, young Master, and amongst a troublesome race. When this house was built it was a castle. There was fighting all the time. Even to-day the doors are a foot thick and to reach the lower windows one must climb. These men ask for the cemetery."

"There are only four of us to shoot," Haven reflected, a little dubiously.

"There are six other rangers within the house," Alexis told him. "Besides, there are two who have gone off to Irtsch to report to the Commandant that there is a raid of the Russian revolutionaries. They are men like us who can pick out the white of a bear's eye. Have no fear. It is not from such danger as this that you will suffer. Young Master would like to try his skill with a rifle, perhaps?"

Haven shivered. After all, these black crawling figures, scum of the earth though they might be, were human beings.

"I don't want to kill for the sake of killing," he objected.

"It may be that you will have to kill to save your own life," Alexis replied. "There are more of them than I thought and they all seem to have come armed. I think that Paul and Ivan will be shooting directly. I shall fetch rifles."

Almost as he spoke, three shots rang out from the lower part of the house. The three foremost figures in the line of invaders sank slowly into their bed of snow. Alexis scarcely glanced out of the window.

"I shall fetch rifles," he repeated. "Soon they will have had enough. After all, they have small chance of hurting us, and

for them it is suicide."

Apparently the forward centre of the semicircle had had enough already, for no one hurried up to take the places of the fallen men. On the extreme right, however, nearer the opening from the avenue of trees, half a dozen of the invaders were almost flush with the house. Haven hurried into the anteroom and, opening the window a few inches, took careful aim at the man below with his automatic. The first time he missed. At the second discharge, the Russian, who had stopped with a start at the sound of the first shot, threw up his arms and collapsed. Haven heard the boards creak behind him and turned quickly around. Alexis was crawling like a bear on three legs across the floor, with the butts of two rifles under his free arm. He peered over the sill.

"Good!" he approved. "That was the dangerous spot. Still, one should not miss. It gives confidence. Watch, Master."

The muzzle of his rifle stole downwards. There were three men below, all of different heights, all closing in upon the angle of the house. Alexis' rifle spat out and the first one fell. The second one followed him in a matter of seconds. A bullet from the third sped through the window only a few inches above Alexis' head and buried itself in the wall. The man who had fired the shot and who had moved a step on one side in order to get a better aim never fired another. The sunlight which flashed upon his yellow hair showed the look of sudden bewilderment in his face, the opening mouth and the staring eyes. His rifle fell from his hands, he clutched at his chest, coughing, staggered backwards a few yards and disappeared in the snow.

"Well, well!" Alexis murmured. "They had better have gone to be food for the Austrian bullets. They would have lived longer. If these men had known that it was the Prince's rangers whom they faced," he added, with the happy self-complacency of a child, "they would never have ventured near the house."

The semicircle was broken and the attackers had withdrawn to the shelter of the avenue. Haven and his companion moved back to the front room. A fat, smiling woman, with heavily braided brown hair and face redolent of soap and sunshine, was busy setting out upon a table a huge bowl of coffee, a loaf of bread, some butter, and a great dish of fried bacon. Haven hastened to complete his toilet.

"Sit down, Alexis," he invited.

The man looked at him in round-eyed surprise. He was already standing at attention behind the high-backed chair which he had placed at the table.

"American Master will eat," he said quietly.

A fantastic week! Haven was never able to take real count of it or to realise the swiftly passing days. He seemed to be always tumbling into bed or called to the table to eat enormous dishes of stew—stew composed of bear's meat, hare, rabbit and birds which he judged to be pheasants. There was a great stock of crude red wine always on hand, of which he drank sparingly, and a small stock of whisky and brandy, both of the best. The besiegers who were camped in the avenue appeared to have lost their enterprise. All the time Alexis was walking from room to room, making ceaseless perambulations of the house, continually on the watch for an attack which never came. Only once Haven heard the crack of his rifle, and, hastening to the window, saw a dark splotch which he knew to be the figure of a man lying at the extreme end of the avenue. Alexis beamed at him with all the joy of a contented child.

"They are mad to face the rifle of the Prince's ranger in chief. Does Little Master know what I would do, if I missed one of those pigs? I think that the shame would kill me. It is like burying one's weapon in the hay and shooting the stack."

"You seem to have scared them off pretty well," Haven remarked.

"They wait till the night," Alexis explained contemptuously. "They think they will have a better chance. Ivan there has fixed up a searchlight from the dynamo. If ever they venture to come, we'll turn it on them and shoot them like frightened rabbits."

But there was to be no night attack upon the Prince's shooting box. Just before the coming of dusk on the sixth day, Alexis, who was standing on duty outside the door of the great dining room, made hasty and, for him, unceremonious

entrance. He had laid down his rifle, a sign that it was not an attack he feared, and with a gesture of apology he drew aside the curtain, turned out the lights and threw open the window. Haven, hastening to his side, was conscious of a medley of distant sounds. Through the trees of the avenue came red flashes of flame, there was the thud of horses' hoofs, hoarse unintelligible cries, the crackle of Maxims and the yell of dying men—a battle going on, there in the avenue and in the road beyond, between the besiegers of the shooting box and a new force. Alexis watched long and anxiously. Then he closed the window.

"It is a massacre," he announced. "A company of Polish cavalry with Maxims in motor wagons."

"Bravo!" Wilfred Haven exclaimed. "Now perhaps I shall be able to make a move."

There was no answering gleam of satisfaction on Alexis' face. He walked the room restlessly for a moment; then, saluting, withdrew. Presently he reëntered.

"Little Master will come this way," he invited.

"What's wrong?" Haven enquired, as he rose to his feet.

Alexis explained his fears as they crossed the stone-flagged hall.

"This Russian mob," he confided—"this spawn of the revolutionaries from Petrograd—they will, without a doubt, tell the soldiers who have fallen upon them of the presence here of Little Master, of their own mission, and for what reason he is guarded by the Prince's men."

"I can't see that that matters so much," Haven observed.

Alexis shook his head gravely.

"This is not ordinary war time," he muttered. "Discipline is at an end. Every one is fighting for loot and gain. Young Master will please to be patient for a time. His Highness' last words were 'Trust no one.'"

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Haven asked, with a groan.

"American Master will please to follow me."

Alexis led the way to the musicians' gallery above the dining room. From here he mounted three steps, lifted a picture, and drew back one of the panels of the wall. It slowly opened and disclosed a smaller apartment, which had apparently been prepared for a final retreat, for the stove was lit and a lamp burning.

"Little Master will please remain here," Alexis begged.

They heard the trampling of horses below and the sound of heavy knocking at the great front door.

"If these are Polish cavalry," Haven expostulated, "why can't I go down and introduce myself to the officer in charge?"

"Little Master must please content himself," Alexis insisted. "There may be even worse danger to be feared from those who seem to be our saviours."

It was Alexis himself who, an hour or so later, brought Wilfred Haven his evening meal. He made his customary salute and, accepting from the hands of a servant waiting outside a tablecloth and a few other accessories, placed a roast hare and a bottle of wine upon the table. Haven rose from the couch where he had been dozing and stretched himself.

"What about these Poles, Alexis?" he asked anxiously. "Everything seems peaceful now, so far as one can tell. Is it necessary that I lie hidden here?"

"It is necessary, Little Master," was the grave reply.

Haven seated himself at the table. He felt that there was something behind the other's reticence, but he was beginning to

learn the habit of patience in dealing with his guardians.

"They cleared the other lot off, did they?" he enquired.

"There were very few who escaped," Alexis announced. "Those who did are limping back towards the frontier. Nevertheless, there is still cause for uneasiness."

"In what way?" Haven demanded.

The Russian paused for a moment before speaking. He had left his accustomed place immediately behind the chair of the young man whom he was serving and was standing in the same respectful attitude by the side of the table, an enormous figure in the dimly lit chamber. His expressionless face betrayed little of the thoughts which were moving in his mind. Nevertheless, Haven was conscious of an atmosphere of trouble.

"Little Master," Alexis confided, his tone suggesting the disquietude which was stirring in his brain, "one sees only so far as one's eyes allow, but as it is with me, so it is with Ivan and Paul. We are greatly worried. There is disturbance everywhere. Discipline seems to be at an end. The men who have taken up their quarters in the outbuildings here are drinking and shouting and singing songs which have nothing to do with war or patriotism. They have posted no sentries. It seems as though the licence of the world across the frontier had reached them too. They are under the command of a Colonel Patinsky who once shot here as His Highness' guest."

"They are friendly, I suppose?"

"They are friendly," Alexis admitted. "Yet I beg that Little Master will be very careful. Patinsky appears to have secret knowledge of many things. He is full of suspicions and he asks questions all the time. He is aware of your presence here."

"The devil he is!" Haven exclaimed. "Then what's the use of my hiding?"

"It was not known to us," Alexis pointed out, in his deep throaty voice, "that such a position was possible. The rumours during the week have been that all telephone communication between Russia and the outside world has ceased, that the telephone offices have been blown up and the telephone wires cut, as we know that our own has been. Yet this Patinsky asks me particulars of the young American diplomat, with the satchel chained to his wrist, who left the train at the junction and travelled here under our charge. How did he know of that? Of your presence in this lodge he might hear from the mob they have been fighting, but no more than that. How did he know of our journey and of our mission?"

"Beats me," the young American confessed.

"I am not one of those," Alexis continued, "who speak of the things which happen beneath my noble master's roof. Paul is like that—so also is Ivan. His Highness has never had to do more than lift his hand, and our eyes would become blind and our ears deaf, yet now I shall speak of something in order that you, Little Master, may be prepared for all that may happen. Patinsky, who is in command of this troop of cavalry and who is under this roof at the present moment, is not a man to be trusted."

Haven pushed back his plate and held out his tumbler which Alexis promptly refilled with wine.

"That sounds bad."

"Four years ago," Alexis related, "there was a large shooting party here. His Highness was always anxious to show courtesy to his Polish neighbours and he invited the officer commanding the garrison at Frensh to join us. That officer was Patinsky."

"Well?"

"After the shooting," Alexis continued, "there was always a great feast and cards were played. On the last night it was my turn on duty."

"What do you mean by 'on duty'?" Haven enquired.

"Wherever His Highness went," Alexis explained, "since the days of the Nihilists, in peace time or at war, in the cities

or in the country, we three—Paul, Ivan and myself—took it in turn to guard the person of our master. That night I walked the terrace. It was early in November. The snows had not come, the weather was warm and our stoves were piled with logs. His Highness had directed the windows of the banquet room to be opened. It was there that they always played cards after the service of dinner. As I patrolled the terrace, I was conscious of a great disturbance. I entered the room, as was my duty. His Highness was standing with his finger upon the bell. Krotonoff, his butler and major-domo in those days, who had come down with us from Petrograd, had just entered the room in reply to the summons. There was that light in His Highness' eyes which we, who have known him all our lives, have learned to fear.

"'Escort Colonel Patinsky to his rooms,' he told Krotonoff. 'See that servants assist him with his packing and order a car at once. The Colonel is obliged to leave us.'"

"Sounds like a bad business," Haven observed.

"It was a moment which I have never forgotten," Alexis declared solemnly. "Patinsky was white as a sheet. His hand kept on nervously fingering his side, where his sword would have hung had he been in uniform. His tongue was moistening his dry lips. It seemed as though he had been stricken dumb. He muttered something. His Highness made no reply. There were cards lying all across the table and the contents of a spilt bottle of wine still trickling on to the floor. But such a silence! It is by the silence I remember those moments. Even Patinsky failed to break it. He left the room. The Prince turned to the others.

"'Gentlemen,' he said, 'my apologies.'

"Then he motioned to the servants.

"'This table is befouled,' he added. 'Prepare another one.'

"They hurried to obey. He turned and saw me by the window and waved me away. I knew then that I was no longer wanted. I went back to my tramp along the terrace. That was the last time I saw Colonel Patinsky. It is he who is here to-night, who eats our food and drinks our wine below."

Haven moved uneasily in his chair.

"It doesn't sound exactly pleasant," he reflected. "You say he knows that I am here?"

"He knows," Alexis admitted. "No sort of concealment was possible. Spies have been at work. He knows that you are here and he demands an interview. For myself—many thoughts have come to me. At first it was in my mind to speak to him of that night and refuse Ostrekoff hospitality."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't go very well," Haven meditated.

"The Young Master is right," Alexis acknowledged. "We are in Patinsky's country, he has a troop of a hundred men quartered on the premises. I think it would be wiser for the Young Master to see him. If he should show curiosity about the papers or the contents of the satchel the Young Master is carrying, the Young Master will know how to deal with him. It is not our business. We can answer no question. We can only fight. That," Alexis continued, his voice becoming deeper, "we will do to the death, if necessary, but we think—I think, Ivan thinks and Paul thinks—that it would be well if Young Master talked first with Patinsky."

"Do you suppose," Haven asked bluntly, "that he knows exactly what my mission for His Highness is?"

"Spies have been at work," was the grave but evasive reply. "We have not brains, we three, only strong arms, sharp swords and a gift of shooting so that we kill. The next hours may be for us—this one is the Master's."

Wilfred Haven rose to his feet. Tall though he was, he was a head shorter than his gigantic guardian, by whose side he seemed little more than a smooth-faced boy; nevertheless, during the last nine days his lips had tightened and his eyes had grown harder.

"What about seeing him here and now?" he suggested.

"It would be the best," Alexis acknowledged, his eyes fixed steadily upon the satchel. "I think," he added, "that the Little Master should be prepared for anything that might happen."

Haven nodded. He touched a portion of the chain and his arm was free. He carried the satchel into the small anteroom, locked the door, and returned with the key in his pocket.

"What language does this man understand?" he enquired.

"Any language the Little Master cares to speak."

Haven stretched himself, touched his hip pocket, and lit one of the strangely flavoured Russian cigarettes which Alexis had placed upon the table.

"Let us know the worst," he enjoined, waving his hand towards the door. "Bring in Patinsky."

CHAPTER VI

Haven, during those few minutes of waiting, although he knew very well that he was on the brink of a new danger, felt to a larger extent than at any moment since he had left Petrograd the joyous thrill of this new life of adventure. This was better by far than the day-by-day drudgery at the Embassy, or the horrors of those last few weeks in Petrograd, when one could do nothing but look on at other people's sufferings. He felt his senses alert, his mind active. Early in life, but with amazing completeness, he had become his own master. If he was called upon to face danger, it was for his brain to appraise it. If there was to be fighting—well, he was a stronger man than the average. A skilful boxer, he had a weapon which he had learnt to use without compunction, and behind him were Alexis, Paul and Ivan. He awaited his visitor with little apprehension, almost in fact with pleasant anticipation.

The knock at the door came at last. There followed a faint click and the panel rolled back. A thin, dark man, clad in the uniform of a Polish cavalry regiment, entered the room, followed by Alexis. Wilfred Haven rose to his feet and the other approached with outstretched hand.

"You are Mr. Haven," he said, "late of the American Embassy at Petrograd? I am Colonel Patinsky. At your service."

"Very glad to meet you," Haven replied, pointing to a chair. "Won't you sit down?"

"You are very kind."

Perhaps it was the accident of Alexis' lingering in the background for a few moments and finding some trouble with the catch of the door as he pushed it into its place which was the real cause of the brief silence which ensued. The two men seemed to be taking careful stock of each other during an interlude which, to Haven at any rate, was full of poignant and dramatic significance. The success of his mission which, even in this brief space of time, had already grown to be the one vital thing in his life, might very well rest in the hands of this visitor. Patinsky, for his part almost as deeply, though with far more selfish interest, was studying this powerfully built, somewhat ingenuous looking American with cautious and speculative eyes beneath a mask of courteous interest.

"We have to thank you, I hear, Colonel, for driving off that mob of revolutionaries," Haven observed. "But for you, I think they meant to sack the place, rob us of our supplies and drive us out into the snow."

"You owe me no thanks at all," Patinsky replied in grave and measured English. "We are on Polish soil. It was my duty. Besides, any friend or protégé of my late friend, Prince Ostrekoff, is welcome to any aid I can offer. I have enjoyed the Prince's hospitality more than once under this roof. You will permit me?"

He rose, unbuckled his sword, loosened his belt and reseated himself with a little murmur of relief. There was certainly nothing sinister, Haven decided, in the man's appearance. He was unusually pale for a soldier who, presumably, led an outdoor life, and his dark eyes were more the eyes of a poet than of a cavalry commander. His mouth was a trifle small and lacked strength, and but for his carefully trimmed, military moustache and a gash on one cheek, apparently only recently healed, his general appearance was almost feminine.

"They are bringing us something to drink, I hope, directly," Haven remarked.

Patinsky bowed.

"It will give me great pleasure," he said, "to drink a glass of wine with an American. I should tell you that I have been in New York myself."

Once more the panel rumbled back and Alexis made discreet entrance. He carried a large tray and arranged silently upon the table a bottle of red wine, a flask of vodka, some Scotch whisky, water and glasses. There was a faint gleam of uneasiness in Patinsky's eyes as he watched him.

"The Little Master has further orders?" Alexis enquired.

Haven shook his head. The panel door rumbled back into its place. In less than a minute the ranger's heavy footsteps were perambulating the terrace outside.

The two men both drank whisky. Patinsky, to his host's astonishment, filled his own tumbler three quarters full, then

added a little water.

"The habit of whisky," he explained, "I acquired in England. For three years I was there to learn the language."

"You speak it all right," Haven observed.

"I speak it very good," was the self-satisfied reply.

There was a momentary pause. Patinsky's eyes seemed to be wandering round the little apartment, as though taking note of its possibilities.

"What lucky chance brought you this way?" Haven enquired.

Patinsky smiled gently.

"We are under orders to patrol the frontier," he pointed out. "Raids of this character were to be expected. This mob of revolutionaries, who seem for the moment to have gained the upper hand in Russia, care nothing about the frontiers or," he added, after a moment's significant pause, "about diplomatic privileges."

"So I have already discovered," Haven commented.

"You will not object," Patinsky went on courteously, "to a few questions which I must ask in my official capacity?"

"Not in the least. Go right ahead," the other invited.

"One is permitted to enquire, then, the reason why you, the official representative of a country friendly to our own, were forced to leave the train at the frontier and take refuge here, instead of pursuing your journey in peace?"

Haven stretched out his hand, took a cigarette from the box, tapped it upon the table and lit it.

"The station," he confided, "was in the hands of a crazy mob. They were all blood-red Communists of the worst type. Possibly they believed I had documents incriminating some of their leaders in Petrograd in my despatch box. At any rate, they wanted to search it."

"I see," Patinsky murmured, in his silky voice. "And sooner than gratify their curiosity you made, I understand, a dramatic escape from the station."

"You might call it so," Haven assented.

"With the help of His Highness' amazing bodyguard," Patinsky continued meditatively.

"That is so."

"You were a great friend of Ostrekoff's, one gathers?"

"During my stay in Petrograd," Haven explained, "no one showed me more kindness or hospitality. It happened that a few hours before my departure I was able to be of some service to him. For that reason he wished to ensure my safe transit."

Patinsky leaned back in his chair. He had drunk quite half of his tumbler of whisky without the access of the slightest tinge of colour into his pallid cheeks. He lit a cigarette and gazed thoughtfully into the cloud of smoke.

"I am interested in that frontier incident," he observed. "The mob might naturally imagine, or their leaders might imagine, that you were bringing away papers of great importance in the satchels they wished to search. Knowing you to be a protégé and a close friend of the Prince's, they might even go so far as to imagine that you had stretched the bounds of diplomatic privileges and were taking Royalist property or communications out of the city."

"I have no means of knowing what was in their thoughts," Haven replied coldly. "I only know that they were a damned unpleasant crowd."

A somewhat curious silence reigned for a few minutes. From the stove upon the hearth came the roar and the sizzle of the pine logs and the occasional howling of the wind down the huge chimney. Alexis' footsteps upon the terrace were as

monotonous as the ticking of a clock. There was no other sound. Each of the two men suddenly realised that he was being watched by the other. Patinsky, with a little start, leaned forward and poured more whisky into his glass.

"Our huge friend outside," he remarked, "seems to guard you as zealously as he did his master."

Haven shrugged his shoulders.

"The Prince placed me under his protection," he explained. "A very faithful fellow, I should think."

"He may," Patinsky reflected, "have reasons for his fidelity. You would perhaps be surprised to know," he went on, "that there were very definite rumours down the line. It was, in fact, openly stated that you were taking out of the country property belonging to Ostrekoff."

"An absurd rumour," Haven observed. "We're not allowed to use our privileges in that way."

"One might claim that these were exceptional times," Patinsky pointed out, "and that diplomatic relations between your country and a country which had ceased to exist were of no particular account."

"And then?"

Patinsky shrugged his shoulders.

"There are still many miles of wild country to traverse before you could call yourself in safety. If it were true that you were in such a position, you would do well to make friends with those whom chance has placed in the position of being able to defend you."

Haven followed his companion's example and helped himself, only much more moderately, to whisky.

"I'm not in particular need of help," he declared. "I am in a friendly, I might almost say an allied country. In Warsaw I shall be in touch with the whole civilised world."

"It may be true," Patinsky admitted, "that you are in a friendly country—politically—but there is this unfortunate circumstance to be reckoned with. You are in a very wild strip of it. Nobody knows where you are. Anything might happen to you and no one would know for certain where it happened—*or who was responsible*."

Haven looked steadily at his visitor through the light mist of tobacco smoke and his right hand stole downwards.

"Are you threatening me?" he asked.

Patinsky shrugged his shoulders.

"I should not put it like that," he objected, and his voice had become soft and gentle as a woman's. "I am not threatening you, Mr. Wilfred Haven. Such is not my intention at all. I would remind you, though, that in the event of any little discussion between us, I have at my back a company of well-trained and disciplined soldiers."

"What of it?"

"Simply that if I deemed it my duty to make you a prisoner you would not be able to resist."

"On what charge would you make me a prisoner?" Haven enquired. "I am an American citizen with an American passport and carrying American despatches."

Patinsky smiled very amiably.

"How well it sounds," he observed. "But if those despatches, my friend, instead of being letters and documents, should turn out to be jewels of priceless value—the Ostrekoff jewels, for instance—being conveyed—very improperly conveyed, by the by—to a place of safety on behalf of your late friend, Prince Ostrekoff, then your position becomes a little more—I think your word is—assailable."

The man's smoothness irritated Haven and for the moment he lost his self-control.

"What the hell business is it of yours?" he asked.

Patinsky's long and elegant fingers toyed with his moustache.

"The question is bluntly put," he complained, "but I will reply to it. A few years ago I was a guest in this shooting lodge for purposes of sport. We played cards and there was a debt owing to me. The Prince has never paid."

"Do you expect me to believe a story like that?" Haven demanded angrily.

"Does it matter very much whether you believe it or not?" was the equable reply. "You are here in charge of property belonging to the late Prince. I am sure that he would be delighted to hear that his debt has been paid. You are in this place, as I remarked, practically alone. I am here with a company of fully armed soldiers who would lay down their lives for me. You get my point, Mr. Wilfred Haven?"

"You've been a long time coming to it."

"There seemed no necessity for haste, as we are not likely to be disturbed," Patinsky pointed out. "I will accept as a full discharge of the Prince's liability to me the contents of the despatch satchel which you were carrying chained to your wrist, returning to you any papers or documents with which the American Government is concerned. How does that proposition sound to you?"

"Rotten," was Haven's brief comment.

Patinsky rose to his feet. He had been clever enough all the time to keep the advantage. His fingers were nearer to his holster now than Haven's to his hip pocket. His sword too was within a few inches of his fingers.

"Then I will put the matter before you so that only a dolt could fail to understand it," he said, and this time there was an open sneer in his tone. "You are trying to take the Ostrekoff jewels across to London or Paris. I am here to stop you doing it—I and my soldiers."

"If you or any one belonging to you dare to touch bags with the Embassy seal upon them, you'll be looking for trouble," Haven threatened him.

Patinsky waved his words away.

"Do not be foolish," he begged. "These are days of war. Behind you are the red fires of revolution. You are almost within sound of the German guns. Who cares what is done in such a spot? And who will there be, young man, if you should prove foolish, to bring the crime home to anybody?"

"The idea is to kill me and make a clean job of it, then?" Haven observed.

"I shall certainly kill you," Patinsky agreed, "rather than allow you to leave this place with the jewels. Be sensible. Sit down and drink with me. Open the bag and let us look at them. I have a weakness for jewels. If ever there was a tradesman in my family I think that he must have been a jeweller."

Haven reflected for a brief space of time. At the moment, Patinsky had the advantage of him. The latter's left hand was on the butt of some sort of pistol or revolver and he had also his short cavalry sabre. Haven's own automatic was uneasily resting in his pocket and he was utterly unused to a quick draw. He threw himself back in his chair and, abandoning any attempt at reaching his gun, poured himself out more whisky and filled the other's glass.

"How am I to know," he complained, "whether that cock-and-bull story of yours about a gambling debt is true?"

Patinsky drew a revolver of old-fashioned type from his holster, leaned forward in his chair and laid it upon his knee. His sword also he drew from its scabbard and left leaning against the chair. He poured a few tablespoonfuls of water into the glass which Haven had already filled almost to the brim with whisky.

"You come from a very uncultured people, Mr. Haven," he said calmly, "and you have not yet learned the language which prevails in circles higher than your own. One does not speak of a 'cock-and-bull story,' whatever that may mean, to an officer bearing arms, nor, if one values one's life, does one accuse him of having told a falsehood."

Haven glowered at the speaker across those few feet of space.

"I don't need you to give me lessons," he muttered sullenly. "I wonder what really did take place when you were here on

that hunting trip?"

For the first time Patinsky showed signs of some slight emotion. A small spot of colour stole into his cheeks and there was a hard glitter in his eyes.

"I have told you," he said, "that, when I left, the Prince owed me money which he has never yet paid."

"There wasn't a little matter of cheating, was there?" Haven asked with an ugly sneer.

The effect of the latter's words and tone was exactly what he had hoped. Patinsky sprang forward from his chair and in a second the younger man was upon him. Out of reach of his weapons, Patinsky was little more than a child in Haven's grip. The latter held his wrists together with one hand and, with the other upon the back of his neck, pushed him towards the window. From there he summoned Alexis, who entered the room with a look of dismay as he saw Patinsky writhing and squirming in the "Little Master's" grasp.

"I couldn't help it, Alexis," Haven declared. "He was after us, all right. He says that the Prince owes him money."

"The lie should have choked him," Alexis thundered. "Still, one must reflect! In a few seconds he will be dead—if Little Master is not careful."

Haven relaxed his grip on his antagonist's neck. There was a dark shadow on Patinsky's face, his breath came in short gasps.

"You shall be shot for this," he faltered. "Shot before you leave this place."

Haven laughed scornfully, but Alexis was still looking worried.

"What are we going to do with him?" the former asked.

Patinsky's eyes were fixed longingly upon his revolver.

"Let me go," he gurgled.

They dragged him to a chair. Haven brought him whisky, which he drank greedily. He was obviously incapable of moving. Alexis, with a deep sigh, went to a cupboard and returned, bearing a roll of cord. With perfectly amazing skill and swiftness he tied up the half-unconscious man and, carrying him under his arm, crossed to the distant wall. Here he lifted a picture and touched a spring which formed part of the design of the old wall paper behind. Another panel opened slowly and a small apartment was disclosed. Alexis laid his burden gently down inside, closed the door and replaced the picture.

"I go now," he announced, "to summon Paul and Ivan. This is more serious than anything which could have happened to us on the other side of the frontier."

"It couldn't have been helped," Haven insisted. "I almost wish I'd killed him outright."

"We must leave here at once," Alexis continued gravely. "There are half a dozen officers drinking in the dining room. They were talking of coming to see Patinsky. They are not like him; they are brave enough. There are over a hundred soldiers too, all well disciplined—Patinsky's men. Things are not very pleasant, American Master. Patinsky would murder any one for a tenth part of what you are carrying."

"Let's get away then before they find him," Haven suggested.

"It is arranged," Alexis replied. "When I saw the Colonel Patinsky I feared that this might happen. To the bottom of the avenue, Little Master, as quickly as you can. Ivan sits in the car and the engine beats all the time. I must fetch Paul, for we too shall travel."

"Where to?" Haven asked.

"There is only one road," Alexis answered.

CHAPTER VII

The carefully attired hotel clerk, with his glossy hair and generally spick-and-span appearance—he had almost the air of a Rivièra "gigolo"—gazed at the strange figure confronting him and gasped. He had presence of mind enough, however, to declare emphatically that there were no rooms available.

"Don't stare at my clothes," Haven protested irritably. "I've just got out of Russia. Had adventures by the way. I was in the American Embassy there; you can see the Embassy stamp on this despatch case locked to my arm."

Once more the hotel clerk looked his prospective client up and down. Three times on that long and terrible drive they had met with accidents of various sorts. There was a fresh scar upon Haven's face, mud upon his soiled clothes, and he badly needed a shave.

"Those things might easily be stolen," his inquisitor rejoined. "The hotel management would dismiss me," he added, with a little burst of frankness, "if I were to give a room to any one in your present condition. I would suggest—"

He broke off in his speech. He was suddenly faced with a terrible vision. Towering above him was the tallest and broadest man he had ever seen, a man of huge limbs, a man who looked as though he could have torn him into pieces as easily as a child might pull the legs off a fly.

"You will give a room at once, a suite, to the noble gentleman," Alexis commanded. "He is, as he has declared, of the American Embassy in Petrograd. He is also the bosom friend of my late revered master, Prince Michael Vladimir Ostrekoff. His Highness placed him in my charge. I am his servant until he has reached his destination. As for money—I carry with me all that is needed."

The young man, who had thought nothing at all of Wilfred Haven, was very much impressed by his sponsor. He turned to a ledger, consulted a plan, lifted a flap of the counter and emerged.

"We will see what can be done," he conceded.

For the third time he looked Haven up and down. The sight of the despatch case obviously chained to his wrist and a certain fineness of feature and physique helped him to ignore for a moment the mud-stained condition of his suggested guest. At Alexis he scarcely ventured to glance. There was surely no one in the world who would refuse to do the bidding of such a giant.

"The gentleman will follow me," he invited.

Then, for some minutes, Wilfred Haven walked once more the paths of luxury, breathed the warmed airs of the almost overheated hotel, trod on soft carpets, met without shrinking the curious glances of a whole crowd of civilised people. He stepped into a smoothly running lift and was led into a suite of rooms which reminded him very much of the Ritz. The hotel clerk, with one eye upon Alexis, lingered near the door.

"This suite," he announced, "will cost the gentleman—"

He paused to figure it out.

"American or English money, if you please," Haven begged. "Not that it matters a damn."

"Fifty dollars a day."

"I take it," Haven decided. "Send your valet to turn on the bath. Send soap, bath salts, a coiffeur."

The hotel clerk became almost human. After all, these were stirring times. Perhaps the plight of this strange young man was to be accounted for.

"Everything that is possible for your comfort, sir," he promised, bowing.

Haven was already in the bathroom, which seemed to him a palace of marble-tiled luxury. The taps responded to his touch. The warmth, after that awful ride, was like a soporific. He began to tear off his clothes.

"Alexis," he apologised to the huge figure still towering over him, "forgive me. I must know the feel of warm water. Wait only a quarter of an hour and we will talk seriously. In a quarter of an hour I will face the world. Look at the steam!"

Alexis retreated and held the door ajar.

"The Little Master will see that there are towels there," he pointed out. "There is soap—there are many things. I shall wait in the bedroom."

Then he closed the door, and a few minutes later there was nothing to be seen in that huge bath but the head of Wilfred Haven, with an ecstatic smile upon his face, dabbing at himself with a rough bath towel instead of a sponge.

The hotel clerk, half an hour later, realised that he had taken a right decision. Six feet of splendid young manhood, wrapped in a bathcloth dressing gown received him when he returned a little doubtfully to the suite. Wilfred Haven, with a clean body, was a man again. He spoke with a tone of authority.

"Is that the waiter?" he asked, glancing towards a bowing figure upon the threshold. "Whisky and soda—quickly.... The coiffeur? Good. Get to work as soon as possible on me, please. I must consider what I am going to do about clothes."

"The valet is here at your service, sir," the hotel clerk announced, pointing to a scarlet-coated young man, who was also hovering in the background.

"The costume of Monsieur is prepared," the latter confided, in stumbling French.

Haven, whose face was already covered on one side with lather, turned his head.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "I haven't any clothes."

The valet, who spoke no English, failed to understand. Haven was staring at the bed with a blank expression upon his face. The hotel clerk smiled.

"Your things arrived this afternoon, sir."

Haven sprang to his feet. He stood at the foot of the great wooden bedstead and gazed incredulously at the coverlet. Upon it were neatly arranged a dinner suit, linen, black tie and underclothes. He picked up a collar. It was his own, marked with his initials. He lifted the dinner coat—also his own. He glanced at Alexis, whose expression was very grave indeed. He looked at the hotel clerk, who was smiling and seemed to consider the whole affair a capital joke, and finally he clasped his hands to his head.

"Those are my clothes!" he exclaimed. "No one knew I was coming here—I didn't know myself—I don't even now know the name of the hotel. They were tumbled into a van on a refugee train which I left at the frontier. How did they get here?"

The hotel clerk continued to smile. He also shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur has, perhaps, friends whom he has forgotten," he suggested. "The luggage was delivered this afternoon. The porter compared the name upon the label with your entry in the hotel register and brought them here while you were in your bath."

Haven turned to Alexis.

"Do you understand anything about this?" he demanded.

"I do not understand it at all," the man admitted uneasily. "It is not good," he added, "for too many people to know of the master's arrival here."

Haven resumed his seat in the chair and the barber his ministrations. The hotel clerk took courteous leave and the valet disappeared into the bathroom. Haven looked up at his coiffeur.

"Do you speak English?" he enquired.

The man shook his head. Haven glanced at Alexis—a silent, thoughtful figure, standing in the background.

"What do you make of this?" he asked.

"It does not please me, Master," was the serious reply. "I arranged for the Colonel Patinsky to be released this evening. After that, there may be trouble. It was necessary to give your name because of the passports and the privileges you may claim, but every person who knows of the master's presence here means one more danger."

"It isn't only that," Haven pointed out, when he was again in a position to speak. "Who recognised the bags and got them off that train? Who brought them to Warsaw? Who knew that I would be at this hotel?"

"Those are things one does not understand," Alexis confessed. "And just now the things that one does not understand are dangerous. It is permitted by American Master that I go below? I shall make enquiries amongst the couriers."

Haven nodded his assent and was left alone with his barber. Despite the uncanny appearance of his clothes, he felt his spirits rising all the time. The bath and the whisky and soda which he had just drunk had refreshed him, the odour of the shaving soap was aromatic, the comfort and warmth of his surroundings inspiring. Chained once more to his wrist was his treasured despatch satchel. After all, it seemed to him that the most serious part of his charge was safely accomplished. He was in Warsaw, amongst civilised people; there was an American Consul and an American Minister. He paid the coiffeur with a handful of loose Russian coins and stretched himself luxuriously as he made his way to the bedside.

It was about eight o'clock when Wilfred Haven, happily attired in the garments of civilisation, stepped out of the lift and gazed around with interest at the little groups of men and women seated in the lounge of the hotel. There were a great many officers in uniform and a great many exceedingly good-looking women. The place was beautifully warm, and in the distance a band was playing a mazurka-like tune, with strange harmonies and an intriguing rhythm. His friend, the hotel clerk, came smilingly forward.

"What can I do for you now, Mr. Haven?" he enquired.

"You can tell the head waiter to keep a table for me in a corner of the restaurant," was the prompt reply, "and show me the way to the Bar."

"*Bar Américain*, is it not so, sir?" the man suggested, with a smile. "Exactly *en face*. I will go to the restaurant. Marcos is the name of the head waiter. He will prepare your table. You will find an American bartender and very good cocktails."

The young man hurried away. He was evidently anxious to do all that he could to efface the memory of his unfortunate reception. Haven crossed the thickly carpeted floor and entered the very commodious Bar, behind the counter of which was a white-coated and obvious compatriot. There were easy-chairs everywhere but only one occupant of the place—a young woman in an attractive black evening dress—chic from her temperately manicured nails to her beautifully coiffured hair. She looked up at his entrance and an exclamation broke from his lips. He stared at her as though she had been a ghost. Her queer little smile broke into a laugh at his consternation, her eyes flashed a welcome, she stretched out her hand.

"I am flesh and blood," she assured him. "Come and try."

He was scarcely conscious of his progress across the room. He held her fingers, soft and tense, in his. She laughed into his eyes.

"Others, too, can have adventures," she murmured. "Speak to me or I shall think some terrible Russians have made you dumb."

"Have a cocktail," he gasped.

CHAPTER VIII

The barman, with his smiling approach and familiar, pleasantly material question, brought Haven's feet back to earth.

"What can I mix for you, Madam?" he enquired.

"A champagne cocktail," she decided.

Haven sank into the easy-chair by the girl's side.

"A double dry Martini," he ordered.

"Same as I used to mix at the St. Regis," the man observed reminiscently. "In just a moment."

"I suppose I'm awake," Haven murmured, as the man left them, "but I can't seem to get this straight. The St. Regis bartender—a young Russian lady refugee—the Embassy English typist—you all seem mixed up together somehow!"

"It's all very simple," she assured him. "Life plays us these tricks sometimes. Presently, when that Martini has cleared your brain, you'll see everything dropping into its proper place."

"Well, I'm not going to wait that long for one question," he said emphatically. "Will you tell me, young lady, how you—whom I left in that horrible train—just commencing its crawl across Europe—have arrived here in Warsaw, looking like—well," he went on with an appreciative glance at her, "as though you didn't know what being a refugee meant?"

She laughed under her breath. Everything about her seemed marvellous, even her white gleaming teeth.

"Well, I'll explain," she consented, taking a cigarette from a small jewelled case and lighting it. "After your—well, somewhat precipitate departure, there was practically a riot in the station. We saw you being dragged along by three giants who might have stepped out of the Arabian Nights or the Bible, and the hullabaloo in our carriage and on the platform was something awful. Presently things quieted down and we moved on for perhaps half an hour. Then we came to a standstill again and we were on a siding for—I should think—another twelve hours. Finally we backed and backed and backed until we regained the frontier station. By this time, your Mr. Hayes, or whatever his name is, was like a raging lunatic. He found an interpreter who took him to the station-master. When he came back, he told us that the train was not likely to move again for at least a day, as we had to change on to a broader gauge of rails. We had eaten everything there was in the shape of food and drunk everything."

"Pretty cheerful outlook," Haven observed. "Let's hear the rest, please."

"Well, I decided there was no use hanging on for ever," the girl continued, "so I began to make enquiries on my own. Things were naturally easier for me, being able to speak Russian fluently. I found out that that particular train never could leave because of the difference in the gauge, and no one seemed to be doing anything about replacing it. No orders were being issued and fearful rumours were going about every moment. I decided to try to get away, and as I was passing down the platform, I saw a crowd around the luggage van, every one apparently helping themselves to what they wanted. I noticed two of your bags there, with your name on, and, after about half an hour, I got a man to drag them into the yard for me. They would certainly have been stolen if they had been left there, and I could not think of any place you could go to, except Warsaw. It is not such a miracle, after all, you see! I hired a motor car for some distance and I took the train for the rest. I arrived here this morning. I went out and spent all my money shopping. This afternoon, I was told that you had arrived, so I sent your bags to your room, and when I saw American Bar in letters of fire over this door, I thought there could not be a more likely meeting place—and here I am."

"Well, I was jolly thankful for the bags, at any rate," he assured her. "It was very sporting of you to have bothered about them. I arrived here in such a state that they wouldn't give me a room at first. When they did, and I'd had a bath and was just wondering how to set about getting hold of some clothes, I saw my own dinner suit laid out on the bed. That gave me a start, I can tell you. Seems like a fairy tale even now," he reflected. "And you here too, looking—well, not at all like an English typist! It's hard to realise it all. Grubbing for one's life one moment and confronted with luxury like this," he added, taking his cocktail from the tray, "the next."

"Now supposing you tell me your adventures," she suggested. "I see that you are still clasping your despatch case."

He nodded and a passing shadow darkened his face. Even here, though he seemed to be out of danger for the time being, his responsibilities were certainly not at an end. He sipped his cocktail thoughtfully and appreciatively.

"Yes," he admitted. "I've held on to that."

"Very soon," she reminded him, as she too raised her glass to her lips, "you will be a free man. You might even ring up your Legation to-night and they would relieve you of your charge."

He looked at her steadily for a moment then back again into his glass.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "I suppose I could do that."

"Well, then, why do you not do so?" she urged. "It cannot be very comfortable going around Europe with a case filled with papers of international importance chained to one's wrist."

"I'm not sure," he confided, "whether I should consider my charge accomplished if I shifted it on to the shoulders of the people here. Warsaw isn't the safest city in Europe just now."

"You do not mean to say you are going to try to reach Paris or London like that?" she demanded.

Something in her persistence filled him with a vague disquietude. He suddenly remembered how little he knew of her.

"I'm not sure yet," he replied evasively. "Do you realise," he added, "what complete strangers we are? Except that your name is Anna Kastellane and that you speak marvellous English, I know nothing whatever about you."

She smiled.

"Is that not rather intriguing?"

"Not in the least," he assured her bluntly. "I like to know all about my friends and I hate mysteries."

"If you hate mysteries," she countered, "so do I. Tell me what it is, besides love letters, that you value so much that you must carry it about chained to your left wrist?"

"That's another matter," he argued. "You know enough about diplomacy, I am sure, to understand that even a junior like myself can't talk about his job. On the other hand, any one in the world in my position would be puzzled about you. I bring you away from a Russian lodging house. You haven't even told me what you were doing there or why it is you were there alone, with no one to look after you. I didn't know even, when we got on the train, what your destination was."

"And you hate mysteries," she murmured.

"I do," he acknowledged.

"And I am a mystery," she sighed.

"You won't be for long," he declared, his tone full of confidence.

She studied him pensively.

"Of course I like Americans," she meditated, "but you are just a little—conceited, are you not? Why should you think I should tell you my life's history? We have not known one another very long."

"In measure of days, perhaps not," he assented, "but you must admit that our introduction might help us to dispense with a few preliminaries."

"You are quite right," she conceded. "You certainly have the right to know everything about me you want to. There is not much to tell."

"First of all, I'll give you a choice," he suggested, as the barman approached them. "Another cocktail or dinner?"

"Dinner," she decided promptly.

"Thank God," he echoed with fervour. "How much in good American money, Fred?"

The man's eyes twinkled as he accepted a liberal tip. He seemed on the point of saying something more than the usual conventional word of thanks, but, after a glance at the girl, he apparently changed his mind and made his way thoughtfully back to the counter. A man who had been noisily imbibing some curious form of *apéritif* of the country, detached himself from his acquaintances and leaned over towards the barman. He was a lantern-jawed, melancholy-looking person, with sunken cheeks and a general aspect of ill health, notwithstanding a powerful physique.

"Well, Fred?" he asked.

"Three hundred and seventy one his number is," the barman confided reluctantly. "The key was on the table by his side. He's an American, all right, too. You don't need to worry about that."

"Of course he's an American," the other assented. "An American is as easy to distinguish from other nationalities as an elephant is from a herd of buffaloes. Is that satchel he's carrying chained on to his wrist?"

"Seemed to be."

"And the letters on the case?"

"U.S. Embassy, Petrograd," the barman reported, with increasing reluctance. "Say, you fellows don't want to worry any about him. He's all right—I can tell you that."

The lean man tapped with his empty glass upon the counter and Fred shook him another cocktail. He sipped it slowly and looked around. Haven and his companion were just leaving the room. The light of an unwilling admiration shone in his eyes as he watched the latter.

"Ah, *kakaia krasivaia barichnia*!" he murmured cryptically, which being translated, means, "Damn' pretty woman!"

The fine restaurant of the Hotel de l'Europe at Warsaw was crowded with diners, but Haven's table was reserved in a pleasant and obscure corner. Their vodka and caviare were promptly and excellently served, and the dinner suggested by the attentive *maître d'hôtel* was in every way satisfactory. Haven unfastened the secret spring of the chain attached to his wrist and laid the satchel upon the table by his right hand, where it rested in a position of security against the wall. She watched him reflectively.

"Yes," she observed, "I should think your precious letters would be quite safe there."

"I mean them to be," he replied. "Now, how much are you going to tell me of your life's history, Miss Anna Kastellane?"

She sipped her vodka. Her eyes travelled across the room. There was something in her face which puzzled him—something sad and yet enigmatic. Perhaps he was really imbued with one of those added senses which go to the making of the complete diplomat. Perhaps he was already suspicious, even before she opened her lips, as to whether she was going to tell him the truth.

"There is no 'Miss' in Russian," she said. "You must call me simply Anna Kastellane. I make no promise to tell you everything about myself. I shall tell you all that it is necessary for you to know just for the present."

"The rest," he murmured, "I am to find out for myself?"

"If you are clever enough, or if you think it worth the trouble," she replied. "I am a Russian, although as you have noticed, I speak English, as I do French, as well as my own language. That is because I have lived abroad a great deal. I was educated in Russia, however, and went to college there. I know a great deal about my fellow country people—a great deal that I should like to forget."

He maintained a sympathetic silence. He thought of that awful hour through which she must have passed in the lodging house and he even fancied that he could hear again that terrible cry for help.

"I returned to Russia during the war," she went on. "I thought that I might help. I found it difficult. Russia, for a time, is beyond the help of man or God.... There were circumstances," she continued, after a moment's pause, "which made it advisable for me to keep as far as possible from my own people and my own friends whilst I was in Russia. I took a room in that lodging house, imagining that it was in a safe part of the city. I had already made up my mind to leave, before the last outbreak came. Nothing else matters about me particularly. Now, tell me about yourself, Mr. Wilfred Haven. Tell me how you are planning to get away from here."

The caviare and vodka had been removed and another course was being served. Haven leaned back in his chair. He seemed to be studying the delicately beautiful face of the girl opposite to him, to be gazing even into the depths of her deep blue eyes, but, as a matter of fact, his thoughts were far away and his mind was troubled. Even the junior walks of diplomacy, he decided, were bad for the disposition. No one had embraced his profession with so frank and open a mind as he. All that had changed. Three years in St. Petersburg had altered him completely. Word by word he was weighing up the girl's scanty story. He was trying as hard as he could to believe it—and failing utterly. He knew quite well that, although he was finding her, as he had done from the first moment, terribly and dangerously attractive, there was mingled with his feeling for her a curious and ominous fear.

"Well, I haven't made any plans yet," he admitted. "I shall probably go down to-morrow and see if our people can help me. Pretty well hemmed in here, aren't we? Where do you want to get to?"

"London, if I can manage it," she replied. "I was thinking more about you just for the present. Here, in Warsaw, I must confess that if I were in your position I should feel a little uneasy. Everything is so terribly changed that one does not realise for the moment whether we are in a friendly or an alien city. Every one is shouting and shrieking now about an independent Poland, but as yet there has been no time for the people to have framed a definite policy. They say that the Russian garrison is gone and that there are only Polish soldiers in the barracks. What does Poland mean to do about the war, I wonder?"

"I know nothing," he acknowledged. "I have not been outside this hotel."

"Americans seem to be able to get anywhere they want to at any time. I think I shall tack myself on to you and rely upon your chivalry. Perhaps we could go somewhere underground for the next few months. I should not wonder if we had peace by then."

She looked at him with a curious little smile flickering at the corners of her lips. He was dismally conscious of a change in their relations. He was no longer the saviour of her soul and body. They were fighting a duel. Patinsky had been dangerous. Perhaps this girl, whose deep violet eyes were searching his across the table, would prove more dangerous still.

"You could take your diplomatic satchel with its love letters and the rest of its marvellous contents with you," she murmured. "Your despatches will be out of date, though, by the time you have crawled back into the world."

"If peace comes," he observed, "my mission fulfils itself."

"If peace comes," she repeated, "I wonder what sort of a world it will be."

He seized the opportunity to plunge into general conversation. Anything to keep the talk away from himself and the despatch case. He hated to feel those eyes seeking to bore their way into the knowledge of the things that lay in his mind.

"It all depends upon the end of the war," he said. "At present, it looks as though Germany would win."

"And if she does?"

"Well, I suppose Europe will become a sort of federation of German States. Everything will become Teutonized and we shall be doing the goose step down Broadway."

"Worse than that," she shivered. "Nietzsche would come into his own and the Juggernaut of that hideous materialism which Berlin nowadays calls art will lie like an ugly smear all over the world."

"You don't like Germany?" he queried.

"What Russian does?" she rejoined. "Supposing the Allies win?"

"There isn't much to hope for in that case," he decided. "They will be too exhausted to do more than sit still and pant for half a century, and wonder how on earth they're going to pay us all the money they owe."

She shrugged her shoulders. The discussion seemed suddenly to have lost its interest for her.

"I wonder whether the opera is open," she speculated.

He pointed to a notice on the wall.

"I should think so," he answered. "I'm afraid I could not offer to escort you there, though. I am not in the humour for amusements."

"I was not thinking of going myself," she assured him. "It was just an idle remark. I have friends in the city if I needed entertainment, but I am like you—I feel the urge of getting away."

"Have you too a mission?" he asked curiously.

"Naturally I have a mission," she acknowledged. "Do I look like a person without a mission in life? If I had not, I should scarcely be travelling about in these days. I should be in the drawing-room making bandages or in the hospital nursing the sick. Perhaps I should be better employed there."

"I wonder," he murmured.

She relapsed into silence. Their very excellent dinner came to an end and their conversation dwindled into casual remarks about their neighbours. She rose suddenly to her feet, even before the last course was served.

"I am not happy here," she announced. "Let us take our coffee in that pleasant Bar. It is more *intime*."

"Unless you care to sit down and wait for a moment," he replied. "I am afraid that I must follow you in a minute. They don't know me here and I must stay and sign the bill."

"The waiter will bring it to you," she said imperiously. "Come with me, please. I am not well. I have been through too much. The heat is unendurable. Please!"

She laid her hand upon his arm and its intense clasp conveyed to him something of the nervous emotion which had seized her. Her eyes besought him. He hesitated no longer, whispered a word to the waiter and led her towards the door. In a far corner of the restaurant, a man in the brilliant uniform of a Polish general, who had half risen to his feet, resumed his place.

CHAPTER IX

In the Bar there was pandemonium. Every chair was occupied and every inch of space. News of the great advance on the Western Front had just come in and was being discussed feverishly. Haven and his companion turned back into the lounge and found two chairs in a retired corner. They ordered coffee and sipped, with dubious appreciation, some Polish liqueur, which had been recommended to them.

"I really do not know," she remarked, "why you still look so worried. It seems to me that your mission is accomplished. To-morrow morning you will see the Stars and Stripes flag flying at the other side of the square. You have only to deposit your precious papers there and afterwards you can devote yourself to the worthy object of escorting me to my secret destination!"

He lit a cigarette with deliberation. If those vague suspicions of his had any foundation, her remark was subtly put.

"As a matter of fact," he confided, "I am under orders to take my despatches through, either to Paris or London."

She looked at him with wide-open eyes. Notwithstanding their seclusion, she dropped her voice.

"You do not suppose," she suggested, "that any one of your chiefs in Petrograd has been making use of you?"

"There was no one there who would be likely to do that," he assured her. "Besides, I don't quite see what you mean."

"It sounds far-fetched, of course," she admitted. "But my idea was this. You have not lived in Russia for three years without finding out that for generations the Russian aristocracy and wealthier classes have had no fancy for ordinary investments. The money for which they have made their peasants and miners toil to fill their pockets has gone into jewels."

"You sound almost revolutionary yourself," he remarked.

"Perhaps I am," she acknowledged calmly. "I did not appear to be much in favour with the people, though, did I, when we first met?"

She shivered as she spoke and for a moment he shared her emotion. She seemed to-night so beautiful, so delightfully feminine, so imbued with that air of delicate aloofness which from the first had made its impression upon him, that the thought of her at the mercy of that howling, lustful mob brought back a chill of terror, rekindled perhaps his protective sense.

"Don't let's talk about that," he begged. "What is it you are suggesting in plain words?"

"Isn't it obvious?" she asked, a little impatiently. "Couldn't you guess why those officials were so anxious to get at the contents of your satchel? Some of your chiefs were, without doubt, more gallant than you, and your satchel could easily contain a fortune in jewels. It is not my affair, however. I am sorry that I mentioned it. All that I would ask of you is that you complete your great kindness to me and let me accompany you through the next stages of your journey."

"If it is possible," he promised her, without, however, any show of enthusiasm. "It may not be easy. To-morrow I shall get a map. I shall see by which route it is best to travel."

"Your Minister here should be able to advise you," she said.

"Do not let us speak of my mission any more," he insisted brusquely. "I have told you that it is my duty to get through to London or Paris as quickly as possible. I shall devote to-morrow morning to finding out how and when I can leave this place and if I find it possible to take you with me I will do so, but on one condition."

"Condition?" she repeated, her eyebrows delicately raised.

He nodded pleasantly but quite firmly.

"The condition is that you ask me no more questions about my mission. Whatever it may be, and whatever description of papers or documents or anything else I may have in my case, they are of a secret nature and I prefer not to talk about them."

She stifled a yawn.

"I agree, of course," she assented indifferently. "If I have shown undue curiosity, it is your own fault. No man should go about with a bag clamped on to his wrist."

"There's nothing in that," he declared. "Why, in New York, all our bank messengers have their satchels chained to them when they're carrying ordinary bills of exchange or bonds."

They fell into silence, a gesture of resentment on her part, he felt, owing to his lack of confidence. It was in his mind to bid her good night. Her own reservations were palpable enough and his sense of security whilst with her had certainly not been enhanced by her half-told story. He was weary too, and the overheated air of the place had a languorous effect. The thought of parting from her, however, was a curiously unwelcome one. She had turned away from him to watch the distant crowd, and, though women had never penetrated very far into his life, he was sufficiently an artist to appreciate the graceful poise of her long-waisted body, the perfect dignity and naturalness of all her movements. He wanted very much to trust her, to believe in her entirely. Her curiosity about his mission might be a perfectly natural one. He went over the moments since his first meeting with her. It was a sheer impossibility that she should know anything about the contents of his satchel, and yet—her arrival in the hotel—her lack of plans—her interest in his doings! Was it possible, he asked himself, that she was following him? His reflections were brought to an abrupt termination. Subconsciously his observation of her had not been wholly a matter of admiration. He had been watching her in other ways also, and he saw distinctly the sudden start, almost shiver, with which she recognised some one who had just detached himself from the throng of people gossiping and drinking coffee in the hall. Her fingers closed tightly upon the handkerchief with which she had been toying. She shrank back in her chair.

"Who is this coming?" Haven demanded.

"An acquaintance, whom I would have preferred not to meet here," she replied.

He weighed her words and believed them. An elderly man in a gorgeous uniform, with a long row of ribbons across his chest, came to a standstill before them, clicked his heels together and bowed. He raised her fingers to his lips.

"Welcome back to our city, Anna Kastellane," he said with *empressement*.

"I am very glad to be here," she replied lightly. "Other places are not so agreeable. You seem gay in Warsaw."

"Mademoiselle," he confided, "we are a city living in a dream. The tragedy which has happened across the frontier might well mean for us salvation."

"Tell me your news," she begged.

He shook his head.

"We have a council sitting night and day, but there was never a time when it was so necessary to almost hold one's breath. Will you be so kind as to present your companion?"

Anna Kastellane obeyed, but there was little pleasure in the manner of her doing so.

"Mr. Wilfred Haven, late of the American Embassy in Petrograd," she murmured. "General Grotzowill of the Polish army."

Haven rose to his feet and accepted the General's hand. He was a fine-looking man, inclined towards corpulence, but with a good presence and flashing brown eyes.

"I sent my aide-de-camp, Mr. Haven, to search for you an hour ago," he announced. "I am in command of the Second Division, whose cavalry is at present patrolling the frontier."

"I have seen nothing of your aide-de-camp," Haven replied, without overmuch courtesy. "What might have been his business with me?"

The General's manner stiffened slightly. He drew himself up and he was certainly a magnificent figure of a man, standing perfectly motionless and almost as tall as Haven himself.

"It may rather be my affair to enquire what is your business in our capital," he rejoined coldly. "The reason I sent for you, and have now sought your acquaintance, is because I understand that a company of my cavalry was instrumental in rescuing you and your servants from a band of freebooters, as these Russian revolutionaries seem to have become, who dared to follow you across the frontier."

Haven thought for a minute of Patinsky whom he had left lying in the secret room of the shooting lodge, with the cords biting into his body, and momentarily he flinched.

"Your information is perfectly correct, General," he admitted. "To my great relief and gratitude your cavalry drove the Russians off and I took the opportunity to continue my journey."

The General stroked his beard.

"I am greatly surprised," he confided, "that I have not received a report of the affair from Colonel Patinsky, who is in charge of the company."

"There was little serious fighting," Haven explained. "The revolutionaries were only out for loot and they made no attempt to stand up against your men."

"They were well advised," the General observed, with satisfaction. "So Warsaw was your destination, Mr. Haven?"

"My immediate one," the latter corrected. "My ultimate one is either Paris or London. Perhaps you could help me with your advice, sir, as to how to proceed. We seem to be rather hemmed in here."

"You would do well to remain in Poland for a short time," the General pronounced. "I am afraid, as a matter of fact, that such a course will become a necessity. We are massing troops upon all our frontiers. The Russian Revolution, which is entirely contrary to the Polish spirit, has changed the whole situation."

"I'm glad to hear it," Haven replied warmly. "Nevertheless, I'm afraid that I must linger nowhere. I am the bearer of despatches which should be delivered either in Paris or in London with the least possible delay."

The General's eyes lit upon the satchel. He scrutinized it in polite fashion through his eyeglass.

"I will receive you at the barracks to-morrow morning, Mr. Haven," he said, "and I will ascertain from the Staff authorities whether there is any chance of assisting your egress from the country. My own opinion is that you must make up your mind to spend a short time with us.... You can offer me no news then of my troop, Mr. Haven?"

"I left them at Prince Ostrekoff's shooting box," the latter confided. "I understand that the telephone and telegraph wires had been destroyed in every direction."

"Nevertheless," the General reflected, "this complete silence—the shooting box is within two hours' march of a fortified town—I find somewhat puzzling. You will not forget to do me the honour then, Mr. Haven," he added significantly, as he drew back a step, "of paying me a call at the barracks before you make any attempt at continuing your journey?"

"You are very kind, sir," Haven acknowledged.

"It is not exactly an affair of kindness," was the calm comment. "Warsaw is in a very disturbed condition, as is indeed the whole of the country. Our plans, whatever they may be, involve and demand secrecy. We are obliged to keep an eye upon our transient visitors, even when they belong to a nation which we respect so deeply as your own."

The General saluted. Haven, who at the latter's request had resumed his seat, rose to his feet. Anna Kastellane bowed. The little ceremony was at an end. Haven watched the departing figure with a frown.

"Now what the mischief," he muttered, "is the meaning of all that?"

She motioned him back into his place.

"For your position in the diplomatic world," she told him, "you are rather a crude person. Let me help you. I will act as a sort of interpretress. First of all, the General is anxious about Colonel Patinsky and his troop of cavalry, from whom he has received no report. You know best whether there is any cause for that."

"You bet I do!" Haven murmured under his breath.

"Furthermore," she continued, "you are like all your race—and the British too for that matter—you have a task to perform and you think you can go straight through with it, stride across continents, direct to your goal, just because of your sacred diplomatic passport. Don't you understand, my dear friend, that the whole world is at war, or on the brink of war? Respect for etiquette and diplomatic usage scarcely continues to exist. You cannot hew your way to safety with your passport. These days are days of crisis for Poland such as she never dreamed of. She is absorbed in her own affairs. She sees the chance of a century and she means to make use of it. If you want to carry out your mission successfully, you will have to use my brains as well as your own."

For once there was nothing slow about Wilfred Haven. He swung round upon her and there was a flame of passionate enquiry in his eyes.

"Can I trust you?" he demanded.

He saw the tenseness of her expression, noted her brief hesitation, and knew that she was between two minds. For him she chose the wrong one.

"My dear young man," she laughed, "these are not the days to trust any one."

CHAPTER X

At six o'clock on the following evening, Wilfred Haven, with his satchel under his arm, entered the Bar of the hotel and flung himself into the nearest easy-chair. Fred lifted the flap of his counter and crossed the floor towards his compatriot.

"I guess you're wanting a drink, Mr. Haven," he remarked considerately.

"You're dead right," the latter admitted. "Bring it to me quick. Anything you say."

"What's the trouble?" the man enquired. "Don't you like this city?"

"I'd like it better if I could get out of it," was the gloomy reply.

The barman nodded sympathetically.

"That's surely a little difficult just now," he acknowledged. "I'll have to fix up something that'll make you want to stay here for the rest of your life."

He busied himself behind the counter and returned in a few moments with a foaming tumbler.

"My new gin fizz," he announced with pride. "Makes you forget everything."

Haven sampled the concoction and approved.

"Say, we've got our own people here, haven't we?" the barman continued. "Consulate, Legation, and all that sort of thing—right up to date. You're some sort of an official, aren't you? You ought not to be in any trouble."

"Yes, they're here, all right, but I'm afraid I didn't make much of a hit with them," Haven explained, a little ruefully. "However, that couldn't be helped. As for the banks, they seem to be terrified of parting with money."

"Got what you wanted, I hope?" Fred enquired.

"Got enough to be going on with. You don't happen to have such a thing as an atlas, I suppose?"

"There's one in the reading room, I reckon," the barman replied. "You stay where you are and I'll fetch it right away."

He departed on his errand. Watching him idly as he crossed the hall, Haven's attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of two figures—a man and a woman—talking together in a corner of the Palm Court. The girl he recognised at once as Anna Kastellane. The man was the cadaverous-looking individual whom he had seen lounging in the Bar on the previous evening. They were conversing with the confidence of intimates and Haven was conscious of a queer little sensation of uneasiness. He watched them, frowning. Such a sensation as jealousy seemed ridiculous, yet he realised in those few seconds that, notwithstanding his intense preoccupation in his own enterprise, he was capable of a subconscious sentiment which as yet he had not paused to analyse. Presently, as though with reluctance, she drew away. He saw her, half turned from him, motion the man to depart. She came across the hall very slowly and apparently deep in thought. Acting upon another impulse, which he did not recognise, Haven changed his seat. He made his way to the bar counter, glass in hand, and climbed on to one of the stools. Presently he heard his name called out softly. She was standing in the doorway of the room.

"At last!" she exclaimed. "I thought that you were lost."

He descended from his stool and turned towards her.

"I haven't exactly been lost," he confided, "but I haven't had much of a day. My people gave me lunch but they weren't very helpful."

"Considering that your despatch case is stuffed with your private letters and your despatches are meant for Paris or London," she observed, smiling, "it is scarcely likely that they would make great efforts for you."

"There's only a Chargé d'Affaires here," he grunted. "It isn't his business to know what despatches I'm carrying. I couldn't get any particular help—that's the great thing—nor as much money as I wanted, for another. I'm going to work things out for myself if I can. Fred's gone to find an atlas for me. The trouble of it is, they tell me that nearly all the motor cars in

the place are commandeered and the railways are in military occupation."

The barman reappeared and very soon they were established in a corner with the atlas spread out between them.

"Will you look at that and tell me how I am to get anywhere?" he demanded bitterly. "The old frontiers are practically demolished, the civil trains aren't running within a hundred miles of the German or Austrian frontiers. Roumania looks more hopeful, but no one seems to know what the Germans have done with the railway line running southwards."

"You are such a restless person with those love letters of yours," she mocked him gently. "Why not settle down here? It is a very agreeable hotel, there is some life still in the place, and here am I willing to do my best to amuse you."

"Too near Russia," he pointed out. "I don't like to think of what may be going to happen there. Besides, don't forget your old general last night. He wasn't exactly imbued with the spirit of hospitality, was he?"

"Did you go up to the barracks this morning?" she asked.

"I did not," he answered. "And believe me, I had very good reasons for staying away."

He closed the atlas with a slam.

"I knew beforehand that it was not the slightest use your studying that," she told him. "There are hundreds of neutrals here already who cannot leave the place. Besides, if you could, it would be most ungallant to leave me here all alone—and unfeeling."

"My first duty," he persisted doggedly, "is to get myself to the other side of Europe safely. You're all right here, anyway. You've plenty of friends and you're a genuine Russian, not one of these revolutionaries whom the Poles are getting after."

"You said just now," she reminded him, "that we were too near Russia for your liking. Does not that apply to me too? Can you not imagine that after the hell I have gone through even the sound of a Russian voice fills me with terror? If the Reds there overrun the country, they will make their way into Poland before long."

"All the people at the Embassy declare that Poland will fight them if they do," he insisted. "Poland is monarchical in spirit, whatever her form of government may be."

"Anyway, I do not want to be left here," she declared. "You run no risk in taking me wherever you go."

"You're a strange creature," he observed. "How do I know that you're not a spy?"

"If I am, I am not spying on you," she rejoined.

"Show me your passport," he demanded abruptly.

She looked at him speculatively.

"Are you mistrusting me?" she asked.

"Not definitely. You're a mysterious young person, though. I find you in a very ordinary sort of house in Petrograd, you turn up here with a marvellous wardrobe of clothes, you seem to know all sorts of queer people. Your stories about yourself are not in the least convincing. There doesn't seem to be any reason for your existence or your presence here or anything. I find you damnably distracting and I'm afraid of you."

She leaned back in her chair and laughed. Her mirth appeared to be so genuine that tears actually came into her eyes. She wiped them away, called to the barman and ordered a cocktail.

"Please try to be polite instead of being silly," she enjoined. "I have sat here all this time and you have not even offered me a cocktail. Your nerves are all wrong. Two dry Martinis, please," she added, turning to the barman. "You can see my passport at dinner time if you like. Will that do?"

"I suppose so. You are going to dine with me then?"

"Am I taking an invitation too much for granted?" she enquired.

"Not at all," he assured her. "I thought you might perhaps have been dining with some of your friends here."

"I have not yet seen any of them except General Grotzowill," she confided. "His little weakness is generally a supper party."

"Have you ever been to supper with him?" he asked bluntly.

"So far," she replied, "I have managed to escape it. To-night, however, I feel that an invitation is pending. The only thing is, he may be too busy with his Council of War."

Haven scowled, took a cigarette from his pocket and tapped it upon the table.

"You have another costume on to-day," he remarked, with a glance at her very neat dark green coat and skirt bordered with astrakhan.

"Is that forbidden?" she laughed. "I may be a spy, you know, and spies are always well dressed."

"I don't see where all your things came from."

"There are very good shops here," she told him.

"I'm not much of a judge, but that costume doesn't look ready-made."

"But you see I happen to be stock size. I waited an hour in the shop whilst they made one slight alteration in the skirt. I hope you like it."

"I like it and it suits you wonderfully," he assured her. "In fact," he went on, looking at her steadily, "I consider you're one of the most attractive young women I ever met in my life. I admire you far too much already, but I am beginning to be afraid of you."

Again she laughed, though this time in more restrained fashion. She raised her glass and the corners of her lips quivered as she looked into his eyes.

"If you challenge me," she threatened, "I shall try to change that fear into some other feeling. It would be impossible? Yes?"

He was in a queer mood, for he spoke to her almost savagely.

"You shall try," he declared. "As soon as this accursed bracelet is off my wrist and I am a free man—you shall try then, if you want to—if you dare!"

"Of course I shall dare! See how brave I am even now," she went on, suddenly caressing his hand. "Of course I shall dare, dear Wilfred. I have known Englishmen with many strange names," she added reflectively, "Englishmen and Americans, but 'Wilfred' is new to me. Are you beginning to trust me a little more, Wilfred? Am I still to bring you down my passport?"

"You are," he replied emphatically. "And don't forget it."

"You want to be quite sure that I am not an international thief or a political spy with fake medicines in my bag and a dagger in my stocking," she mocked him.

"Don't talk rubbish," he snapped. "I never suggested that there was anything so melodramatic about you. I want to be sure that I can trust you, that's all. If I find that I can't, I'm going to crawl out of this country somehow by myself, even if I never see you again."

His tone was perhaps a little more brusque than he had intended. She shrank away for a moment as though he had struck her, then she rose to her feet.

"I will see you down here before dinner," she suggested. "I think I can prove to you then that I have been thinking of you and your safety all day. I have a plan and if, after I have told you what it is, you still wish to mistrust me, you can do so, but in that case we shall say good night and good-bye."

She turned hastily towards the door and swept out of the room, having always the air of keeping her face concealed from him as though she wished to hide the tears in her eyes. As she crossed the lounge, he saw that she held her handkerchief, a crumpled wisp of cambric, between her fingers. He was certainly in a queer temper, for he struck the table with his fist so that his wineglass, with his untasted cocktail, fell crashing on to the floor. The incident did more than anything else towards restoring him to his normal self.

"Sorry, Fred," he apologised, looking across towards the bar. "Come and wipe up this mess and bring me another Martini."

CHAPTER XI

Outside the closed double door of his suite, Haven found a very depressed Alexis standing on guard.

"There is bad news, Master," he announced, as he unlocked the doors, and, following Haven into the room, turned on the taps of the bath. "The police have been here this afternoon. They sent for me. They sent also for Paul and Ivan. They discovered from our passports that we had borne arms for the Tsar and were only released for special service in the household of His Highness."

"Well, what was their trouble?" Haven asked, as he began to undress.

Alexis shook his head sadly.

"They said that the Little Master had no longer need of protection under present conditions, that we had fulfilled our mission, and that if he had enemies it was a matter for the police. Foreign soldiers, or foreigners who have borne arms for their country, are being cleared out of Warsaw. The Police Commissary was a humane man, but he told us—all three—that he must make his report to the military, and that, without a doubt, we should be forced to return to Russia."

Haven reflected for a few minutes.

"I couldn't have taken you much farther, anyway, could I, Alexis?" he pointed out consolingly.

"His Highness' orders were," Alexis declared, "that we should not leave you until you were in safety. This is not safety. Patinsky must be free by this time. He may arrive to-night. At least, he will be in a place from which he can telephone to the authorities. Then, unless the Master has left Warsaw, there will be great trouble."

Haven tried to appear more cheerful than he felt.

"You got me out of Russia—that was the most important thing. I couldn't possibly have reached here without you. As to Patinsky—my word will count for something against his, surely? He tried to rob me whilst on military duty. If he has any sense, he will keep his mouth shut."

"He is a cunning and a bad man," Alexis said sorrowfully. "Against us he will certainly make a charge, and the word of a civilian or of a common soldier against an officer goes for little."

"Then you are best out of the way," Haven decided. "I can deal with the Patinsky affair all right."

"His Highness' orders were that we were to see you to safety," Alexis repeated doggedly.

Haven smiled.

"Well, I ought to be in safety here. Warsaw is a civilised city and I'm not looking for any more trouble at the present. You can't fight the whole Polish army, Alexis, if they insist upon your going back to Russia."

"Has the Master any plans?"

"Not yet," Haven acknowledged. "It isn't easy to move anywhere. My own people seem powerless. They made just the offer I feared they would. They will accept my papers, give me an official discharge for them, and allow me to stay at the Embassy."

"The Little Master did not accept?"

"Naturally I did not. But there may be some trouble about it. Nearly everybody at the Legation is senior to me and I have an idea that they're thinking of ordering me to hand over my wallet. In that case, the Russian Government, such as it is, would claim what there was to be claimed and you can't tell—they might decide to give up the jewels."

"The Little Master has been able to procure money?"

"Not as much as I should have liked," Haven confessed. "Plenty to be going on with, though. The banks here all seem to have the wind up. They think that Poland is going to strike out for herself and I dare say they're right. I can't get over an uneasy feeling about this hotel either, Alexis. I feel as though I were being watched all the time."

"His Highness used to say that this city was always the headquarters of international spies," Alexis confided. "So long as Paul, Ivan and I are here, the Little Master is safe from criminals and thieves. If they send us away, the Little Master must leave the country—it does not matter how—but he must leave it."

"Is there any one special whom you mistrust, Alexis?" Haven enquired, as he tied his tie.

The man's honest face clouded over. He was obviously distressed.

"The Little Master has confidence in the young lady who left the train and brought his clothes here?" he asked simply.

Haven paused to light a cigarette. The question had been torturing him for long enough.

"Why not, Alexis?" he rejoined. "I saved her life, or at any rate, I saved her from becoming the prey of the crowd. I heard her shrieking when I stood at the window with the Prince. On my way back to the Embassy, I heard her call out again. I made my way into the house, found her tied up, and brought her to the Embassy. I shot one man, and half murdered another, and I only escaped myself by a miracle. The Counsellor there didn't like it at all, but we brought her away with us as one of the English typists. When you got me out of the railway carriage, I never thought I should see her again, but it seems that train was held up and she chose to come here."

"And brought the Little Master's luggage," Alexis murmured.

"I always thought that was queer," Haven agreed.

"Will the Little Master describe the house in which he found her?" Alexis begged.

"It was a tall, narrow building just across the boulevard, almost opposite the porter's lodge of the Palace. It was queerly built, inasmuch as there seemed to be no ground floor. The first front window was about twelve feet up. I remember that because there was a drunken brute who dragged her to it to show her off to a mob who were passing."

Alexis' eyes grew strangely expressionless. His lips scarcely moved as he spoke.

"I know that house, Master," he said.

"What about it?"

"It is a notorious house—a house of ill fame."

Haven swung round from the window. He felt a horrible sinking of the heart, and, without noticing what he was doing, he crushed up the cigarette between his fingers.

"Alexis!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure? Think—don't make a mistake. Are you sure?"

"I am sure," the man repeated gravely. "His Highness has had the place closed twice. It was only during the disturbances that the tenants came back to it."

Haven's nerves had stood him in good stead during these days of multifarious agitation, but a momentary weakness assailed him. He sank into the easy-chair and, leaning forward, covered his face with his hands. Those unwillingly spoken, definite words, with all their hideous significance, appalled him. He had fought against his admiration, his swiftly developing feeling for the girl, because he had told himself fiercely that this was no time for anything of the sort, yet now that he was face to face with the horrible suggestions called up by Alexis' reluctant confidence, he passed through a moment of torture. She had always seemed to him, even in her disguise and during all that loathsome railway journey, to be so completely possessed of the innate refinements of her sex. He loved the absence of all cosmetics, the neatness of person which nothing seemed to disturb, the sense of complete mental and moral purity, inexpressible, a wholly dumb and passive charm, but which had been the foundation of his first regard for her. If he was deceived, he was the most utter fool who had ever attempted to blunder his way through the world. A dozen times he had been on the point of telling her his whole story, explaining the entire situation. Nothing but a certain shyness, a clinging to the conventions of his profession, had stopped him. "Not, to trust no one, but to know whom to trust," his old chief had once told him was one of the finest qualities of his profession.... A sudden flash of hope shone in upon the blackness. General Grotzowill had recognised her. There might be something in that; it might mean absolutely nothing.... In the end he decided that he must be ruthless—dine with her to-night and tell her that his mission demanded a solitary journey. He

might try to get into Roumania or one of the Black Sea ports and from there to Palestine. He visualised his journey in a dozen different fashions and forced back all thoughts of this other catastrophe.

He sprang up, brushed his hair once more, straightened his tie and stretched out his arms for the coat which Alexis was still holding.

"I dine in the restaurant," he announced. "If you hear any more from the police, send me word."

Alexis bowed. With his fingers upon the door handle he leaned forward. There was something paternal in his attitude.

"I regret that the Little Master was disturbed by my news," he said. "Russian women of the north are not to be trusted. They are very cold, they are very beautiful and they are very false. They make wonderful spies but they are not to be trusted."

The lump was in Haven's throat again for a moment as he passed out.

Haven was first in the Bar, and when Anna Kastellane arrived he was seated on a stool, drinking his second cocktail. He came across the room at once and led her to an easy-chair. As some malicious chance would have it, it seemed to him that she was looking more beautiful than ever, a little fragile in her clinging black gown, almost pathetic in the appealing smile with which she greeted him, as though she sensed that there was trouble in the air. The proud curve of her mouth and droop of her eyelids reasserted themselves for a moment as she passed a noisy group of obviously admiring officers. Her eyes sought only her companion's. More than ever, he seemed to appreciate the delicate air of aloofness which had always impressed him.

"I do not think that I wish for a cocktail to-night," she decided. "We will have some champagne for dinner instead. They have cashed a cheque for me which I left at my bank—I found the money just now in my room. I am rich. I shall be hostess."

He walked by her side in gloomy silence. The head waiter welcomed them with smiles and gave them the same desirable table. The music was just the right distance away. The dinner proposed by the *maître d'hôtel* was excellent. There was champagne which was not too sweet. Haven realised bitterly what a wonderful interlude the evening might have been, but for that dull pain in his heart. It was not long before she perceived that something was the matter.

"Tell me what has happened," she begged. "You must tell me, please."

He was searching wearily for some evasive reply when a sudden brutal impulse seized him—the primitive man's instinct for destroying beauty that offends him. He told her the truth.

"I have just heard," he said, "that the house from which I rescued you was—a bad house. You know, one of the red-lamp houses where women are bought and sold."

She looked at him for a moment without moving a muscle, her deep blue eyes, fixed upon his, absolutely without expression. Suddenly she gave a shiver which seemed like the rustling of startled leaves before a thunderstorm. Every particle of colour was drained from her cheeks, her lips were parted, a slowly dawning horror crept into her eyes. She seemed incapable of speech and he could think of no words. She had asked for the truth and he had told it. Yet it was ghastly. He felt suddenly like an executioner. He had killed something. Rubbish! Brutality was sometimes best. It was sometimes necessary. He moistened his lips. Again he tried to think of something to say. He felt like a foreigner in a strange country, who had forgotten the few words he knew. He was dumb because his tongue refused its mechanical office. He began to wish, more than anything else in the world, that she would speak. It didn't matter what she said—just one word to break this paralysing silence. The change in her, when at last it came, was unexpected. The blood flowed back into her cheeks. They became delicately scarlet. The hard stare of horror had gone from her eyes and they were growing so soft that he feared to look into them. Her lips too were quivering. He knew that she was going to speak and he felt that he would have given anything to have fled like a coward from his place. She spoke, however, quite quietly.

"I am sorry to be stupid," she said. "That little speech of yours—your very lucid explanation—was rather a shock to me."

"Sorry," he muttered clumsily. It was a miserable word but it seemed to be the only one in his vocabulary.

"Will you tell the waiter to pour me out some wine, please," she continued. "He can take away my plate. I never liked bortsch and the cream is sour. I will eat the salmon."

The waiter obeyed Haven's peremptory gesture and she drank her whole glass of champagne from the brim to the dregs. It seemed to Haven who, though sensitive enough, was not overburdened with imagination, that there was something allegorical in the way she tilted back her head so that the last drop disappeared. Something had happened, something had been disposed of. When she set the glass down and spoke again, her tone and manner were at least passable reflections of her former self.

"I promised that during dinner time to-night I would offer you a suggestion," she reminded him.

"I have not forgotten it," he answered eagerly, only too anxious to escape into some more normal and less tragic atmosphere. "Let's have it."

She watched the carving of the salmon, and waited until the dish was served, with its attendant sauces, and the *maître d'hôtel* had disappeared.

"You have wasted all your time brooding over frontiers and railway trains," she remarked. "Is there no other way of travelling?"

Her idea flashed in upon him at once.

"By air?"

She assented.

"It would be dangerous, of course," she confessed. "But it is at least a chance, and no danger could be greater than that you are courting by remaining in this city any longer. I know the manager of the large aerodrome here and I went out to see him this morning. There are three machines in the hangars, rejected by the Government because they are unarmoured and not heavy enough for serious bombing. One of them might hop across Europe with us, or perhaps I had better say—with you. There would have to be a stop in an enemy country, of course. It would probably be in Austria."

"Before I say a word," he insisted, "let us have this much of an understanding. If I make use of your idea and try to get away by plane, you will accompany me?"

"I was hoping to do so," she admitted coldly. "Eventually I could pay my share. Have you any money?"

"A little. All I could get hold of to-day. They might let me have some more to-morrow."

"How much exactly?"

He made a mental calculation.

"The equivalent of about two hundred pounds in English money when I have paid the bill."

She reflected for a few moments.

"With what I have, we might start on that," she decided. "You could get more in such countries as Holland or Switzerland, I suppose?"

"Any amount, in a civilised country where the banks are doing ordinary business," he assured her.

"The pilot will want eventually five hundred pounds," she warned him. "He has to commit an indiscretion in taking the plane out of the country and it may be some time before he will be able to return."

"He can have a thousand if he lands us in any neutral country without accident," Haven promised.

She lowered her tone. Her face continued to wear its strange mask of impassivity. Her words seemed draped with icicles. The eyes which had laughed companionably into his a few hours ago were like polished ovals of steel.

"The *maître d'hôtel* pays us too much attention," she confided. "There are people in the room whom I mistrust. For a time we speak of other things—or not at all."

She lit a cigarette and leaned back in her chair, whilst the waiter carved a duck at the table. Haven, to whom ordinary conversation just then was impossible, followed her example and took note of his surroundings. The room was crowded; the majority of the women in evening dress and wearing beautiful jewels, the men nearly all in uniform. Many admiring glances were cast towards his companion, a few curious ones at Haven himself. The music throbbed in the background, always with a vivid sense of movement, a note of incitement underlying its sweetness....

The duck was served with all its proper accessories. Anna Kastellane stubbed out her cigarette and sat forward at the table. The wine waiter filled their glasses and retreated. They were alone once more.

"From whom did you discover the nature of my profession?" she asked him calmly.

He looked at her with beseeching eyes, but he realised that she was cased in steel. He choked back all the things he longed to say.

"My information referred only to the character of the lodging house from which I rescued you," he replied. "My informant was Alexis of Prince Ostrekoff's bodyguard. He and his brothers were quartered at the porter's lodge opposite."

She inclined her head.

"He was perfectly correct in his statement," she admitted. "The house was notoriously one of ill fame. That was why I was surprised that the young women upstairs made such a fuss. They always received the most impossible people."

His grip upon the stem of his wineglass was becoming dangerous, but he could have cut his finger through at the moment without noticing it.

"I suppose they like the pretence of choosing the people upon whom they confer their favours," he remarked.

"That may almost have accounted for my own emotion," she ruminated.

"Why not?" he muttered, grasping the side of the table and glaring across at her.

"Your friend Alexis, I suppose, has also confided to you his suspicions that I am a spy," she continued.

"You told me that yourself," Haven reminded her shortly. "What about that passport?"

She opened her bag and handed it across the table. He studied it for a few minutes inattentively. The bearer, he learnt, was known as Anna Kastellane. She was twenty-two years old, her hair was dark, her eyes were blue, her figure was slim, her profession was undeclared and her birthplace had been at Petrograd. He folded the document up and returned it to her across the table. It was partly sheer devilment and partly genuine suspicion which prompted his next question.

"What about the other passport?"

He failed to shake her immobility.

"What other passport?"

"The one you had in your bag when the man came around in the railway carriage."

"So you were looking over my shoulder," she observed, in a tone which sounded as though it would have been scornful, if the matter had been worthier of her attention. "What else did you see besides my lipstick and my powder puff and my handkerchief? Did you make a mental list of everything?"

He took refuge in silence—a silence which she did not attempt to break. He ate and drank and crumbled his roll upon the tablecloth. Life was a filthy mess. This dinner had been nothing but a bitter discipline. He hated his companion almost as much as he adored her. She showed signs of wishing to leave and he called for the bill. Then she spoke.

"My other passport," she confided, "is for use in case of emergency. You evidently have not studied the art of espionage.

To be a real success, a woman needs to be able to change her passport as often as her lover. We will take coffee together in the lounge and settle this matter of the aeroplane. You are probably in greater danger here than you realise. I am not too well placed myself. I go to my room for a few minutes. Will you wait for me where we took our coffee last night?"

They left the room together but parted at the lift outside and Haven made his way towards the Bar.

CHAPTER XII

"Coffee for two in the lounge and one Grand Marnier," Haven ordered. "I'll take a liqueur brandy at once."

Fred passed on the order to his assistant, but supplied the liqueur brandy himself. He poured it out with great care and glanced around cautiously. The place was practically empty.

"Mr. Haven, sir," he said, "I'm going to give you a straight tip. You can bet all you're worth on it—and it's this: get out of Warsaw. However quick you were thinking of going, go a little quicker."

"What's your good news, Fred?" Haven asked.

"That's it. The warning you've had, and don't you forget it," was the impressive reply. "There's no more coming—not from me, at any rate. I've said enough now to lose me my job and very likely land me in prison. I don't care. Americans have got to stick together in a mess like this. You're for it, Mr. Haven. You and whatever you've got with you that other people want. If you loiter about here any longer, it's in the other world I'll be mixing the next cocktail for you!"

"Good fellow, Fred," Haven muttered. "Listen. There's not a soul within hearing. I know I'm in difficulties, but who's for my blood?"

"There's a long-faced, dark chap always hanging about here. Spends half his time at the telephone. I saw him talking to a friend of yours this evening. Well, he's got a pal who doesn't show up here, and, from what I heard—I was in the next telephone box this evening—he's the man who's aiming to wipe you off the earth. He hasn't shown up yet, but the other man's watching you. And you take it from me, Mr. Haven, without any offence, there's never been bad trouble round that a dame hasn't had something to do with it. You get me?"

Haven tossed off his brandy and tucked his satchel carefully under his arm.

"I'm afraid I do, Fred," he admitted.

He crossed the hall and seated himself at the table which Anna Kastellane had indicated. The minutes passed but there was no sign of her. Instead, there advanced a melancholy cavalcade down the broad staircase—Alexis, upright and imposing as usual, walking with dignified and leisurely strides, but after him a sergeant and two soldiers, the latter with drawn bayonets. Alexis quickened his pace as he saw his master and bowed low before his chair. At a word from the sergeant, the soldiers dropped their bayonets. They stood, nevertheless, at attention.

"American Master," Alexis announced, "the end for us has come. We have kept our word faithfully to His Highness so far as the fates would have it. An order has arrived from the General commanding the garrison. We are to return to Russian soil to-night. One may be willing to fight," Alexis added, with a mighty sigh. "We cannot fight the Army of Poland."

"You've done your job nobly," Haven declared, rising to his feet. "You couldn't do a thing more. You and Ivan and Paul have served me magnificently and through me—the Prince. It isn't an easy task I have before me—you know that, Alexis—but I shall succeed, I shall carry out my promise—you can rely upon that."

His hand was straying furtively towards his pocket. Alexis stopped him with a dignified gesture.

"Little Master," he said, "we have served you for the love of His Highness, for whom we would have laid down our lives."

Haven held out his hand. The Russian stooped low and kissed it. Then he drew himself to his full height and saluted.

"The Master will carry out his charge," he concluded. "He will be as faithful to His Highness as we shall be to his memory in life or death."

They marched away, a strange procession, Alexis magnificently indifferent to his escort, and Haven felt his heart sink, was conscious indeed of a strange sense of loneliness as they left him. Anna Kastellane sank into the chair by his side with a hard little laugh.

"The tale bearer!" she scoffed. "Has he discovered more stories to recount of my horrible life? He seems to have found

some trouble on his own account."

"It is trouble splendidly earned," was the cold retort. "Can we discuss further this scheme of yours?"

"We must discuss it now or never in this world," she answered. "In my capacity as spy, I have been telephoning to various 'associates.' You are in a very bad way indeed. I can assure you of that. You have private enemies who are watching your every movement and you have official ones who are only waiting to declare themselves until they can do so with some show of authority."

"I don't see why I should suddenly become so unpopular," Haven observed, lighting a cigarette. "What laws have I broken? What country have I offended? I am, after all, an American official doing my duty."

She struck him across the mouth with her fan—lightly, and as though in fun, but with deliberate intent.

"I am tired of your obvious lying," she complained. "I will be as blunt with you as you have been with me. You have broken the laws of Russia, if such a country can be said to have any laws, by bringing out of it two or three million pounds' worth of jewels which had already been confiscated by the State. You have broken the laws of your own country by using your ambassadorial seal for protection and your ambassadorial satchel to hide the jewels in. It is true you have crossed the frontier and arrived in Poland, but this country is still under the domination of Russia. You see, you are in a very bad way indeed."

"And you?"

"Oh, you have been clever enough to find out all about me," she mocked. "I am a spy and a prostitute and a most unpleasant person to be connected with. I left Russia with one false passport and entered Poland with another. I am going to have supper with General Grotzowill to-night. If I do not succeed in making him my slave—with all my experience, it ought to be easy—I shall probably be standing up with my back to a brick wall to-morrow morning, instead of stepping into that aeroplane with you. The authorities here are most disagreeable about me. They do not seem to understand my profession at all."

For a definite interval of time, brief though it was, Wilfred Haven was illogically and ridiculously conscious of one sensation and one sensation only. He had forgotten the dangers of which she had spoken in plain words. He remembered only that single statement of her intentions. She was going to supper with the Polish general who had looked at her so strangely, yet with so much obvious admiration, on the preceding evening. He struck the table with his fist, his fist which seemed swollen with upstanding veins, and he scowled into her face.

"We are going to set to work to find that aeroplane right away," he insisted. "You are not going to supper with that damned Pole."

Her astonishment at his outburst, if it were not genuine, was a triumph. Her features even lost a little of their impassivity. She laughed at him mockingly.

"Who on earth will stop me?" she demanded. "I may be doing this to save my life, but I rather expect to be amused. He is elderly, perhaps, but he is an aristocrat and his manners are excellent. It is a pity," she went on, "to have to sup so soon after our excellent dinner, but the General is impatient. I have just spoken to him upon the telephone. He may be called back to duty at any moment."

Haven's eyes were ablaze.

"You shall not go," he declared.

Her eyebrows were slowly uplifted. She looked at him as though he had taken leave of his senses.

"The strain of these days has been too much for you," she murmured. "You have to win your way to safety as men should—with your right arm, your sword and your revolver. A woman has to use other methods. Fortunately, my experience at the tall house opposite the porter's lodge, where Prince Ostrekoff's bodyguard lodged—"

He rose suddenly to his feet. For a moment, as he towered forbiddingly over her, she suffered a spasm of genuine physical fear.

"You can go to hell by yourself," he declared. "I'll find my own way out of this blasted country."

In the Bar, Haven discovered his friend very busy and indisposed for conversation. He sank into an easy-chair which commanded a view of the lounge and ordered some more coffee. Fred, obviously unwilling to be seen in conversation with his patron, sent it to him by a waiter. Leaving it untasted, Haven, after a few minutes' sombre reflection, made his way down to the great rotunda of the hotel where the bookstall and various offices were situated. A little queue was already formed before the railway bureau and he took his place in the line. The agent would be able to give him the information he wanted. There must be some way of getting somewhere. He edged forward, about a foot at a time. Every one who reached the wished-for goal seemed to spend endless minutes at the window. Probably when he got there, he reflected, the man would be unable to speak English or French and his own inadequate Russian would fail him. He moved on another foot. The whole thing was very depressing. He thought longingly of mounting towards the clouds, of the hum of an aeroplane, of being out of reach of uniformed officials, past the barrier of red tape, free to carry to a successful issue his great purpose. Another foot forward! He was fifth in the line now. A small man with a smile extending all over his face, a man who might have been a commercial traveller or a small tradesman, was just leaving the window. He carried a railway ticket clenched in his hand and seemed to have hard work to keep from dancing. Obviously the trains were still running to some places. Haven tried to think of the name of another town in Poland which might not be a military centre. If he could get there, he might be able to purchase an aeroplane without incurring any suspicion. If only he could get a train to-night—get right away from any chance of seeing Anna Kastellane again—away from the whole madness of it—devote himself entirely and utterly to his trust. He felt a touch on his arm. He looked down. A small boy in the uniform of a chasseur handed him a scrap of paper. He untwisted it and read. There were a few words only, scrawled in pencil:

> Whatever madness you may be guilty of, make no inquiry concerning the possibility of leaving Warsaw by automobile, train or aeroplane. All your movements have to be at once reported to the Bureau and my scheme then would be ruined for both of us.
>
> A.

To the overwhelming joy of a heavy-footed and weary man next behind him in the line, Haven relinquished his place. He made his way slowly back towards the lounge. He had told himself firmly that he would not once glance towards the spot where he had left Anna Kastellane. He broke his word, however. In the very act of pressing the bell for the lift he looked around. The chair in which she had been seated remained unoccupied, although her coffee cup was still upon the table, but in the place where he had sat, and which he had left so precipitately, was the dark, lantern-jawed man with whom he had seen her talking behind the palms on the previous day.

Haven was waiting for the lift when he felt a touch upon the shoulder. He turned around and was confronted by his friend the young hotel clerk.

"If you could spare a moment, Mr. Haven," the latter begged, "the manager of the hotel, Mr. Nakoli, would like to see you."

Haven was out of temper, angry with the whole world and sick at heart. He answered almost roughly:

"If the manager wants to see me, I shall be in my apartment."

The young man made a sign to the lift attendant, who removed his thumb from the button which he was about to press. The lift remained stationary.

"It would be better for you to come to the manager's office, sir," he begged. "There is another gentleman there from the police. It is a matter of some importance."

Haven turned away from the lift.

"Take me there then," he assented shortly.

The clerk led the way across the lounge and down a long passage to the back of the general offices, at the end of which he paused and knocked at a door. In response to an invitation to enter, he stood on one side and Haven, passing in, found himself faced by a typical, black-bearded, middle-aged Pole seated at a desk, with the sallow complexion of a man who has smoked too much all his life. In an easy-chair by his side was a man in plain black uniform, a man with a brown beard, hooked nose and light blue eyes of deceptive mildness. The hotel manager rose and bowed to Haven.

"Do you speak French?" he enquired.

"After a fashion," Haven admitted. "I'm more at home with my own language."

"We speak French, if you please," the other begged. "It is necessary, as Colonel Madriwill speaks no English. I have the honour to present to you, Mr. Haven, Colonel Madriwill, Chief of the Police of Warsaw and connected also during war time with the Intelligence Department."

Haven bowed and accepted a chair. He sat there, gloomily silent, the satchel still under his arm.

"Colonel Madriwill has come to me," the hotel manager continued, "to explain the views of the authorities with regard to the passing through Poland of various foreigners who, owing to recent events, have been driven to leave Russia hastily."

"Do you blame them for wanting to leave such a pigsty of a country?" Haven demanded.

"A Government has no sympathies," Colonel Madriwill intervened. "Its outlook is controlled entirely by the political necessities of the moment."

"At the same time," Nakoli chimed in, "Mr. Haven, being on his way back to his own country, must understand that Poland looks without the slightest sympathy on the present state of affairs in Russia. It is permitted to me to say this because I am not an official person. I myself believe that before many weeks have passed Russia, who no longer exists as a military force on the side of the Allies, will find herself engaged in civil war. The sympathies of Poland will not be with the Red army."

"It is unnecessary to enter into a long explanation with this young gentleman," Colonel Madriwill said smoothly. "Let him understand the position in which we find ourselves placed. It is this: A formal complaint has been received by us from an organization which seems to call itself a Commission for Public Safety, and the document is signed by several men who I suppose consider themselves officials of the new Russian Republic. A definite complaint is made that you, Mr. Haven, have left the country with stolen property amounting to a very large sum. There is a further demand that you be handed over to a military escort who are on their way here."

"You know perfectly well that if you hand me over you will be guilty of murder," Haven observed.

Colonel Madriwill smiled politely.

"Fortunately," he explained, "as we have not recognised any new Government in Russia, we are technically in order, in refusing to give you up. At the same time, our secret agents in Russia have given us to understand that a large body of the troops are remaining faithful to monarchical principles and, responding to an appeal by the Grand Duke Michael, are forming themselves into separate units. There will be civil war for a certainty. I now take you into our confidence, Mr. Haven. This country, as you can well imagine, is exhausted. I put it to you that we would rather fight the Russian revolutionaries, if fight them we must, after the Grand Duke has marshalled his troops and the White Army is prepared to take the field."

"What has all this to do with me?" Haven asked, a little bewildered.

"Just this," the Chief of Police explained. "We do not wish to seem discourteous to the representative of a friendly nation, but we should be glad if you would spare us the embarrassment of your presence here."

"That is to say," Nakoli put in, "the Government would be glad if you would withdraw from the country before the arrival of the escort."

Haven leaned forward in his chair. Again he felt the anger hot in his veins.

"Do you suppose I don't want to leave your—your damned country?" he demanded passionately. "Do you suppose I'm

here as a tourist, going round with a Baedeker to look at your galleries and your buildings? I've been hunted here, I've been in danger of my life all the time. I'm only aching now to escape. Show me how to get into some civilised or friendly State, and I'll be as glad to leave you as you will be to get rid of me."

"In that case then," the hotel proprietor remarked, "we are of the same mind. Mr. Haven is willing to leave to-night. That is according to your wishes, Colonel, is it not?"

"Absolutely," was the complacent reply.

"Having decided that," Haven observed, "perhaps you will advise me how to get out of your city and where to go to."

The hotel proprietor extended his hands in deprecating fashion.

"Alas, that is a different matter," he sighed. "Our connections with the outside world are temporarily broken off."

"What you ask me then," Haven pointed out, "is to leave here for either Germany, Austria or Roumania—which we understand is now in the hands of the Germans—be stripped of my possessions and interned for the rest of the war."

The Chief of Police stroked his beard.

"You appear to have come here, Mr. Haven, at your own will," he reminded him, "so you can scarcely expect us to take over the responsibility of your future movements."

"But what frontier is open?" Haven demanded.

Madriwill looked at him with a slow smile.

"The frontier back into Russia, which you are supposed to have crossed," he added, looking hard at the satchel, "with stolen property of great value."

Haven rose to his feet.

"So that's the game, is it?" he remarked bitterly. "You first of all order my bodyguard away, you are going to let those bloody Reds send in what they call an escort to deal with me, and you are turning me out of the hotel so that you will have no responsibility with regard to me."

"But that is unreasonable," the hotel manager remonstrated. "If trains were running and frontiers open, you could proceed on your journey without hindrance from us. It is not our fault that the whole world is at war. I ask you, young sir, as a man of common sense—what can we do?"

"You can give me an aeroplane and a pilot," Haven proposed.

The hotel manager rocked with laughter. The Chief of the Police took the matter more seriously.

"Such a thing, unfortunately, is out of the question," he pronounced. "The few military planes we possess are on service day and night. With every desire to be helpful," he added, "to the representative of a friendly country, who seems to have involved himself in somewhat complicated difficulties, there is unfortunately nothing we can do—unless—"

"Well?" Haven demanded. "Unless what?"

The Chief of the Police stroked once more his stubbly brown beard.

"There is one alternative," he admitted. "I have been hoping that you might suggest it yourself."

"I thought there was something behind all this," Haven said irritably. "Well, get on with it, please. Show me how I can save myself."

Madriwill fixed him with his pale blue eyes.

"If you cared to deposit anything you might have with you of value, and the possession of which might be disputable, in the care of, say, one of our principal banks—the National Bank of Warsaw, for instance—and present yourself to us without luggage or any other encumbrances, the situation might be reconsidered."

Haven turned towards the door.

"What a lot of time you've wasted," he scoffed. "I'll leave the hotel to-night."

CHAPTER XIII

In the end, Wilfred Haven, whose one frenzied idea was at all costs to break away from Anna Kastellane, decided upon an uninspired but obvious course of action. He paid his bill, packed his clothes with the assistance of the valet and a clumsy, but willing chambermaid, and was driven in a dilapidated taxicab to the nearest hotel. His request for a room there was met by a searching regard on the part of the clerk.

"Have you your passport?" the latter asked.

Haven produced it. The young man cast one casual glance at the inside and returned it.

"No rooms at all," he announced. "Hotel full."

"Any sort of a place would do for me," Haven persisted. "It will probably be only for one night."

"No place at all, even for one night."

"My passport is in order, isn't it?"

This time the hotel clerk did not raise his head.

"No room whatsoever in the hotel," he repeated, a little wearily.

Haven returned to his taxicab and was driven to another establishment on the other side of the square. The same parrot-like question was asked him and the production of his passport met with the same emphatic refusal. He tried at another and smaller place on the Grand Boulevard, with a similar result. Here the manager was half French, and Haven, taking advantage of his greater politeness, asked him a plain question.

"Have the police or the military sent around any orders that I am not to be given shelter?"

The hotel manager hesitated.

"All such instructions would come to us with the stipulation of secrecy," he confided. "Monsieur will understand therefore that his question is one which could not be answered."

Once more Haven returned dejectedly to his taxicab. He pulled out his maps and endeavoured to study them by the feeble light. Finding it impossible, he thrust his head out of the window.

"Drive to a café," he ordered the chauffeur.

The man started his engine with a prodigious effort. They lumbered off and drew up a few minutes later before a brilliantly illuminated restaurant. As he descended, the man muttered something in guttural Polish. Haven summoned the commissionaire.

"Do you speak French, English or Russian?" he asked.

The man twirled a fine moustache.

"Every language, American gentleman," he replied condescendingly.

"Tell me what this fellow is trying to say to me then."

A few words passed between the commissionaire and the chauffeur, after which the former turned to Haven.

"He says he cannot understand why you have difficulty in obtaining a room at the hotels, but if you cannot find shelter for the night, he knows a house where you can have a bed and no questions asked. The price will not be very high."

"At a hotel?" Haven enquired.

The commissionaire smiled as one man of the world to another.

"A private hotel," he confided. "All suites, supper rooms, ladies if desired."

"Tell him to wait for me, then," Haven begged, slipping a tip into the man's hand. "I shan't stay here very long."

The café turned out to be the best in the city. There were many tables, most of them occupied, and a gaily dressed little orchestra making fantastic music. The majority of the crowd were men, either playing cards or dominoes, but near the dancing floor were several young women who welcomed the newcomer with smiles. He passed on to the inner recesses of the place, and, finding a retired corner, ordered some wine and drew out his map. He spread it upon the table and studied it. In the light of the information he had received from one or two people, the only chance of escape seemed to be through Roumania, but it was impossible to obtain definite news as to what portions of the country were actually in German hands. He spelt out the names of the frontier towns and looked through the evening paper which he had taken from the stand to see if he could learn anything. Suddenly he was aware that some one had paused at his table. He looked up. Fred was standing before him, his coat collar buttoned high to his throat and a black felt hat pulled low over his eyes.

"Say, Mr. Haven," he began in a muffled and almost angry tone, "if you don't know better than to sit about in a public café with a map on the table in front of you, it's time you and I swopped jobs."

"A map?" Haven repeated a little blankly. "What's wrong with a map?"

Fred looked at him in pitying fashion.

"Don't you know that this place is full of spies?" he remonstrated. "I can tell you I'm doing myself no good by stopping to speak to you, even for this moment. The little man three tables away is an agent of the police. He scooted out like a rabbit as soon as he saw you produce the map and noticed the satchel. I'll bet you what you like he's in that telephone box, speaking to the police headquarters. Can't you take the damn thing off your wrist, Mr. Haven? You're noticeable enough anyway, without having to advertise yourself with it."

"I can't do that," Haven confided sadly. "I'm a careless sort of fellow and it's the only way I can make dead sure of never leaving it for a moment. Don't you stay around if you're likely to get into trouble, Fred. All I want is to get out of the country and it doesn't seem to me there's any one who can help me do that."

"There's only one person who could," Fred replied, dropping his voice a little, "but then I rather fancy she's after you herself—she and another little gang of them."

"What do you know about her?" Haven demanded.

Fred glanced round the room with anxious eyes.

"There's no surer way of getting into trouble in this part of the world," he said, "than by talking too much. I'll tell you this, because any fool that has eyes to see can see it. She's supping in the restaurant at the present moment with the general commanding the garrison here. She can do what she likes until he loses his job. I'm off, Mr. Haven. I just spoke to you as a customer from the hotel. I'll tell you how to make that medium Martini," he went on, raising his voice, "any time you can drop around behind the Bar. It's the bitters that does the trick. I'm not bragging, sir, when I say that I'm one of the only six bartenders in the world who know how to handle bitters."

He swaggered off, threading his way amongst the tables and exchanging greetings with many acquaintances. Outside, on the pavement, he paused to tie his scarf around his neck, and before he started on his homeward way he spoke a few words to the commissionaire and afterwards to the taxicab driver.

"They've got him sure," he muttered to himself, as he crossed the square towards another of his favourite night haunts. "Just to think I used to believe that Broadway and Seventh Avenue were the places for toughs."

Left alone, Haven folded up his map and put it away, summoned a waiter and ordered another pint of the best champagne in a tankard. With some pretzels and a box of cigarettes by his side, he leaned back and watched his neighbours. So far as he could make out, they were harmless enough. There was a considerable sprinkling of soldiers and a few family parties with quite young children. The little man whom Fred had pointed out as a police agent had returned to his place. So far as appearance was concerned, he was the most inoffensive-looking individual in the restaurant, a small, sandy-haired man with red eyes and a pendulous lower lip. He seemed to have but two objects in the world. One was to stare

at Haven's satchel and the other was to appear to be buried in his newspaper when any one else was taking notice of him. The two tables between them were vacant. Haven suddenly leaned across.

"Come and take a bock with me," he invited in Russian.

The man seemed startled. After a moment's, hesitation, however, he laid down the newspaper which he had been professing to read and took the vacant place by Haven's side. The latter called a waiter and ordered more wine.

"Speak French?" he enquired.

"Yes, I speak little French," the other assented. "Much English. I am a tailor and I have many clients here in the city, some French, a few Americans—not many Americans."

"So you're a tailor, are you?" Haven observed. "Why are you so interested in my satchel?"

His companion squirmed apologetically.

"I demand Monsieur's pardon," he begged. "My wife says that I should have been a woman. I am curious about little things. I ask myself why Monsieur should go about with a bag like that fastened by a chain to his wrist."

"For a reason which you ought to have been able to guess," Haven told him. "Because this satchel contains valuables which in this very disturbed part of the world I am afraid of losing."

"Valuables?" the other repeated. "Ah, yes; that, of course. One wonders, though, whether they would not be safer in the hotel safe or in a bank—that is all. It would seem to me to invite attention that Monsieur carries them so undisguisedly."

"There is some sense in what you say, my small friend," Haven admitted. "The point is, however, that no hotel will take me in for some reason or other. There is another point too. The satchel contains political papers from the Embassy where I have been working and this happens to be the way in which political documents of importance are transferred from one capital to another. Are you satisfied?"

"I have no more curiosity," the little man confessed. "I apologise."

"*Bonne santé*," Haven said, raising his glass.

"*À la vôtre*," was the prompt and eager response.

"Now," Haven continued, as he set down his tankard, "it is my turn. You were curious about my satchel. Well, I too have curiosities. Will you tell me why, when you are a tailor, you wear a metal disc on your waistcoat which I only saw by accident when you took off your overcoat, and why, also, if you are a tailor, you carry a revolver in your breast pocket instead of your tape and marking chalk?"

The sandy-haired man sipped his wine. His lips had come together with a snap. There was a hard gleam in his eyes.

"The city is in a disturbed state, as Monsieur has remarked, and I am too small and weak to defend myself except with firearms," he explained. "As for the disc—it is nothing. It is the badge of a small club."

"The disc is the badge of the Polish Secret Police," Haven announced calmly. "You are carrying the gun because you are liable at any time to be led into trouble. That time may be to-night, if you have a fancy for following me about. I don't mind confiding to you," Haven went on, taking another draught of his wine, "that I am in a queer temper. I belong to a country which doesn't understand all this sort of underground business. I've had more than I want of it since I came to Europe, especially since I entered Poland."

The police spy would have risen to his feet, but Haven leaned forward and laid a grip of iron upon his shoulder.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed. "You can go when I've finished with you. You're here to spy on me. Well, you can do it. The only thing that I claim to know is—what you want. What is it you're after?"

"I am watching you," the other confided, "in accordance with orders received from my department. I shall go on watching you until we know where you intend to pass the night. My duty will then be over."

"If you knew where I was going to pass the night," Haven observed grimly, "you'd know more than I do. Can you suggest a nice quiet hotel where they don't worry about your passport?"

"Monsieur's passport is not in order then?"

"You mind your own business," was the curt reply. "What about that hotel?"

"There is the police station."

"Well, I'm not sure that isn't a damned fine idea," Haven reflected. "I ought to be safe there, anyway. Arrest me, my ingenuous friend. I'll come quietly."

The little man looked up to the ceiling. He appeared to be listening to the music.

"Monsieur would have to be searched," he observed.

Haven flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"There's something sort of undignified about that, I must confess. Look here," he went on in a suddenly changed tone. "I'm going directly and they tell me that money's scarce in Poland. I'll give you a hundred dollars—you know how much that is in Polish money—if you will tell me why you are following me, what your instructions are and what you want from me."

The police spy shook his head.

"I am very dishonest," he admitted; "I have taken bribes many times, but this time you do not get—what you say—value for your money. All my instructions are to follow Monsieur about until he discovers a place to sleep for the night. Then I will make my report to the police of the Department."

"Very simple," Haven agreed wearily. "But what I should like to know is this—having found out, what are they going to do then? Protect me or rob me?"

"Sir," the official remonstrated, "my Department does not rob. You are a stranger here with apparently many enemies. It would not be good for us if you got into trouble."

"I see. Just a friendly and paternal interest, eh? Well, I'll save you trouble. I'm going where my taxi-man takes me. He says he knows a room where I can sleep which is clean and not too expensive."

"He will take you to a brothel," the other confided, "and the proprietors will pay him fifty per cent of what you pay. It is the custom here."

"A brothel," Haven repeated, with a fierce little jump of the heart. "Well, the idea is unpleasant, but I presume one may remain alone. Your amiable Department has apparently issued orders that I am not to be entertained at any hotel. I suppose at the brothel they won't demand my passport."

"Monsieur will be too welcome a visitor," the other murmured.

He rose to his feet and this time Haven made no attempt to detain him. He laid his fingers for a moment, however, upon his coat sleeve.

"Look here," he said, "I can make use of you, after all. You can take a message from me to the Chief of your Department. I should like you to tell him who I am. My name is Wilfred Haven. I have been third secretary to the American Embassy in St. Petersburg, and, although it's nothing to brag about, my father is one of the richest men in the world and it was he who arranged that last loan for Poland. Let them remember that, if they're thinking of going in for a little private free-booting or if they're going to stand in with that dirty Russian crowd who followed me over the frontier. I'm not of much account in myself, but all the same, there'll be hell to pay if anything happens to me."

The little man bowed.

"I shall tell my Chief all that you say," he promised. "He will be greatly concerned for your safety."

CHAPTER XIV

Haven whispered to the commissionaire. The commissionaire translated to the taxicab driver. The latter shook his head in knowing fashion, waited until his passenger was safely ensconced inside, and drove off. To Haven the journey seemed interminable, although, as a matter of fact, it took something less than twenty minutes. At the end of that time his driver turned off the main boulevard and continued for a short distance down a narrow street, pulling up eventually at a large and solid-looking house with a courtyard in front. The place appeared to be in darkness, but the sound of music stole out from behind the drawn curtains; from the narrow fanlight above the door came a sharp line of purple light. The taxicab driver took command of the proceedings. He rang the bell of the porter's lodge and talked for a few moments earnestly to the man who opened the door. The latter came forward to Haven who was standing on the pavement.

"I speak Russian," he announced. "What do you want?"

"I want a room," Haven confided, "a room to myself for the night. The hotels are all full."

"Are you in trouble with the police?" the man asked suspiciously. "Madam will have nothing to do with you, if that is so."

"I am in no trouble with any one," Haven assured him. "I am an American official and I am leaving Warsaw to-morrow."

The man nodded.

"In that case," he replied, "you are perhaps the gentleman who is expected. Enter and make your arrangements with Madam."

Haven paid his taxicab driver. The porter picked up his bags and led the way to the house. The door was opened almost immediately by a manservant in livery. The porter whispered something to him, laid the bags upon the carpeted floor and took almost precipitate leave. The servant, motioning Haven to follow, entered a heavily furnished, gloomy apartment on the ground floor. The room was overheated and a samovar was hissing on a side table.

"Madam will see the gentleman," the servant announced in unexpected English.

"Look here, don't go away, for God's sake, if you can speak a Christian language like that," Haven begged.

The man smiled.

"Madam speaks every language," he replied.

Haven was left to himself for barely five minutes. Then the door opened and a woman made noiseless entrance. Haven rose to his feet and stared at her in surprise which he found hard to conceal. She was tall, slim and pale, with thoughtful eyes and hair brushed back from her forehead in the Italian fashion. She wore a plain black dress which fitted her admirably and was cut in the severest style. She wore no jewellery and made use of no cosmetics. She greeted Haven gravely but pleasantly in English which was almost without accent.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Haven?" she asked.

"Tell me how you knew my name first," he begged.

She smiled.

"You know they call this city the whispering city," she confided. "You want a room, I think, for the night? A companion perhaps?"

"Certainly not," Haven replied. "The police have been interfering in my affairs and they have made it difficult for me to stay at an hotel. If you don't mind taking me in until the morning, I shall be very grateful."

"You do not care to amuse yourself?" Madam persisted. "I have young lady guests of every nation and very good music. They are dancing now."

"Madam," Haven explained, "I am travelling on a serious errand and I am not looking for distraction. Another time your

invitation would be wonderful. To-night all I ask for is bed and peace—if such a thing exists at all in Warsaw. I shall expect to pay for my room as though I had accepted your offer of entertainment. You can send me wine here, if you will, and cigarettes, but I drink alone."

Madam sighed. Her quiet eyes seemed to look him over a little wistfully.

"You are a strange race, you Anglo-Saxons," she said. "The men I know would flirt with life even while they listened for death. You shall have your way, though, but you must pay me ten pounds in English money for your room and the champagne and cigarettes I shall send you and your coffee in the morning. I dare not keep you longer than that. We are on the best of terms with the police but I must not offend them."

"As soon after daylight as your man can get me a taxicab," Haven promised, producing his pocketbook, "I shall be ready to depart. Here is the ten pounds."

The woman accepted the note with a little word of thanks.

"I shall put you upon the ground floor," she announced. "You will hear no noise and—it might be better."

"In what way?" he asked curiously.

Madam smiled but made no reply. She led Haven along the passage into a wider hall and pushed open the door. He found himself in a clean and well-furnished bedroom, with a bathroom opening from it. His two bags were upon a luggage stand and the coverlet of the bed was turned back.

"Somehow or other," Haven remarked, "it seems as though I were expected."

Madam smiled once more ever so slightly.

"I trust that you will sleep well, Mr. Haven," she said. "If you change your mind, you will find us on the floor above. There is a dancing room there, a bar and a card-room."

She took very deliberate and courteous leave of her guest and Haven, drawing up a chair in front of the round table in the centre of the room, unrolled his map and recommenced his study of it. In a short time there was a knock at the door and the servant who had admitted him arrived with a tray on which were a bottle of champagne, a dish of pretzels, some cheese and a box of excellent cigarettes.

"Is there anything more Monsieur would like?" he enquired.

"Nothing more to-night, thank you," Haven assured him.

He too departed. Haven listened for a few minutes to the distant strains of music and then strolled over to the door. It had a lock but there was no key. He opened and closed it quietly and then returned to his map. His surroundings were peaceful, if not soporific, but a queer fit of restlessness had come over him. He found himself listening for strange sounds. There had been nothing alarming about his reception. There was certainly nothing alarming about his present environment—nothing except the lack of a key to his door. He paced up and down the room. There was no other entrance and the window, probably because it was almost flush with the ground, was quite reasonably supplied with iron bars. Occasionally he heard the hooting of a horn and the clanging of the bell at the porter's lodge. Now and then too he caught the sound of voices, always amused, sometimes a little drunken, but nevertheless joyous. There was nothing in any direction to indicate that the house was used for any purpose other than as a rendezvous for pleasure seekers, yet slowly and inevitably there crept into his consciousness a conviction that he was in greater danger during these apparently peaceful moments than at any time since he had left Petrograd. He struggled against the feeling, but it obsessed him. With a sense almost of shame, he drew his perfect little automatic pistol from his pocket, loaded it with a full clip and placed it on the table by his side.

The night wore on. Haven felt himself growing sleepy, yet he resisted every inclination to undress and crawl into bed. He sat waiting—for what he had not the faintest idea. By degrees, the intervals when the music died away were longer. The sound of footsteps and voices slackened. Something that was almost silence crept over the place. The heat of the stove began to assert itself and his eyes grew heavy. An automobile drew up outside. There was the sound of the grinding of brakes, the usual hoot, the porter's bell, muffled voices outside on the pavement, a woman's laugh in the hall,

the clinking of spurs, then again silence. Sleepiness almost overcame him and then found sudden and complete banishment. The door of his room was swiftly opened and as swiftly closed. Anna Kastellane stood there, breathing quickly, her fingers still clenching the knob of the door behind her. Her eyes seemed to sweep around the room in one comprehensive flash. She nodded and regained her breath.

"Thank Heaven," she exclaimed, "you haven't been quite such a fool as you tried to appear! I was afraid I should find you tucked up in bed."

He rose to his feet. The automatic to which his hand had leapt was still gripped in his fingers, but with the muzzle pointing to the floor.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Don't waste time," she advised. "It's now or never for both of us. You can keep your pistol in your hand, if you want to. You may have to use it. Take the smaller of your two bags. You can hold that in your left hand with the satchel. You'll have to leave the other behind. Come here."

He obeyed like a child at school. He stood by her side whilst she opened the door softly and peered up and down the passage. Then she drew back into the room, closing it again.

"To the right," she whispered, "as far as you can go, then turn to the left. The front door is open. Outside the gate—the gate too is open—a car is waiting. Get into it, clap your hands and sit still. The man will know where to take you. When you get there—wait. Everything else will happen—or it won't. Shoot any one who interferes with you. You understand?"

"Perfectly," he answered.

She opened the door once more and stood in the passage with outstretched finger. He walked as far as possible to the right, then he turned to the left. He passed out of the front door and hurried down the paved way, through the gate and across the pavement. The door of a big American touring car standing there was also open. He sprang into it and clapped his hands. In a matter of seconds the houses of the terrace and afterwards the cafés with their dwindling lights and the closed shops of the boulevards were flowing past him.

The city gave way to the suburbs and the suburbs to long stretches of flat marshy land. Haven's instinct told him whither they were bound and his instinct was correct. After about half an hour's rapid motoring they passed through two great gates, admitted by a sentry who presented arms at the sight of the card which the chauffeur extended towards him. On their left was a huge aerodrome. They turned away from this to the open flying ground. Just outside one of the hangars a large plane was drawn up. Its engines were roaring, its lights were already lit and there was a stepladder by its side. The car came to a standstill and the door was opened. A cold misty rain was falling and the few figures moving about the place were like ghosts. A small man, muffled up to the throat, wearing a mask and pilot's cap, accosted Haven, who tried in vain to understand what he said, and in the end was forced to shake his head. The man approached the steps, patted them with his hand and, stretching up, unfastened the door above. Haven, completely resigned, did as indicated. He climbed into the body of the plane and took his place in one of the four easy-chairs. The man motioned him to remain where he was and retreated. The engine continued to roar.

The talc windows were already partially obscured by rain. There was only a blur of lights to be seen. Smoking, it seemed to Haven, was unwise. He sat still, gripping the moments of agony. For some reason or other Anna Kastellane seemed once more to have thrown in her fate with him. Was it for his good or his downfall, he wondered? What was she doing in that house where he had left her? Why couldn't she have come with him? Once his heart sank with a terrible thud. He fancied that there was a false beat in the engine, then it went on again, roaring away stronger than ever. God! Why wasn't she there? Why weren't they mounting towards the clouds? He felt his forehead and found it wet with sweat. The agony of waiting! Through the blurred glass he fancied that he saw twin lights advancing over the flying ground. An automobile! He rushed to the doorway. It was an automobile crossing the great open space, swaying with the pace at which it was being driven. It was stopping. It turned half round with a tremendous skid. There were figures closing in upon the plane now. Out of the darkness some one came running up the steps. It was Anna Kastellane, dressed in a long Russian tunic over her evening frock and an astrakhan cap. She was followed by the lantern-jawed man of the Hotel de

l'Europe, in full flying kit. Outside he saw another man, the observer, follow the pilot into the cockpit. Anna and her companion staggered into the saloon, the former sinking breathless into a chair. Her companion was shouting orders from the top of the iron ladder at the other end. Anna began to rub desperately on the window with her handkerchief. There were other lights upon the plain.

"God, I hope he lifts!" she sobbed.

"Léon is off the ground quicker than any one I ever knew," the man called back to her. "He is the finest pilot we have."

They were off, speeding down the tracks, bumping along the ground. Suddenly there was a sense of lightness. Anna leaned back in her chair laughing hysterically.

"Miracles!" she cried. "We are away!"

There was no power on earth at that moment which could have unlocked Haven's lips. He stood clenching the back of his chair, a dumb overwrought figure, listening to the roar of the engine as though a new music were stirring upon the earth.

CHAPTER XV

Awakening on the following morning was one of the most curious experiences of Haven's life. The plane, although the engine must have been of great power, was exceedingly primitive in its interior appointments. It had, in fact, been stripped bare of any attempt at luxury with a view to its conversion into a bombing machine. An effort to provide some sort of sleeping accommodation had been made by fixing two cushioned boards between the arm-chairs. One of these roughly contrived couches was occupied by Haven, who had removed his coat and shoes; the other by Anna Kastellane. Esterhaczy, which appeared to be the name of the lantern-jawed man, had retired with the attendant into the premises behind. In the cockpit the bent figures of the pilot and observer seemed like creatures in some other and isolated world.

"Are you awake?" Haven asked softly, leaning across the narrow space.

There was no reply. Anna Kastellane, wrapped in her fur coat, was curled up and sleeping soundly. She appeared to be occupying exactly the same position as that into which she had collapsed on the previous night. Haven, holding on to anything he could clutch at for support, carried his small suit case into a cupboard-like compartment at the rear, and, with less difficulty than he had anticipated, performed a perfunctory toilet. The sting of the cold water cleared his eyes and braced his nerves. He rearranged his collar and tie, and crept back to his place, just as the plane completed a long and terrifying downward glide. With a fragment of newspaper, he managed to partially clear the window by his side. They were still riding through the clouds, and, as he gathered, at a great height, but there came a moment when passing through two banks he caught a glimpse of woods and villages and fields, an impression of what seemed to be a midget world emblazoned upon a crazy quilt. Then they plunged into another bank of clouds and everything was blotted out.

Haven resumed his seat and with his head buried in his hands tried to establish some coherence in his thoughts with regard to the events of the last few hours. If only Anna Kastellane would wake up. He was terrified at the idea of talking to her, terrified at the anticipation of the anger which somehow or other he would be called upon to restrain, but which blazed up in him even now, as the events of the past few days recurred to him. How much of what she had told him was true? How much was he to believe of what he had actually seen? Those were the thoughts which came tearing at his brain. He looked wistfully across towards where she was lying, still wrapped in the most profound slumber. He tried to patch together the curious medley of confidences which at times she had vouchsafed, and to find in them some measure of unity, however thin or elastic. There were too many loose ends. He could make nothing of them or her. She claimed to be a spy. She pleaded guilty to being a courtesan. She possessed influence of a sort somewhere behind the scenes, or their adventure together would never have reached its present stage. The house in which he had found her, her miraculous appearance in Warsaw, the completeness of her wardrobe there, her acquaintance with Esterhaczy, her intimacy with the woman-loving General Grotzowill, her arrival at the scene of his last night's lodging—there seemed to be no possible way of linking these things together—except one.... Whatever she was, it was no concern of his. Twenty-four hours, and if all went well, they might be in safety. He tried to think of himself with his task accomplished and his resignation handed in. It was incredible. The world behind seemed to belong to another man. The world before him was an utterly intangible proposition. Life seemed to have poured itself out to the dregs during these last few days.

He tore off a further fragment of newspaper and by assiduous rubbing cleared another small space of the window. They were clear of clouds for the present and he realised that it was indeed a strip of the real world upon which he was gazing down. He looked at his watch. It was past seven o'clock. A shaft of unnatural light below might well have been sunshine. He looked at it and remained puzzled. Then he stepped cautiously across to the other side of the plane, taking care not to disturb Anna, and cleared another space of window there. He looked downward upon a similar view and again that shaft of light so strangely placed. He crept forward to the front and, drawing back the shutter, looked upwards over the heads of the two crouching men. Here there was little to be seen, but what he saw was disturbing.... He turned around, attracted by a slight sound. Anna was sitting up in her place, stretching her arms. Her fur coat had fallen back and the long tunic with astrakhan up to her throat seemed to be stifling her. She unfastened it with lazy fingers and glanced at him, expressionless.

"Well," she observed, "this is better than prison, is it not?"

"A great deal," he admitted. "Yet there are things which worry me. I should like, if I may, to have a few words with you."

"Oh, la la!" she mocked impatiently. "What a strange person! You are always seeking for explanations. Why can you not

be happy that you are alive, when there are so many people who would like to cut your throat? I am going to bathe my eyes and wash. Afterwards we will say to one another as much as is necessary."

She waved away his assistance and made her unsteady way into the dressing room. When she returned, some time later, looking marvellously fresh and bringing with her a suggestion of aromatic and fragrant toilet water, the couches had been cleared away and he was engrossed in studying his map. She took the place opposite to him.

"I do not think," she said, "that I shall ever explain to you exactly how you came to be here. I do not think that you deserve it. I do not care very much, anyway. I shall not tell you what a marvellous guardian angel I have been or what dangers I have had to face to secure your safety."

"And your own," he muttered, with a little catch in his throat.

"A young and reasonably attractive woman can always escape from any dilemma. I think that you are a very pig-headed and short-sighted person. I am surprised that any one should have entrusted you with an important mission. And amongst your many stupidities you understand women even less than the rest of your fellow countrymen."

He looked up from the map and, in the cold morning light, with that angry glitter in his eyes, he was, she admitted, more than passably good-looking.

"Very well," he conceded. "I will ask you no questions about this wonderful exploit of yours in producing a great plane and an escort. I will ask you no questions as to how you extricated me from this crowd of evil wishers who are after my life and property. But you will allow me to ask you this at least—where do you think we are going?"

"To Holland," she replied. "Captain Esterhaczy, who is on board, and who is the owner of the plane—it is going to cost us a great deal of money, by the by—says that we can very likely make it without a stop, unless the winds are too strong. If we have to descend once we must risk it."

"You abandoned the idea of Switzerland or Italy, then?"

She assented.

"Esterhaczy found it impracticable. The mountainous regions in the north of Italy are too dangerous, and, although there might be a possible way into Switzerland, our pilot does not know it. In Holland we should be in a country whose neutrality has never been questioned. You can go by boat or air to London and from there wherever you will."

"And you?" he ventured to ask.

"Where I go is my own affair. Since I was a young girl I have made my own life. I shall continue to do so."

He looked at her sadly. With her transparent complexion, her clear, beautiful eyes, her proud mouth with lips unspoilt by any artificial colour, her general air of purity and elegance, the things which he knew seemed impossible. He hesitated even then before he spoke.

"Well, what is it?" she asked. "You have something on your mind. Say it. Captain Esterhaczy will want to talk to me presently before he goes up to relieve our pilot."

"What I have to say seems to me to be very serious," Haven confided, "and you must please put aside for the moment all personal thoughts. Before I speak, please remember this—I do not suggest that you are aware of the very obvious thing which is happening; you are as likely to be deceived as I. Even though everything else may be true which you have told me concerning yourself, I should like to believe—"

"For heaven's sake," she interrupted, "tell me what you are driving at. I cannot bear any more words."

He leaned a little towards her.

"If we were flying towards Holland," he said, "we should be flying due west. We are, on the contrary, and we have been, since early this morning, flying due east."

A brief silence followed his words. He was convinced from the first that the news was as great a shock to her as the discovery of it had been to him. He found himself wishing that he could have arrived at some gentler way of breaking it

to her. The fear that he had seen there once before was creeping back into her eyes and her lips were quivering.

"How do you know which way we are going?" she gasped.

"By the simplest of all means," he answered plainly. "We are heading straight towards the rising sun."

"It is not possible," she murmured.

"Look out of the window for yourself," he suggested. "See from which direction the sunshine is falling."

She struggled first to one window and then the other, looked eagerly ahead, and then staggered back to her place. She pushed the bell furiously.

"There must be some mistake!" she exclaimed. "We are perhaps making a circuit to avoid mountains or a fort of anti-aircraft guns."

A sleepy-eyed attendant appeared, carrying a tray with coffee and rolls, which he set down between them.

"Where is Captain Esterhaczy?" Anna demanded.

"He sleeps," the man replied.

"Wake him at once," she insisted.

The man looked doubtful.

"The Captain was in the cockpit till four. He left word that he was not to be disturbed until nine o'clock."

"Never mind that. It is very nearly nine o'clock now. Tell him that I must speak to him. Our course is wrongly set."

The man withdrew. Haven kept his forefinger upon the map.

"Assuming that we have been travelling in this direction all night," he remarked, "and have been making, say, seventy miles an hour, we should be over Bessarabia now. If the idea really is to land us in Russia, I am afraid it looks like trouble."

"My God! Do I not know it?" Anna groaned. "Every second of yesterday I was breathing thanks to heaven that I should never see that accursed country again."

"Don't lose heart," he begged. "If they land us there, I shall be in a pretty bad way myself. Things aren't so desperate as all that, though. We ought to be able to have a say in anything that happens."

"You have your gun?" she asked eagerly.

He nodded. His hand stole round to his hip pocket. Suddenly the complacency left his expression. She read the truth at once.

"You have not got it!" she cried. "Where is it?"

"It was in my hip pocket when I went to sleep last night," he groaned. "The button has been cut away. The pistol is gone. You are quite right, Anna Kastellane; I am too big a fool for a life of adventure."

"You are sure that it was taken away from you here," she persisted, "and not in the house on the Marszalkowska."

"I am sure that it was here," he confided. "I had it in my hand when I left the house and I had my fingers upon it when I boarded the plane."

"If it was stolen here," she said tremulously, "there is no longer any hope of a mistake about the course."

"I'm afraid not," he admitted. "Anyway, here comes your friend. Now at least we shall have the cards upon the table."

Esterhaczy was advancing slowly from the back of the saloon. He was indeed a sinister figure as he stepped out of the gloom into the sunshine which was flickering through the windows. He made no secret of the gun which he carried in his

right hand. With his left he steadied himself against the chair backs.

"You sent for me, Anna Kastellane," he said.

She swung round in her place.

"I did. You were told by General Grotzowill last night in my presence to take us in this plane to Holland. Will you tell me why we are travelling in the opposite direction?"

"You are very observant," he remarked. "However, as you want to know why, I must tell you that it was as a result of later orders."

"From whom?"

"From the General."

"I do not believe it!" she exclaimed. "You are lying to me."

The man bowed and remained silent. It was a very eloquent silence.

"I insist upon knowing our present destination," Anna declared imperiously. "Tell me where we are now."

Esterhaczy looked at his watch. He cast only a casual glance out of the window.

"Roughly speaking, I should say that we are over Ormsk," he confided. "I could not be positive. I have slept soundly and the wind has been in our favour. I shall know better after the next watch. I am now on my way to relieve our friend the pilot."

A positively saturnine smile curved the man's lips. An evil humour shone out of his eyes.

"My orders were," he continued, speaking very impressively, "that, if you did not arrive until seven o'clock this morning, you were to be taken westward and landed in Holland. If you arrived at the aerodrome at any time before that—the precise hour of your arrival, I think, was half-past two—you were to be taken eastwards."

The colour flamed up in her cheeks. Haven looked steadily out of the window as though he had not heard. A sad little throb of gratitude for his refusal to understand trembled in her heart.

"So this is to be my reward for not keeping my rendezvous with the General," she murmured. "I am to be thrown to the lions and this poor young man, who is nothing to me and who should surely not be made responsible for my misdemeanours, is also to suffer for them."

"That," Esterhaczy admitted, "is the way in which the matter seems to have presented itself to our amorous friend, the General. If it is any consolation to you, however, let me assure you that just now, in these days of stringency, I do not think that, in any case, we could have suffered your friend, Mr. Haven, to pass out of the country. Besides," he added, as he watched the approaching figure clambering down from the cockpit, "Mr. Haven has a friend on board who is very anxious to have a little conversation with him."

The man who had been sitting in the observer's seat sprawled into the room. He was swaddled in leather coats and unrecognisable. He lifted his mask, however, loosened the buttons at his throat and greeted them all with a little bow. Esterhaczy introduced him.

"My friend, Colonel Patinsky. An expert flier as well as a cavalry officer. Permit me, Anna Kastellane, to present the Colonel to you. Mr. Haven, I think, you know."

CHAPTER XVI

The silence that followed was one of those intervals in the development of a drama so unexpected that words are absolutely inadequate. The brain is engaged in an almost hopeless struggle to adapt itself to impossible demands. It was Anna Kastellane who broke it at last. She spoke in quite an ordinary tone of voice, without looking at any one in particular.

"So this is the revenge of a great Polish gentleman and soldier," she meditated.

Haven's heart jumped at her words. Although they had no material effect upon the situation, he felt a curious lightening of his intense depression.

"General Grotzowill had doubtless sufficient provocation," Patinsky observed, releasing his right hand from one of the huge gloves he had been wearing and stroking his moustache.

Anna turned to Esterhaczy.

"And you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He was leaning against the chair on the other side of the aisle, but his fingers caressed always the butt of his revolver and his eyes seldom wandered far from Haven. Rumours had reached him of the young American's courage.

"As for me, Mademoiselle," he replied, "you can have little of which to complain. I am a builder of motor cars and aeroplanes, who has lately been given a commission by the generosity of our great General. I obey his orders blindly. Who would not? Poland is under military law and I prefer walking on my two legs to standing with my back to a brick wall."

"Those protestations of yours," she began coldly—

"Were as sincere as your pretended hesitation," he affirmed. "Your sex are very clever. You may fool one man for a very long time, as you have done the General, but you cannot fool every man for all the time. Besides," he added, with that very unbecoming smile of his, "Patinsky is the ladies' man in this show. I myself am simply a captain of the Flying Corps, obeying orders. You will forgive me," he went on, as he seated himself at the remote table upon which the attendant had just set out a tray. "Patinsky—your coffee."

Patinsky, joining him, drank greedily. Notwithstanding his layers of clothes, his hands were still blue with cold.

"You have told us where we are," Anna remarked. "I should now like to know our final destination."

"That, for the present, is a secret," Esterhaczy regretted. "You will be told in good time."

"You realize, I suppose," she went on, "that to put me down anywhere in Russia means death? The General knew that."

"The General seemed to me," Esterhaczy confided, breaking a roll, "indifferent concerning the matter. He was very angry."

She glanced out of the window. They were passing over a great open expanse of corn-growing country, with here and there a few sheds and one or two isolated villages. Already the spirit of the north was apparent, for it was noticeable that half the churches were in ruins. Her eyes grew sadder as she watched the unrolling panorama. A few feet away from her Patinsky was noisily drinking coffee and relating incidents of the night drive through the darkness. Haven remained almost preternaturally silent. It was Esterhaczy who roused her from her preoccupation.

"You have shown no interest, Anna Kastellane, as to our intentions with regard to your companion."

She turned away from the window and Haven, too, looked up.

"I am a woman," she remarked. "I am more interested in myself. Yet tell me what it is that you propose to do with him."

"It is my friend here who decides that," Esterhaczy replied, indicating his neighbour, his unpleasant smile once more in

evidence. "It appears that there is already a small matter to be arranged between the two. Mr. Haven is in possession of some property belonging to the Colonel."

"That is a lie," Haven declared.

Patinsky wiped his moustache carefully with a coarse fragment of napkin. Neither the cutlery nor the linen on the plane were of the best quality.

"Later on," he threatened, "I hope to give this uncouth young man a lesson in manners. Before then, however, I shall require him to hand over to me the property he is carrying in that satchel."

Haven laughed, and curiously enough his laugh sounded almost natural.

"You've had one or two tries at that before," he reminded his adversary.

"This time," Patinsky pointed out, "the conditions are different. You cannot steal away from your enemy on a plane flying some thousands of feet high. You are here to be dealt with when it suits me. That time will arrive before long. For the moment, we must concentrate upon insuring your safety. What about taking over, Esterhaczy?" he went on. "I drove myself in the night, but only for three hours. The wind was patchy and there were many pockets. Léon is getting tired. His hand is not so steady as it was."

Esterhaczy rose to his feet.

"I shouldn't trust that sullen young man," he advised. "Even with that ridiculous bag strapped to his left wrist and without a gun he has unpleasant habits."

Patinsky swaggered to his feet.

"I should not be afraid of him even if I were unarmed," he boasted, "but my motto is—caution. You see? I change places with you. I am now perhaps twelve feet away. I could put as many bullets as that into his body before he could stand up. There have been times when I felt that it would be a pleasure."

Esterhaczy walked warily past Haven, his automatic very much in evidence. Soon they heard him mounting the rungs of the iron ladder. Patinsky lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. He had the air of a man at ease, but his fingers were always within an inch or two of the butt of his own gun, and his restless eyes seldom wandered far from the two people on the other side of the aisle. Haven they watched cautiously, but their expression when they turned towards Anna Kastellane made the young American more than once writhe in his chair. By slow degrees, he was beginning to realise the extreme danger of the situation.

"I imagine the idea is," he whispered, leaning forward, "that we are not going to be left alone again until we have arrived at our destination, wherever that is."

"It would be more polite," Patinsky broke in, "if you raised your voice."

Haven waved his hand in ironical salute.

"We are not prisoners yet, Colonel," he reminded him. "Tell me," he went on, lowering his voice, "are you really in danger if they set you down in Russia?"

"If they set me down at any place from which they can communicate with Moscow or Petrograd, it is certain death."

"Nothing to do with me?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing whatever to do with you."

"I suppose," he reflected, "that their position with regard to me is a little difficult. There is no doubt of what Patinsky is after. He did his best to get hold of what I am carrying at the Ostrekoff shooting lodge. We left him tied up there in a secret room. If the General has given him permission to join Esterhaczy in this show, there isn't the slightest doubt that he is in it too. I'm committing a misdemeanour, it is true, but it's against my own Government—no one else's."

"I am going to ask you a question," she said, "which I have not asked you before and which, under ordinary

circumstances, I should not have dreamed of asking. Where do you keep the key of that chain and lock?"

Haven looked across at Patinsky. The latter was yawning ill-humouredly but there was no sign of intelligence or interest in his face.

"I keep it hidden in my hair," Haven whispered. "That is why I never go to a barber's."

She drew a little away.

"I asked a serious question," she reminded him coldly.

"Forgive me," he begged. "I felt positively certain that Patinsky couldn't hear from where he was, but the fellow is such a cunning rogue that I thought he might be shamming. I'm now convinced. There is no key."

"No key?" she repeated wonderingly.

"None at all," he assured her. "There is a secret catch, though, which was patented by a New York ex-criminal and which no one yet has ever been able to deal with. You see, you have to handle two different parts of the chain at the same time to make it work."

"It sounds ingenious," she murmured.

"It makes all the difference, of course," he pointed out. "If I had a key, I should be at my wits' end, hiding it all the time. Last night, for instance, my clothes were gone through when they took my revolver. Everything I had was disturbed. If they could have found a key to the satchel, I almost think that they would have been rude enough to look inside."

He leaned across towards Patinsky. The latter was at once on his guard.

"Colonel," he said, "do you remember what you or your friend did with my passport when you went through my clothes last night? I can understand your taking my revolver but I miss my passport. Even when one is traversing the skies of a foreign country like this," he waved his hand downward, "it gives one a sense of confidence."

Patinsky smiled.

"You have been a great traveller, I am sure, Mr. Haven," he said. "Has it never occurred to you that when you are taking a journey, say, on a Rivièra train, the attendant relieves you of your passport at the commencement of the journey and hands it back at the end? That is how it will be with you, Mr. Haven. Your passport will be returned to you when you have reached your journey's end. I hope you may find it useful."

"Sinister," Haven reflected. "Very sinister. I suppose it would be superfluous to say that I should feel safer with it in my pocket? We might have a smash, you know, and get—er—separated."

"The planes my friend Nicolas Esterhaczy designs and builds do not meet with accidents," Patinsky rejoined with a confident smile. "Monsieur and Mademoiselle may rest well assured of that. There is no danger whatever of escape in that way."

"And therefore no passport for me?"

"And therefore no passport for you."

Haven shrugged his shoulders and turned back to Anna.

"Anna Kastellane," he said, and his voice, low though it was, had a new note in it which thrilled her. "You and I have had our misunderstandings. I am not sure even now whether I love you or hate you the more, but it is certain that at this moment our fates are linked together. You say that to be left here in Russia would be death for you, and to be left in these men's hands—"

"Neither of these two things shall ever happen," she told him.

Haven nodded sympathetically.

"As for me," he went on, "their intentions are perfectly clear. They mean to have my, shall we say—despatches—and

after that to make an end of me. To keep me alive would be an impossibility."

"I agree with you," she said. "Well?"

"Watch all the time," Haven begged her. "I'm going to look out for my opportunity and take it. I've never been afraid of losing my life in a fight and the odds here are very little against us. Anything's better than sitting still and doing nothing. I don't want to embroil you if I can help it. If I fail, you can always disown me, but what I want you to do is to be always on the watch. I may go for the man I decide to go for at any time. Keep out of it if you can, but remember only this—if the man I'm struggling with drops his gun, pick it up and shoot him like a dog if you get a chance. Shoot the other one too, if he comes along. Leave nothing to chance. They're carrion, both of them. Maybe I'll manage without, but I want you to remember from the first second what you're to look out for. It's the gun. Don't be afraid of hitting me. I'm lucky. Blaze away—keep the muzzle low."

"When do you think you will make your attempt?" she asked calmly. "I quite approve. I believe it is our only chance."

"I can't tell you," he answered. "I must wait for my opportunity. You must watch as I do."

Patinsky rose suddenly to his feet and came towards them. He still kept, however, outside the swing of Haven's right arm.

"Stop that blasted whispering," he ordered.

"Why should we?" was the cool reply. "We are passengers, aren't we? It seems to me we're likely to pay dear enough for the hire of the plane."

Patinsky smiled as though some pleasant thought had entered his mind.

"Yes," he agreed, "you speak the truth now. You will pay for the trip—both of you. In good coin too. You, Haven, in one sort of coin; Madame in another."

His hand was raised to his hateful little moustache. He paused before leaving and Haven knew that his smile was deliberately provocative. He ached in every nerve but he held himself back. Patinsky was tense and watching. It was not the moment.

CHAPTER XVII

About twelve o'clock that morning some dried fish and a dish of stew was served to Anna Kastellane and Haven at one table and the pilot and Patinsky at the other. A request by Haven for cocktails and a bottle of Burgundy produced from the attendant some vodka and some sour Hungarian wine of indifferent quality. There were a good many clouds in the sky and light, driven snow was falling. It was difficult now to distinguish their course but Haven believed that they had wheeled towards the south.

"Do you know anything about Odessa?" he asked his companion.

"Not a thing," she answered, "except that I hope we are not going there."

"Why not?"

"Simply because it is a port," she explained, "from which all manner of little tramp steamers cross to Asia Minor and trade around the Black Sea. There are heaps of places where we might be left and never be heard of again. Besides, there is a population there which is the most terrible in the world."

Haven turned to the table where the other two men were seated.

"The voyage would be more interesting to us," he explained, "if we had some idea of our destination."

"It is not our object to make the voyage interesting to you," Patinsky replied amiably. "Make the best of it. It is probably your last ride in an aeroplane."

A bell at the farther end of the saloon rang. Patinsky's companion drained his tumblerful of wine, swallowed a liqueur glassful of vodka afterwards, and stood up. The bell rang again and their passage became more bumpy. Buttoning his coat as he went, the pilot disappeared.

"Observations, I expect," Patinsky remarked. "A very careful pilot, Esterhaczy."

"Rather jolly if we all went down together, wouldn't it be?" Haven suggested cheerfully. "Executioners and condemned."

"There is no fear of that," the other assured him, with a smile. "Esterhaczy is a great artist. If he were a younger man he would be famous throughout Europe. If he has called for the pilot now, it is because he wants his course settled."

"Wrong for once," Haven rejoined. "He's coming in. Don't like the look of the weather, I should guess."

Esterhaczy almost stumbled into the saloon. There were icicles upon his coat and hanging from his cap. His face, when he lifted his vizor was white, with mottled patches of purple. He drank two glasses of vodka and then sank into the chair which the pilot had vacated.

"We are running into a storm," he muttered to Patinsky, as he poured out a third glass of vodka. "My heart almost stopped beating. I have reduced the speed and told Léon to glance off the wind. We may toss about a little but we shall be safer."

The plane began to creak and groan. Esterhaczy, who had thrown his leather coat on to the floor, sat with his hand pressed to his side. Patinsky watched him anxiously and occasionally glanced out of the window. They seemed to be driving into a solid bank of snow.

"Do you think we had better come down?" he asked.

"We will never start again if we do," Esterhaczy groaned. "Take the map out of my pocket. I have marked the position."

Patinsky went over and fetched a bottle of brandy from a cupboard, poured some into a tumbler and held it to Esterhaczy's lips. He swallowed the strong spirit in convulsive gulps. Soon his appearance became more natural.

"Feeling better?" Patinsky enquired.

The other nodded.

"It is my heart," he muttered. "I gave up driving for this. God!" he added, as the machine gave an immense lurch. "I hope

our wings are all right. This snow is going to weigh like hell."

They were obviously slackening speed and, though the descent was unnoticeable, they were flying lower. Suddenly the alarm bell rang. Patinsky rapidly arrayed himself in Esterhaczy's discarded cap and coat. He adjusted his goggles and pulled down the flap of the cap.

"Hope I will be able to stand it," he muttered, as he hurried off.

They heard his footsteps climbing the rungs of the ladder. For a moment Anna Kastellane and Haven looked into one another's eyes. There was doubt in hers; there was purpose in his. Chivalry was a great quality, but her life and his—not to speak of his trust—came first.

Esterhaczy was still stretched across the table, although he was breathing more naturally and the mottled patches on his face were beginning to disappear. Haven rose slowly to his feet. As though by a miracle his left arm was suddenly free of the encircling bracelet. He looked at Anna and she nodded. Her fingers closed on the satchel. Haven towered for a moment over the figure of the recumbent man, then his left arm swung round his neck and his right hand was in his pocket. If Haven at times during the last few days had seemed slow-witted, at that instant he was amazingly quick of action. His own automatic—Esterhaczy had evidently discarded his in favour of the newer weapon—was in his hand in a moment. He held it out to Anna.

"Take this," he muttered.

She obeyed without hesitation. Esterhaczy was struggling wildly to rise to his feet but he had not the strength of a child. Once more Haven's fingers travelled over the helpless man. There was no further weapon. He returned to his seat, leaving his opponent groaning and only half-conscious in his place. Haven had become a different person now. His eyes were alight. His brain was working quickly.

"I'm sorry to have to tackle a man in that condition," he said to Anna, "but it had to be done."

"Why not?" she answered coolly. "It was our opportunity. I should not have minded if you had killed him."

"They robbed me of this," he continued, handling his beautifully polished automatic, "when I was asleep. It's only tit for tat. I think our friends in front will have enough to do for a time," he added, as the plane gave another violent lurch. "One thing we have to make certain of, though, and that is our friend the attendant."

He pushed a bell. His right hand slipped under the table. Presently the attendant lumbered into the saloon, pulling on his coat as he came. He had a stolid, Scandinavian face, a freckled skin, a heavy, clumsily built body, but few indications of actual muscular strength. Haven waited till he was within a yard of the table.

"I am afraid," he pointed out, "Captain Esterhaczy is not well. Give him some more brandy."

The man touched Esterhaczy on the shoulder. The latter only groaned.

"He is drunk," the attendant declared indifferently. "He was half frozen first, then he drinks, and he is drunk. He had better sleep."

"Have you any whisky?"

"No whisky—only brandy."

"Very well," Haven said. "You can bring me some brandy in a moment. Now, listen to me intently. My Russian is good enough? You understand?"

"I understand," the man acknowledged. "But you are not my master. You cannot give me orders here. What there is to eat and drink I will give you. That is all. I am the steward of Captain Esterhaczy."

"Quite right," Haven agreed. "As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have you as my servant for anything. Now—you are listening, aren't you? Do you possess a revolver?"

"I do not. If I did, I should not know how to use it."

"You've never done military service?"

"I have not," was the stolid reply. "I am a Russian Finn. I make the soil and catch the fish."

"Very well," Haven said. "I believe you but I must make sure. Lift your hands."

"Lift my hands! For why?" the man asked.

"Above your head—and quickly," Haven ordered. "I'm going to see whether you are telling the truth."

With a swift movement his automatic stole from under the table. The attendant raised his arms. Haven looked steadfastly into his face, looked at the narrow eyes which had almost disappeared into bulging creases of flesh, and became very cautious indeed.

"I am afraid," he said to Anna Kastellane, "that I must ask for your assistance. I want you to feel in his coat pockets and his breast pockets. You need have no fear—I shall shoot him through the heart if he makes a move."

She rose to her feet with a scornful little exclamation.

"How dare you think all the time that I am afraid?" she complained. "When I am afraid, I can promise you this—you will never know it."

She passed her hands lightly over the man's huge body. They stole round towards his hip pocket and he flinched. She tugged for a moment and threw an old-fashioned but fully charged revolver on to the table. Haven scarcely allowed himself to glance at it. He still held his gun like a rock.

"Finish with him, please," he begged. "He has lied already. A man like this is dangerous to deal with."

Her hands continued their task. She threw on to the table a miscellaneous collection of articles. There were two photographs of women, a daguerreotype of two children standing hand in hand and unhappily resembling their father, an iron tobacco box, a filthy pipe, a pencil and a huge clasp knife. She resumed her seat and wiped her hands on her handkerchief with a gesture of disgust.

"I have searched from his boots to his neck," she announced finally. "He has nothing more."

Haven glanced frowningly towards the revolver.

"Why did you lie to me?" he asked.

"One lies always to one's enemies," was the sullen reply. "I am the servant of Nicolas Esterhaczy. If you are his enemy, you are mine."

"I see," Haven murmured. "I also see that it is no use asking you any more questions. I am going to explore your pantry. Lead the way."

The man turned around.

"You will not be afraid?" Haven asked his companion. "Esterhaczy is helpless. You have the revolver on the table—shoot him if he stirs. If either of the two leave the cockpit, call for me."

"Why do you persist in thinking me a nerveless coward?" she asked angrily. "Go away and stay as long as you like. I am perfectly safe."

The two men made their way—the attendant leading and Haven following—into the pantry and the various offices behind. A thoroughly careful search produced no results. In a tiny chamber beyond, however, where Esterhaczy had apparently spent the night, Haven found that for which he was in search—Esterhaczy's discarded revolver under his pillow. He transferred it to his own pocket, then he laid his hand upon the attendant's shoulder and he spoke to him very grim words.

"What's your name?" he asked him first.

"Stensson," was the throaty reply. "Olav Stensson. I am a man of the North. I understand nothing of what goes on here."

"No harm will come to you," Haven guaranteed, "so long as you behave like a sane man. This is not a battle between servants—it is a battle between myself, Nicolas Esterhaczy and Colonel Patinsky. You have nothing to gain by interfering. If you interfere, I shall put a bullet into that fat stomach of yours and you will die in agony."

The man began to weep. Real tears coursed down his cheeks.

"I do not wish to fight," he groaned. "I wish nothing but to cross again to Finland and see my wife and children. They told me that there was much money here because of the war and we were poor because there was no trade for the fish."

"At the end of this voyage," Haven promised, "you shall have enough money to go back to your wife and children. You can earn it in one way and one way only. Serve food when you are bidden, serve wine, serve what you have—but interfere in no man's quarrel."

Stensson made suddenly the sign of the cross.

"Against no man on this plane will I raise my hand," he swore. "I will be the servant of the winner."

"Damned if the fellow isn't a philosopher," Haven muttered, as he made his way back into the saloon.

Arrived there, Haven found changed conditions. An absurdly early twilight seemed to have set in by reason of the storm, and, though it was barely four o'clock, the gloom inside and out was intense. Anna Kastellane had turned on the one electric lamp from the switch by her side and by its light Haven could see that Esterhaczy had so far recovered as to be able to sit up. He had been talking too. Haven heard his last words—

"You shall be set free in whatever country of the world you wish."

"You couldn't include me, I suppose?" Haven asked as he entered.

Esterhaczy looked at him, and, if the fire of savage eyes could kill, Haven was already a dead man.

"You are a different person," was the deliberate reply. "The police of Warsaw and such authorities as remain in Petrograd want you for the same reason. You are a thief. The sins of Mademoiselle here are more magnificent."

Haven stood in the middle of the car, his feet firmly planted on the swaying floor. He had taken up his position so that he could clutch at the rail above his head if necessary.

"Nicolas Esterhaczy," he said, "why do you irritate me? Your life was in my hands a few minutes ago—your life is in my hands now. I dislike shooting sitting game, but for the sake of the young lady, for my own sake and the sake of other people, I know that it is my duty to shoot you in that chair. I shall have only Patinsky to deal with then and I have dealt with him before. Why should I let an enemy live when he makes the odds against me doubtful?"

Esterhaczy was not a brave man, but he understood the guile of bravado.

"Well," he admitted, "it appears that I am at your mercy. I do not see what you have to gain by wholesale murder. You would have to shoot every one on the plane if you expected to get off. I do not think that even Anna Kastellane would applaud your action."

She lowered the revolver which she had been holding steadily.

"I am not at all sure," she intervened. "I, for one, would be safer with you dead. Patinsky is dangerous in his way and he is covetous, but he also seems to be something of a fool. One could deal with him. You—unfortunately—have brains and you know more."

"I know nothing," he declared emphatically, "that I cannot and will not forget."

"Perhaps," she admitted. "If you do not die now, Nicolas Esterhaczy, will you swear that I am not left in Russia?"

"I will swear that," he promised.

"It is my only fear," she went on. "I have seen what has happened to others who have done less than I have done. Why, in heaven's name, do you not tell us the truth, Nicolas Esterhaczy? You want to regain our favour. Your life is in our hands.

Tell us what you mean to do with us. We are not working together. He is nothing to me—this American, Wilfred Haven," she said, with a note of contempt in her tone which hurt. "Yet here we are, up till an hour ago, your prisoners. Well, you are ours now. By the Sacred Virgin," she cried, with a sudden burst of passion, "why do we play with this dumb fool? Look at me, Nicolas Esterhaczy. I have an uncertain forefinger. It is trembling and quivering even now. I have never shot a man and I should like to see one die. Tell me what you meant to do with us, or slip into hell."

If the girl's forefinger was tremulous, her hand was steady enough. The small black circle of the revolver's mouth gripped his eyes and held them. Esterhaczy quivered in his place.

"We are making for the Divinoff Marshes," he faltered. "Flat uninhabited land for two hundred miles. We are going to drop Haven there when we have taken the Ostrekoff jewels away from him. As for you—"

"Well?" she interrupted coldly. "I am interested."

"We are dropping you at the General's shooting box at Latchiniska on our way home."

Her eyes were like points of fire.

"Why I do not shoot you, I do not know," she said. "This American, who at any rate has sometimes been helpful to me, is to be murdered and I, Anna Kastellane, am to become the woman of a greasy old General with a grandfather who made cloth. Oh, Nicolas Esterhaczy, what keeps my finger steady, I wonder?"

The man writhed in his chair. The sweat was pouring down his face.

"I will help you," he cried. "I will do what I can. I promise. I will help your friend. Let him give up the jewels and we will save you both."

"Why should he break his trust for carrion like you?" she demanded. "Do you hear me, Wilfred Haven? Shall I shoot this man? We shall be safe then."

For a matter of seconds Haven was sorely tempted. Then courage came back.

"Let him live," he enjoined firmly. "Killing is no woman's game, after all. One has to remember."

She gave a little sob as she lowered her arm. All the fierceness died out of her face. Underneath that tight-fitting tunic he could see the quick rise and fall of her bosom.

"I hate you," she declared, her eyes suddenly flaming upon Haven. "But you are at least a man."

The wind for a moment had fallen. A blaze of lightning seemed to open the sky. Haven became rigid. He pointed to the farther seat.

"Go there, Esterhaczy," he ordered. "Patinsky is coming down," he added, turning to Anna. "I saw his feet upon the ladder."

CHAPTER XVIII

Patinsky had, at least, courage of a sort. He realised at once what had happened, when he entered the saloon, and cursed himself for not having relieved Esterhaczy of his revolver. His own fingers stopped as though galvanised, as they crept towards his pocket. Unwillingly he obeyed Haven's sharply given order and raised his hands.

"This is a foolish business," he complained. "What can you possibly gain by it? We may be your prisoners but you can do nothing without our guidance. The plane will not fly alone."

"I have just made a blunder," Haven announced, "in not shooting Esterhaczy. If you give me the shadow of a cause I am not going to repeat that mistake with you, Patinsky."

"Do not be absurd," the latter blustered, though his tone was not altogether natural. "If you kill us, you do yourselves no good and you will be in terrible trouble with the plane."

"We're wasting words," Haven observed. "Listen to me, Patinsky—and you too, Esterhaczy," he broke off, his voice ringing through the saloon. "If you try to move another inch, you'll go where I ought to have sent you ten minutes ago."

Esterhaczy, who had been struggling furtively to rise, relapsed into his chair. Haven's eyes never wavered from the figure in front of him.

"Anna Kastellane," he said, "your revolver is, I suppose, fully loaded. Look in the breech to be certain and keep Esterhaczy covered. You can do that?"

"I can do that," she repeated, examining the gun before she swung around in her chair. "I hope that he moves. I should be a happier woman even now if I had killed him."

"Shoot if he stirs an inch," Haven enjoined. "Keep both your hands flat on the table, Esterhaczy, until I give the word. Now, Colonel Patinsky, you are listening?"

"I am listening," was the cautious reply.

"Take off your outside leather coat. See that your fingers don't stray one inch beyond the buttons. Remember, I'm watching—watching even your thoughts. I'm only waiting for an opportunity to shoot."

Patinsky had evidently no intention of allowing him to do so. He took off his heavy sheepskin-lined leather coat and let it fall to the floor, exactly according to instructions.

"You are in rather too dangerous a position to tell lies," Haven continued. "Where do you keep your gun?"

"In my jacket pocket—the jacket I am wearing," Patinsky replied. "You can see the muzzle sticking out."

Haven nodded. He could discern a faint glitter of metal in the direction which the other had indicated.

"Now listen very carefully," he went on, "because your life depends upon your not making a mistake. Lower your left hand, draw your gun out of your pocket by the muzzle and throw it on the table. From the fact that you are carrying it in that fashion, I conclude that it is at safety. Don't snatch now! Very good. Very correctly done, Patinsky," he added as, with a crash of metal, the revolver fell upon the table. "Anna Kastellane."

"Well?"

"Concentrate upon Esterhaczy. Don't let your eyes wander for a moment. I am going to search Patinsky."

"If Captain Esterhaczy moves as much as a finger," was the deliberate assurance, "he will give me just the opportunity I am hoping for!"

Haven lowered his revolver, took a quick step forward and seized Patinsky's arm. The latter made no resistance and submitted himself to an extensive search.

"Very good," Haven approved, as he brought the matter to an end. "Now you can go and sit with your friend Esterhaczy at that table and we can have a little conversation."

"I have been outside in the freezing cold and I want a drink," Patinsky declared. "May I ring for Olav or will you?"

"I will in a minute," Haven promised. "Anna Kastellane, please get up and move to one of the chairs behind—the one nearest the window. Good. Now look at the window by your side. There is a top slat about three inches wide which opens if you draw those two brass catches together and pull."

She tugged for a moment in vain, then suddenly the narrow pane slid back and the place was filled with the roar of the wind. Haven picked up the revolvers from the table before him and handed them to her.

"Out with them," he enjoined.

She hesitated.

"Is it wise?" she ventured.

"It is wise," he assured her. "Unarmed, I can deal with any of these men, but they have the type of brain I don't trust. They'd wheedle these guns out of any hiding place we could think of if we left them to it. Out with them!"

Anna obeyed. One after the other the three weapons slid into black space, after which she closed the window and Haven rang the bell. There was a look of dark fury on Patinsky's face. Esterhaczy was still a little dazed. Olav made shambling entrance. He seemed more than ever like an animal from the frozen regions, but from those two slits where his eyes lay hidden came still that uneasy boding light.

"Order what you like," Haven invited, "and I shouldn't advise you," he added to Patinsky, "to go on making those signs to that poor brute of a steward. I took his gun away half an hour ago. It went out of the window with the rest."

"Bring tea and brandy, bread and ham," Patinsky ordered sullenly.

"For every one," Haven added. "And listen, Olav. There has been a change of owners on this plane. It belongs to me now. You will obey my orders and mine only. Do you understand?"

The Finn looked towards Esterhaczy and muttered something in a quite incomprehensible dialect.

"You understand, Olav?" Haven insisted, tapping him on the shoulder. "I am the master here and the only one. For example, I think I've searched the plane pretty well, but if I see another man handling a gun, I shall shoot him on sight."

"There is no other gun," Olav muttered.

"Go and get the things Colonel Patinsky ordered and bring enough for every one," Haven instructed him.

The man disappeared. Haven pulled out his map and studied it for a moment.

"Patinsky," he said, "I'm going to ask you a question which Esterhaczy has already answered. If your reply coincides, well, we shall at least know where we are. If Esterhaczy has lied, trouble may ensue. Where are we bound for? Where is our next stop?"

"The Divinoff Marshes," Patinsky replied.

"Quite correct," Haven agreed. "I am glad to see that you have a loud-speaking communicator there. Go to it and tell your pilot to change his course a few degrees southwards and make for Odessa."

"Odessa!" Anna Kastellane exclaimed in consternation.

"Odessa is at least a seaport with an exceedingly mixed population," Haven pointed out. "You have answered one question truthfully, Patinsky," he continued, looking across the aisle. "Let me try you with another. How much farther can we fly without more oil and petrol?"

"Patinsky knows nothing about these matters," Esterhaczy intervened. "He only served in the Air Force one year and that a long time ago. You had better ask me these questions. We can go for another four hundred miles if the wind gets no stronger. I stocked the plane and I know what she can do to a dozen miles."

"Very well," Haven assented. "I will make you the responsible person. Can we reach Odessa?"

"If we change our course at once we can reach Odessa by early morning," Esterhaczy pronounced. "The flying ground is nine miles from the city but there is always communication."

"Have the course changed at once," Haven directed.

Esterhaczy promptly obeyed. Haven had certainly acquired some sort of mind control over these two men, for they never even exchanged glances when Esterhaczy left his place to perform his mission.

"Odessa will probably provide you with a funeral, at any rate," the latter remarked, as he resumed his seat. "Those marshes—hundreds and hundreds of miles of them—are unpleasant. One hears of vultures there, of reptiles born and bred in the mud who never leave their homes. A Russian peasant now and then is a treat to them. A young American like you would be a feast. I was against abandoning you there. I suggested a revolver shot and a long dive. The General, however, seems to have taken a dislike to you."

"He will probably dislike me more before I've finished," Haven glowered.

In due course the food and brandy were placed upon the table. Olav brought vodka and whisky and a small bottle of champagne which he presented to Anna. Patinsky smiled across the aisle wistfully.

"Could we not join up and make a feast of it?" he suggested.

"You stay right where you are," Haven enjoined. "The farther away you are, Patinsky, the better I like you."

"There is Mademoiselle to be considered," Patinsky continued with an amorous smile.

"Mademoiselle is not thinking very much of me at the moment, but I think she prefers her present company to yours," Haven declared sharply.

"So much so," Anna sighed, "that I am really regretting that whilst I had the chance I did not pull that trigger. You two—Captain Esterhaczy—I suppose you would add, of the Flying Corps—and you, Colonel Patinsky of the Polish Cavalry—are of the type whom no woman, or man either, for that matter, should trust. I have trusted you to some small extent—and look at my predicament. If it had not been for my companion, you would have ignored altogether the bargain I made with you. You would murder him, you would rob him of his property and you would get rid of me and salve your consciences by delivering me over to General Grotzowill. Listen to what I am saying, my friend," she went on, laying her hand upon Haven's arm. "I am speaking the truth. They are not to be trusted, either of them. They are of the type who would break their word of honour to God."

"Mademoiselle, I fear, does not like us," Esterhaczy sighed. "Yet we have worked together, she and I. I could give our amiable friend, Mr. Haven, who seems now to be in such great favour, a little account of our last adventure which I am sure would thrill him."

"Hear the officer and gentleman!" Anna scoffed. "A spy, too, you know, Nicolas Esterhaczy. You are a spy, are you not?"

Esterhaczy stiffened in his place. It was a terrible word to use even with no listeners around. A streak of the unhealthy colour reappeared in his face.

"A spy? No," he declared vehemently. "A few weeks I passed in the Intelligence Department of my Government. During that period there may have been episodes."

"Ah, who cares?" Anna Kastellane cried scornfully. "What about you, Patinsky? An officer and a gentleman, yes? You are not by any chance a thief?"

"What if I am?" Patinsky sneered. "To-day the world is topsy-turvy. We leave our morals in pawn and we play our own hands. Wilfred Haven, permit me to ask you a question. You consider yourself the owner of this plane?"

"Absolutely," was the prompt rejoinder. "It is mine by right of conquest. At the same time," he went on, his eyes fixed steadily upon his enemies, "I am always willing to make it mine by right of purchase."

"Then, if it is yours, what are you going to do with us?" Patinsky asked quietly.

Haven smiled.

"I feel a gentle impulse to lie creeping over me," he confided. "I shall fight against it. I shall keep my mouth closed."

"It would be convenient to know," Patinsky sighed.

"Then you may prepare for the worst," was the urbane reply.

Later on the wind died down. Even the clouds disappeared and the plane rode smoothly southwards under a clear starlit sky. Anna Kastellane alone of the quartette, after the remains of their meal had been carried away, once or twice closed her eyes and dozed. The three men, face to face with the climax of their journey, made no attempt at sleep. Esterhaczy and Patinsky talked in a low tone throughout the night. Haven brooded in somewhat sullen silence. Odessa meant nothing to him. He knew little of the place or its possibilities, nor had he any idea as to how far it had been affected by the Revolution. Towards the small hours of the morning his two companions, who had been talking earnestly together for more than an hour, appeared to come to a decision. Patinsky leaned over towards him.

"Mr. Haven," he pointed out, "I wonder if it has occurred to you that if we carry out your own instructions, you will find yourself stranded, probably penniless, and with the young lady to look after, in one of the worst cities of Europe?"

"I certainly don't figure out that it's quite as bad as that," Haven replied, with all the confidence in his tone which he was very far from feeling.

"Be so good as to reflect," Patinsky begged. "So far as Russia is concerned, the Civil War is practically over. The Revolution has spread to Odessa, the Reds are holding the city, and all private property is being confiscated until arrangements are made for its redistribution. Now we will speak in plain words without any more of this fencing. What chance do you think you have of retaining in your possession the Ostrekoff jewels, which already belong to the State? Their value is known all over the world. The revolutionists of Odessa will make you very welcome, but their welcome will be little better for you than the mud and snow and vultures of the Divinoff Marches."

"Sounds depressing," Haven observed, "but get on with it."

"Your whole mission," Patinsky proceeded, with a wave of the hand, an appreciative gleam in his languorous eyes, and a note of respect in his tone, "has been one of chivalry. You accepted a trust and you have done as much as any man in the world could have done towards carrying it out. Nevertheless—it is time you abandoned it. Neither Nicolas Esterhaczy nor I are men of violence. I propose that we come to a friendly agreement, one of the conditions being that we shall do our best to see you through the dangers of Odessa and get you by some means or other into a neutral or friendly country."

"And the other conditions?"

Patinsky removed from his mouth the cigarette which he had just lit and waved his hand in a graceful gesture.

"That we divide the jewels you are carrying into three portions as nearly as possible equal in value, and that they be distributed between yourself, Nicolas Esterhaczy and myself. Even the third share in the value of these jewels is a great fortune, and if your conscience impels you to persevere in your trust, you will still be in a position to fulfill it to some extent."

Haven followed his companion's example and lit a cigarette.

"What about the young lady?" he asked, after a few minutes of apparent reflection.

Patinsky sighed.

"Concerning Anna Kastellane," he admitted, "there is only one possible course open to us. We must, on our homeward way, leave her at General Grotzowill's chateau. I do not think," Patinsky continued, with a slow but ugly smile, "that the young lady will greatly object. Grotzowill is the most powerful man in Poland to-day. He is certain to be the founder of our new State and, to be quite frank with you, neither of us dare disappoint him."

Wilfred Haven, aged twenty-six, a graduate from Harvard, whose home address was Fifth Avenue, poured himself out a drink and sipped it thoughtfully.

"What a precious pair of blackguards you two are," he remarked.

Esterhaczy sprang angrily to his feet, but his companion pulled him down. The two men talked together in rapid incomprehensible Polish. Finally it was Patinsky who remained spokesman.

"Which is worse," he asked, "imbecility or blackguardism? If we are blackguards, you are an imbecile—and frankly, I prefer our own position. You can insult us as much as you wish now, but if you refuse to make friends with us you will spend to-morrow night, or rather to-night, in the fortress of St. Joseph at Odessa, which many people have declared to be a most unpleasant place. You will be found with loot from Petrograd in your possession, loot which the Government here will be only too glad to take over. You have no earthly chance of escape unless you kill both of us, Olav and the pilot. I do not think that you will take that risk."

"There may be human beings in Odessa," Haven meditated.

"There are indeed," Patinsky agreed. "But human beings are pretty much the same all the world over, when it comes to a matter of two or three million pounds."

There was a brief silence. Esterhaczy poured out more brandy. His companion followed his example. Haven, ever watchful, lit a cigarette and sat with folded arms.

"Are we to understand," Patinsky enquired—"I am perhaps mistaken but I am judging only from your aloof attitude—that our proposals for an alliance are rejected?"

"Most emphatically you can," was the curt reply.

"You are a crazy young man," Esterhaczy deplored. "Without our help you have not one chance in a million of getting out of Odessa alive."

Haven looked across at them regretfully. He was very young and human life had always seemed a sacred thing to him.

"I ought to have killed you both," he groaned.

CHAPTER XIX

Serge Zakoff, newly appointed Governor of Odessa, sat before his desk in the large council room where, for twelve hours a day, he strove to establish order out of chaos, and looked at the long list presented him by his secretary, a young Jewish woman, dressed with an affectation of military style in a blue tunic and loose trousers tucked into high boots.

"Do you mean, Lydia Andrekovitch," he demanded, "that all these people are here and that they expect personal audiences?"

"All these and one other," the girl replied. "She would not tell me her name, but she wrote it on a card and placed it in this envelope."

Serge Zakoff slit open the envelope with a thin knife that lay before him on the table. He drew out the card and looked at it. His eyes grew wide with astonishment, some inaudible ejaculation escaped him. He hesitated for a moment, then he tore the card into small pieces and, placing them in an ash tray, laid the cigarette which he had been smoking on the top of them.

"I will decide what can be done about seeing the others in a few minutes," he announced. "Those having business connected with ships waiting in the harbour must have preference. First of all, though, bring this young woman into my private room."

The girl departed without a word but with the air of one ill pleased with her mission. Zakoff, picking up some papers, crossed the bare floor of the room and disappeared into an inner bureau. He was standing there, looking out upon the harbour through a high, uncurtained window, when his secretary returned.

"It is the young woman, Governor Serge Zakoff," she announced.

The Governor swung around, looked at Anna steadfastly for a moment, and pointed to a chair. He himself moved to the place on the other side of his desk.

"So it is indeed you, my fellow student," he observed, as soon as Lydia Andrekovitch had left the room. "I heard of you last in Petrograd. How long have you been in Odessa?"

"A matter of thirty-five minutes," she told him, smiling, "and I have heard a good deal already of Serge Zakoff, the Governor."

He sighed. His was a thin, thoughtful face, with a mass of brown hair and brown eyes marred by too light eyebrows. He wore a severe, well-fitting uniform, a red sash tied round his tunic.

"I am beginning to discover," he confided, "that these places on the outskirts of our new dominion present peculiar difficulties. To govern here is almost as impossible as to submit to government. What can I do for my friend and comrade?"

"What I shall tell you in these few words," she declared, "will sound like the story of a mad woman, but you who know me know that I speak the truth."

"I would believe your word against the world's, Comrade Anna," he assented quietly. "I had the misfortune never to please you when we worked together but I bear no resentment."

His eyes were fixed upon her but without undue steadfastness. His pale face was expressionless. His surprise at seeing her having departed, he showed not the slightest sign of any other emotion.

"I landed here," she recounted, "barely an hour ago, with a young man from the American Embassy in Petrograd who was of great assistance to me in aiding my escape which, believe me, was a necessity. We have all the time been in difficulties, but somehow or other we scrambled through as far as Warsaw. There I had affairs which I duly concluded. I had great trouble with General Grotzowill, who is known to you by name. It is he who wishes to march southwards with a Polish army and join the White forces."

"Yes," Zakoff agreed softly. "I know Grotzowill and I can guess at the nature of that trouble."

"Between us," she went on, "the American and I hired a plane in which we were to be taken to some friendly or neutral country. A plot was laid for us which would have succeeded but for the courage of my companion. He was to have been stripped of all his possessions and either thrown out of the plane or left to die of starvation in the marshes over which we passed. I was to be returned to General Grotzowill at a shooting lodge which he keeps for the entertainment of his lady friends near the frontier. A man who was a stranger to me, Patinsky of the Polish Cavalry, and a flying man, Esterhaczy, whom we were paying for the plane, acted as our escorts. My companion, who, though occasionally rather stupid, is a very brave young man, outwitted and disarmed them but unfortunately spared their lives. We landed here on the flying ground this morning. They got into one taxi and I imagine you will find them by this time in your waiting room. I got into another and persuaded your secretary to take my card in to you."

"You are here, Comrade Anna," the Governor said, "and you are welcome, but proceed quickly, for I can hear that outside they are becoming impatient. How can I help you? First of all tell me this—is the American you speak of your lover?"

"He is not," she replied, a spot of colour slowly flaming in her cheeks. "He behaves as though he had been brought up in the back woods and he knows no more about women than I do about crocodiles. He believes incredible things about me and he apparently dislikes me more than any one else on earth."

"Proceed then," Zakoff enjoined.

"You can help me, you can save our two lives and win our eternal gratitude," she explained, "if you will drive with me to the flying ground, or give me a permit which no one dare dispute, to depart with the American as soon as we are loaded up with petrol and oil, and order your guard to arrest Patinsky and Esterhaczy, if they attempt to force their way into the plane."

Serge Zakoff reflected for several moments.

"You are asking a great deal," he observed. "These men may make a grave business of it."

"They may," she admitted, "but, on the other hand, the father of the young American is one of the best-known men in his country and of immense wealth. The murder of his son over here would be a disaster. I can assure you, also, that unless we get away from those two men, Esterhaczy and Patinsky, I myself shall be in terrible trouble. Whatever may happen in the future, Serge Zakoff, you are to-day an autocrat."

"What is the name upon your passport?" he asked.

"Anna Kastellane."

"And the American's?"

"Wilfred Haven. He is carrying a satchel sealed with the stamp of the United States Embassy."

Zakoff drew half a sheet of newly printed note paper towards him and wrote upon it swiftly. He signed his name and, unlocking a drawer, produced a great seal with which he stamped it.

"This will take you out of Odessa," he announced, "and will secure the obedience of every one upon the flying ground."

She slipped the paper down the bosom of her dress and, leaning over, kissed him lightly on both cheeks. There were tears in her eyes.

"Serge Zakoff," she said, "you have made me your debtor for all my life."

He smiled a little sadly.

"And you, Anna," he rejoined, "have helped me to taste the sweets of power as you once pushed me along the path of bitterness."

He rose to his feet and, with a key from his chain, unlocked a door behind his desk. He led the way down a narrow passage and, with another key, opened a farther door leading into the street.

"Get back to the flying ground at once," he advised. "The sooner you are in the air the better. We are expecting two more

envoys from Moscow to-day and they may bring a list of regulations which would interfere with your departure. As for the men of whom you have spoken, I will do my best to detain them, if they should come here."

She passed out into the street with a little farewell wave of the hand. Round the corner she found her taxicab waiting.

All the way back to the flying ground Anna Kastellane sat with her eyes fixed steadily ahead of her. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, although the streets were thronged with people, although shops were plentiful and there were many things which she had meant to buy. She was conscious of but one passionate desire—to hear the roar of the motors, to feel the country slipping away beneath her, to know that the aeroplane was turned westward.

At the gate of the aerodrome she was stopped in peremptory fashion by two soldiers. She produced the pass which Serge Zakoff had signed. They saluted and waved her on. An officer, crossing the flying ground, held up his hand. A glance at the pass and he too saluted.

"It was you who arrived this morning, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Your mechanic and pilot are loading up now," he told her. "It is permitted to ask your destination?"

"Northwards," she answered with a smile.

She drove on to the inner enclosure. Here again a guard was stationed but again her note won her prompt admission. She paid off the chauffeur and hurried to the hangar into which the plane had been wheeled. Haven and the pilot, with their coats off, were storing away petrol and oil. There was a hint of unconscious triumph in her tone as she showed the former the magic slip of paper.

"We are at liberty to remain here, to buy oil and petrol at government prices, and to depart when it pleases us," she pointed out with satisfaction.

There was a flash in Haven's eyes.

"Listen," he begged. "We have enough fuel in stock now to take us half over Europe. You are not thinking of waiting for those two?"

She laughed derisively.

"Wait for our executioners!" she exclaimed. "Why should we? How soon can we start?" she added, turning to the pilot.

He looked at her blankly. An hour or two at a café in Odessa and a sound sleep were very much in his mind.

"The master said nothing about leaving to-day," was his stolid reply. "It is not possible. The engine needs attention. There are adjustments to be made."

"Neither Captain Esterhaczy nor Colonel Patinsky are returning with us," she announced. "Mr. Haven and I wish to leave at once."

The man shook his head angrily.

"You are passengers, you two," he declared. "Captain Esterhaczy is my master. I shall not move without his authority. We shall stay here for the night. It is necessary."

He felt an iron grip upon his arm. Haven led him into the furthermost corner of the hangar and then released him. Slowly he opened his pocketbook and brought out a pile of notes. The man, who had opened his mouth to protest, was suddenly dumb. He loved money, beer and women, but he loved money best of the three, and there was more there than he had ever seen in his life.

"Listen," Haven confided, "I have taken over the plane. You are my pilot now. I am going to pay you bigger wages than

you have ever had in your life before and, when you land us safely where I shall direct you to land us, I shall give you enough money to live on for the rest of your life. Don't worry any more about such inferior people as Esterhaczy. You're going to be rich. You could open a garage, if you cared to, or fly your own machines."

"But I cannot fly long distances without an observer," the man gasped.

"I will be your observer," Haven told him.

"You! What do you know about it?" the man demanded incredulously.

"I have done some flying," Haven assured him. "I am going to join the American Air Force when we get out of this."

The man was a Lithuanian and he only half understood. Haven turned to Anna.

"Look here," he said eagerly, "he doesn't want to start without an observer. Here's my certificate, viséed by the military. I'm a certified pilot and can drive this plane myself if necessary. If this fool's going to be obstinate, I shall start off without him—if you'll trust me. See if you can't make him understand. We want to leave this moment. I'll make him independent of Esterhaczy all his life. I'll give him five thousand dollars for the trip as soon as we get to a friendly or a neutral bank, if he'll start at once. Make him understand that I can read the chart and drive the plane myself if necessary."

"You are rather a wonderful person, are you not?" she exclaimed, looking at him with a very much softer light in her eyes. "Give me some of that money. He has never taken his eyes off it. I expect he would like some on account."

Haven thrust the packet into her hand. She talked rapidly and earnestly to the pilot and handed him a thick wad of the notes which he almost snatched from her fingers. Then, without a word, he picked up his coat and cap, called out a warning to the helpers and clambered up into his place. Haven distributed some of the smaller notes to the men who were standing around and followed Anna. They found Olav in the saloon, staring at them in surprise.

"We are starting at once," Anna announced.

"We cannot start without Captain Esterhaczy," the man objected sullenly.

"Get that out of your head," Haven enjoined, blocking the passage. "You leave Léon alone. Here's a thousand kronen. Put them into your pocket. There'll be plenty more to come if you behave yourself and obey orders. If you kick up a fuss, you'll be thrown out. I'm in command now. Understand that."

"But what will they do—the others?" the man demanded, stupefied. "We cannot leave them behind."

"We can and we're going to, and that's all there is to it," Haven assured him, as the engine began to roar. "Get back into the pantry, Olav, and look after things. We'll need some food presently."

The man was only half listening. As he walked away his eyes were fixed on the thousand-kronen note in dazed fashion. Suddenly there was a bump and a jerk forward. From every corner of the huge enclosure people came running to watch the ascent. One more bump and then a sensation of velvety smoothness. They were off the ground, mounting rapidly. They were higher now than the houses and still gliding upwards. Léon, who was really a very fine pilot, took a long graceful sweep and glanced at the compass. Haven called up to him through the loud speaker.

"Do you want me, Léon?"

"Not yet, Master," was the guttural reply.

Olav, with the thousand-kronen note safely tucked away between his sock and the sole of his boot, was preparing the table for luncheon. Haven suddenly realised that Anna Kastellane was human. There were tears in her eyes, the first he had seen there. The proud mouth had softened.

"You are a very wonderful man," she confessed, looking up at him.

"What about you?" he rejoined, tossing a roll into the air and catching it. "Who got the Governor's pass, I'd like to know? We'd never have been able to leave without that. We're all wonderful, including Olav!" he exclaimed exultantly, patting the steward on the shoulder. "Do you know this fellow has stocked up even in this short time. Here we have fresh rolls and I swear I saw a ham."

She smiled triumphantly.

"I sent Olav out," she confided. "I told him the master might want to start at any moment. What I didn't tell him, though, was—which master!"

The aeroplane had become a small speck in the heavens when a large grey touring car, to which all the sentries presented arms, was driven without hindrance into the enclosure. Patinsky, side by side with a much decorated officer, occupied the front seat and Esterhaczy with an A.D.C. was behind.

"We arrive," the latter pointed out to his companion, "but I see no aeroplane."

Patinsky stared at the empty hangar with uncomprehending eyes. Esterhaczy gave an angry shout. The loiterers, who were suspecting something dramatic from the unexpected departure of the plane, came hurrying forward. The officer by Patinsky's side called to a sergeant in uniform.

"Sergeant," he asked, "where is the plane that arrived from Warsaw this morning?"

The man pointed to the skies.

"It left twenty minutes ago, sir," he reported.

"But it was my plane," Esterhaczy shouted, fuming with rage.

"It has been stolen," Patinsky cried. "Who dared to take it away?"

"There was a young lady, sir," the man announced, "a very large young man with a satchel locked to his arm all the time he was working, the pilot and a steward."

The shouted questions of Esterhaczy and Patinsky were utterly incomprehensible. The officer stood up in the car and waved them to silence.

"Sergeant," he said severely, "will you explain how it was that you permitted a plane which had once descended here to leave without permission?"

The sergeant drew himself up.

"The young lady was carrying the Governor's pass to leave when she chose," he replied. "It was stamped at Government House this morning and properly signed."

The officer looked coldly at his companions. He rather resented having been dragged down from a busy morning at the barracks on a fool's errand.

"You hear, gentlemen?" he remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders.

But neither Patinsky of the Polish Cavalry nor Nicolas Esterhaczy heard anything. Their faces were turned skywards to where a small black speck was disappearing in the distance and their eyes were full of hate.

CHAPTER XX

Serenity in the skies, exaltation tempered with exhaustion, marked the first stage of that amazing return cruise. On the evening of the second day, after Olav had served them with an astonishing meal of herring soup, kasha and loaf cheese packed in wooden boxes, Haven produced his map and spread it across the table.

"Before I go up, Anna Kastellane," he said, "I want you to look at this with me. An hour ago we were here, so far as I could make out," he went on, indicating a strip of country south of Vienna. "We must have done something over a thousand miles and there is no reason why we shouldn't do another thousand miles in the next twenty-four hours. It isn't much of a pace, of course, but the old engine's steady and she's humming like a bird."

"It amazes me that you should understand the aeroplane," she remarked.

"It's the only part of real fighting that ever appealed to me," he confided. "I only hope I get back in time to finish up with our people.... What I was going to say is this—our nearest friendly country is Italy. We can wipe that out. We couldn't get over the mountains, and all the passes are bristling with anti-aircraft guns. Switzerland would be even worse, so far as the mountains are concerned, and I believe they shoot on sight any aeroplane seen over the country. On the other side of that—here, you see—" he went on, tapping with his pencil, "is France, but between us and France is the whole of the German, the whole of the French and the whole of the English lines and a collection of the finest anti-aircraft guns in the world. We should be recognized as a Russian plane by the Germans and we should be down in a moment."

"What are we to do then?" she asked.

"I'm afraid there's nothing for it," he told her, "but to wheel north, cross over a portion of Germany by night, without lights, and come down in Holland. If we're going strong and the weather's good and we have enough petrol, we might even make England. The point is, however, that we daren't risk any of the frontiers."

Anna sighed.

"How wonderful if we could reach England," she murmured. "However, it must be just as you think best. What country are we over now?"

"Austria," he replied. "We're between Vienna and Salzburg at the present moment. What I want to do, you see, is to cross a strip of Germany in the night. They've wonderful anti-aircraft guns at Frankfurt and Mainz, but I want to go north of these and then wheel. If we have luck and the wind keeps down, we ought to be nearing Holland at sunrise. If we can do that, bar accidents, we're safe."

One of those rare smiles flitted across her face.

"I have felt safe," she confessed, "ever since we got rid of Esterhaczy and Patinsky."

He rose to his feet thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't like to trust our present pair of cutthroats too far," he remarked, as he did his best to struggle into Esterhaczy's sheepskin coat, which was several sizes too small for him. "There is just one thing more," he went on, after a moment's hesitation. "My satchel gets in my way when I'm taking over and I daren't loosen the chain up there—one lurch and it would be gone for ever. There's no chance of callers here, so far as I can see. Couldn't I leave it with you? You could cover it with your coat, and sleep with your feet upon it, or perhaps put it under your pillow?"

"Of course, I will take care of it," she promised. "Every day since I first met you I have been longing to know how you could ever release yourself from it without a key."

"And alas, you won't know," he told her with a good-humoured smile, "until I hand it over. I've promised to let no one see the trick—not even the Archangel Gabriel, if he came down and offered to take care of it. I'll show you the moment we're out of this mess, however. Excuse me."

He swung around and faced the other way for a moment. In less than ten seconds he placed the satchel in her hands.

"If you want to keep awake," he confided, "you can try fastening it on your own wrist. You'll be still trying when I come

down!"

"You need not be afraid," she assured him. "I am not a very curious person and I am very sleepy."

He raised her fingers to his lips. She gave them to him willingly enough, but though her eyes had grown kinder during the last twenty-four hours, her manner was more aloof. He knew quite well that there was something still between them of trouble or suspicion. They both lacked the initiative for an explanation—he from a sort of clumsy masculinity, she from a curiously involved tangle of sensations. Perhaps, he thought, as he turned reluctantly away, that might have been the supreme moment. Instinct told him that she was craving for a few words from him, for some indication of a larger faith in her. She might easily have invited them, but even then she hesitated. He was fighting for their lives, taking the man's part, driving the plane, of which he knew little, through the night over a strange country bristling with dangers. It was an adventure to which he was committed for her sake as well as his own.... There were a few seconds, an infinitesimal measure of time, during which she nearly called him back for the "Good night" which would have wiped out all necessity for explanations. The inspired moment passed. There was also a similar measure of time a little later on when, with one hand upon the iron banister and the other on the handle of the door, he looked back. The room was only partially lit. The palm of one of her hands rested upon the cloak which concealed the satchel. Her head was turned away. She was looking into the black chaos below. By chance his eyes travelled down the narrow murky passage behind. He caught a glimpse of a white face, as Olav leaned out from his pantry, an evil-looking face from its sheer animalism. For a moment Haven hesitated. He felt a curious unwillingness to leave her, yet, on the other hand she *must* be safe. There was no possible harm which could come to her there. Olav was his bought slave, with nothing to gain by infidelity. Léon would be under his own control throughout the night.

To-morrow, he told himself, crushing down that curious sense of premonition, would find them both in safety.

Haven, as he took over the control and settled down, looked about him with satisfaction. The night was clear and fine, with only a slight breeze, and an unusual absence of clouds. It seemed to him, however, glancing downwards, that the lights below, evidently of a railroad track, were unusually distinct, and he peered forward at the dial. He read its record, frowning. The altitude was two hundred metres below that which he had chalked up before his descent. He leaned forward to look at the compass. They were travelling very nearly due north. He changed the control swiftly and they shot upwards, then he turned round to Léon who was seated there looking steadily ahead, his cap slouched down over his eyes and little of his face to be seen.

"Why didn't you keep the course I chalked up?" Haven demanded.

"I turned to avoid a wind pocket," the man replied sullenly. "There's another one coming. We were flying too high."

"What rubbish are you talking about wind pockets?" Haven asked curtly. "There isn't a breath of wind or a cloud in the sky."

The man growled and pointed over his shoulder.

"Look behind, Master; you will see."

Haven steadied himself with one hand and leaned towards the side of the car. Almost as he did so, some instinct prompted him not to prolong the motion. He turned back abruptly. Léon was almost bending over him.

"Why the devil don't you look over your own side?" he demanded.

The man's eyes were fixed on the spot where the satchel was usually lying attached to Haven's arm. He muttered something utterly indistinguishable. Behind those thick glasses, difficult though it was to recognise any expression in the saucerlike eyes, Haven could have sworn he caught a gleam of disappointment. He affected to study the course. All the time he was thinking. Léon had deliberately altered the course and lowered the altitude. He had tried to get him, Haven, to lean over the side of the car to look for some disturbance of weather which had never existed. He had shown signs of disappointment at the fact that he had come up with both hands free. He had been preparing for some sort of action a few seconds before when he, Haven, had swung around in his place. Taken singly, none of these trifling incidents might have

counted for much. Taken all together, Haven came to a prompt but most disquieting decision. Léon had a plan. He had meant to throw him out of his place and to take over the plane. Was he on his own or was Olav in the plot? Haven steadied down the speed while he reasoned the matter out. If Olav was in the plot, Anna might be in danger. He remembered his strange fit of uneasiness as he had climbed the ladder. This might very possibly be a plot between the two. Earlier in the evening Olav, after he had served the dinner, had taken the observer's seat and stayed outside for some time. They were servants of robbers and criminals and they were probably disposed to be robbers and criminals themselves, with sufficient inducement. Even the great wad of thousand kronen notes which he had displayed in order to bribe them was an indiscretion. He forced himself to think the matter out carefully. The man by his side probably meant having his life. He might be weaponless but a weapon was barely necessary if by a swift movement he could loosen the strap and give one determined push. Well, that part of the plot, at any rate, would miscarry now. Outwardly absorbed in his task, he was, in reality, working his brain hard, keying up his nerves to face any possible eventuality. The last few weeks had upset all his prejudices. He who, like most big men, had never dreamed of fighting except in self-defence, and who, partly on account of his physical superiority, had found no great appetite for the mild combats of school and college, had suddenly developed a new fierceness. He would have yielded without a second's remorse to the impulse which prompted him to throw his companion from his seat to certain death if it had not been for the fact that, save himself, no one else could drive the plane. He wanted intensely to kill Léon, knowing very well that the same idea was in the other man's mind. Slowly his ideas adjusted themselves. Léon must be kept alive and unsuspicious, in order that he might drive the plane. So long as he had the stick in his hand, he would never dare to leave it. That, it seemed to Haven, was the only advantage he had. He planned it all out in his mind—he must make some excuse to hand over the control before long and get back into the saloon. Arrived there, he must discover whether Olav was in the plot. If he was, or if there was the slightest suspicion about it, he must be dealt with promptly. There would be no trouble with Anna, he knew. She would sit calmly by and leave him to do what was necessary. He almost smiled as he realised the simplicity of his own rôle. He would be able to take Olav by surprise and deal with him; then he would take over control of the plane again and that would have to be the end of Léon. He shivered a little, but these days were toughening his sensibilities. If they had indeed conceived a plot, they took their risk as others must do of life or death. His thoughts went wandering on. This was the crisis, he realised, of their adventure. Life and death seemed not such great things perched up there a couple of thousand feet in the air. His brain had never been clearer than it was now, as he glanced downwards at the dial. He altered the course slightly, increased the altitude and took a final look around. Far away southwards, mingled with the stars which hung over the horizon, he caught the occasional flash of a moving plane—probably German raiders. He himself was flying without lights, utterly invisible at his present height. He decided that the time had come for action. He gave a little groan.

"Léon," he muttered.

"Master?" the man replied.

"I have a pain," Haven confided. "It was the coffee which Olav made me drink. Will you take over for half an hour?"

The man nodded and unfastened his strap.

"Don't alter the course," Haven enjoined, without undue emphasis, as he handed over the stick. "I'm sure you meant it for the best, but the course as it is now will take us to safety."

The change was duly effected. Haven lingered for a moment in the observer's seat. Then he swung himself on to the iron ladder and descended step by step until he pushed open the door which led to the saloon. To his amazement the place was in darkness.

"Anna!" he called out.

He fancied that he heard a groan, but in the same instant he felt a sharp flick upon each cheek, as though he had been struck with a whip, and almost simultaneously a suffocating sensation at the throat. His cry was stifled. He felt the blood rush to his head. Olav's face loomed up in front of him through the darkness.

"If Master struggles," he threatened, "I pull the cord tighter. One more pull and Master will be dead."

For a moment life surged away—even his tongue was powerless. He lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXI

Haven opened his eyes upon what seemed to him at first some ghastly nightmare. He was lying upon the floor of the saloon and his arms, from his wrists to his shoulders, were bound to his body with strips of dried and uncured leather. His ankles were secured in similar fashion. More horrible still, around his neck, with a slip knot, was a strip of the same loathsome material. Olav, who was seated on a chair by his side, gave a playful little tug at the loose end and the agony at his throat recommenced. Opposite to him, in the most distant of the arm-chairs, was Anna, also bound hand and foot and groaning feebly. Her eyes were pools of horror. She called out to him piteously.

"This man is a devil—a devil," she repeated. "Why did we not kill him, Wilfred Haven? We should have killed them both while we had the chance."

Olav chuckled and gave a further pull at the cord which he held, so that Haven almost shrieked with the agony of it.

"Yes, yes, it would have been well to kill us!" he cried. "Now we must kill you. We throw you over when we come to the water. Water is safest. Perhaps I throw you over first," he went on, looking down at Haven. "I talk a little to the lady afterwards. Yes?"

The man shook with laughter. Notwithstanding his bound legs and hands and the tightening of the strip of dried leather around his throat, Haven struggled to rise. Olav, with a laugh, drew tighter still the thong and Haven collapsed upon the floor.

"Do not let him do that," Anna moaned. "It is terrible! I am thinking hard," she went on in English. "What fools we were to give them this chance. We must bargain for our lives now. What is there that we can offer them? They know about the jewels already."

"I am rich," Haven reminded her.

"Try and make him understand that," Anna enjoined. "Do not look at me," she begged. "Whatever you do, do not look at me. Try to keep his attention, if you can."

Haven tightened his lips and did as he was bidden. Nevertheless, even when he withdrew his eyes to look at Olav, he understood the meaning of the queer little noise that he had heard, in spite of the roar of the engine when first he had recovered consciousness. Anna had evidently discovered a portion of the brass clasp of the window which had a jagged edge, and she was rubbing the cord which bound her wrists steadily against it. Already her hand was covered with blood where she had slipped. Haven played his part. Fortunately Olav understood his scanty Russian better than the other man.

"Listen, Olav," he argued. "You think you will get rid of us and that the jewels I carry, of which you heard from your master, will make you and Léon rich. You are wrong. You make a great mistake. You could earn great wealth, but not with those jewels. Slacken that cord a little or I can talk no more."

Olav obeyed at once. There was incredulity and also anxiety in his blue eyes.

"The jewels are the Ostrekoff jewels," he declared. "They are famous throughout the world. They would make a whole town rich. With you and the woman at the bottom of the water, the jewels are ours. How could we be wealthier?"

"You have no brains, Olav," Haven scoffed, speaking as slowly as possible and struggling desperately to keep his eyes from the other side of the saloon. "You do not understand. Every one of those jewels is famous. Where will you sell? You might go to Constantinople, to Paris, to New York, to Buenos Ayres, to Berlin, and when you showed the stones, you would be asked the same question—'How did you come by these?' And when you told your foolish story, for I have no doubt that it would be a foolish story, they would shake their heads and say—'Sell those to some other jeweller.' Shall I tell you why, Olav?"

"Yes, you can tell me why if you will," the man replied stolidly, "but that does not mean that I believe. We are going to take the jewels—Léon and I—and you and the woman will be at the bottom of the water."

"Very unpleasant for us," Haven continued, "but no help to you. What the jeweller would say is simple. He would say —'Go to some other jeweller'—because he would know very well that those jewels cannot be worn by any of the great ladies, and when the police asked how he came by them, he would point to you and you would both go to prison. They

might even find out about us. It might become known that we four left Odessa together in this plane, with special permission from the Governor, and that only you and Léon and the jewels arrived in Holland. They would want to know what had become of us. I have rich friends in America who would look for me. The end of this might very well be, Olav, that you and Léon would find yourselves dangling by the necks, with no money in your pockets and no lives to live."

Olav was obviously impressed and obviously uneasy. His attention was rivetted upon every word which his prisoner uttered. Haven prayed only that his voice might not fail him, or his imagination. Once he let his eyes wander to Anna's corner and he gave a little start, but he gurgled in his throat as though in pain. A miracle had happened. Anna was no longer there!

"I will tell you how to become the wealthiest man in Finland," Haven went on. "You have heard of America? Well, America is the richest country in the world. My father is one of the multimillionaires there. He's as rich as the Tsar was —"

"That is not possible," Olav sneered. "The Tsar had all the savings of generations of peasants and farmers. He had more money than there was anywhere else in the world."

Haven shook his head.

"You make many mistakes, Olav," he said, "because you have not travelled very far. Believe me, I am speaking the truth, even though you draw this cord tighter about my throat. There are dozens of men in America richer than ever the Tsar was, and my father is one of them. You will never sell those wonderful jewels. You will have to give them to your children to play with, as though they were pieces of glass. I propose something to you now, Olav. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Olav replied, with sullen reluctance, "but I do not believe."

"You will believe soon, because it is the truth," Haven urged. "Listen to me carefully—there is no hurry. I will speak so that you will understand. We will forget this little quarrel—we will all four go together to London; there I will take you to a bank. I shall not offer you stones of a pretty colour which would not be worth to you as much as pebbles. I shall give you gold and kronen notes—all that you can carry. I will give you and Léon enough to buy a palace as big as the Tsar's, as many wives as the Sultan of Turkey, and more wine than you can drink or food than you can eat all your lives. You shall have enough," Haven went on painfully, "to build schools in which your children shall be taught, to buy wives for them and mistresses for yourselves in your old age when wives grow cold. You shall have the money, the gold to do this —the gold, Olav."

Haven paused, and the duration of that pause was the supreme agony of his life. His eyes were fixed on the distraught face of the man who was leaning towards him, his mouth open, the perspiration standing out on his forehead, struggling fiercely between belief and disbelief, afraid to come to a decision, yet fascinated by the pictures his captive was drawing. And Haven himself was in little better plight. Imagination was not his strong point, and how could he keep his thoughts upon his task and his eyes upon the man's face, when a glance a few seconds ago had shown him a dark figure creeping all the time nearer and nearer through the shadows of the room, with something in her hand upon which the faint light shining from the cockpit flashed and winked. If Olav turned his head and saw her now, all her efforts would count for nothing. Olav must be held.

"You have served us well, Olav," he struggled on, "but you have listened to the talk of this fellow Léon. You are both good fellows, all right," he amended hastily, fearing lest he might have made a mistake. "We will all four be friends. Presently you shall leave me trussed up like this and you shall go up to Léon and tell him what I have said. The night is still and words can be heard even there. Tell him, Olav, and it is as true as the word of God, that those stones you think so much of would find you the inside of a prison and the gallows before they would ever buy you a meal. Tell him that I, that we, forgive. We will be friends together. We will drink together upon the bargain. We will make you both rich with solid gold."

Olav wiped the sweat from his forehead. He pulled his coat open.

"I hear," he said. "I hear all that. Perhaps I make a mistake, but Léon and I—we will have the jewels. You and the woman—" he pointed downwards, "the water. We are not afraid. Whom the fishes eat tell no tales."

One awful, yet wonderful vision, and Haven for a moment closed his eyes. Anna was there bending forward, unhurried,

calm, the fire of purpose in her violet eyes, her tongue playing lightly upon her lips, in her fingers a cruel steel blade drawn back, four, five inches behind Olav's bulgy neck. Then in it went. There was a sound the like of which Haven had never heard before—the rending of human flesh—then a cataract of blood.... Anna was not content. She bent over her work. She drove the knife farther in still. The man's face became to Haven like the face of a horrible puppet. The eyes seemed as though they were falling out. Suddenly blood came from the mouth, and he fell over on the floor, a dull, inert mass.

"I'm afraid I fainted," Haven confessed, ten minutes later, as he sat at the table, livid marks upon his arms, a terrible red band around his neck. "I have never done such a thing before."

"You were wonderful," Anna told him, in a strange far-away tone. "You kept on talking and talking and talking, and Olav was listening with his ears and his eyes and his mouth. He never thought of me. I cut through the bonds with that broken window catch and I got the knife from the pantry. The last few yards were awful. If you had paused in your story—if he had looked away from your face for a moment, it would have been all in vain. Drink this."

She handed him a tumbler she had filled half with whisky and half with water. He drank it and he felt the blood once more coursing through his veins. He stood up, stretched himself and took two long breaths. They were rushing through the darkness, but the edge of a moon was creeping up from behind a bank of black ragged clouds.

"There is Léon," Anna reminded him quietly.

He smiled—a queer strained contortion of the lips.

"Remember," he said, "that after I have once climbed into the cockpit, I cannot come down again. Help me with this."

Afterwards, in the real life of men and women, of music and pleasant thoughts and beautiful places, Haven sometimes found his mind travelling back to those few minutes, not really in horror, but with a blank absence of comprehension. Everything that happened was sheerly impossible! Anna calmly took off her skirt and between them they dragged Olav's clumsy, bleeding body to the door. Fortunately the force of the wind was almost negligible and she was able to hold it open. With a supreme effort Haven raised their terrible burden by the heels and sent it hurtling into space—a queer whirl of arms and legs.... They staggered back to the saloon. Haven drank more whisky. His companion looked calmly at the horrible spot where Olav had been killed.

"I will see to this," she said. "You must deal with Léon. Presently I will come to the ladder and call to you. Then we shall know that all is well."

He suddenly caught her into his arms. It was the wildest embrace of his life.... He closed the door of the saloon behind him and mounted the iron ladder.

Léon half glanced around at the sound of the mounting footsteps.

"Is it finished, Olav?" he grunted.

There was no reply. Léon turned again and met Haven's fist crashing into his face. He collapsed with scarcely a groan. Haven snatched the stick away from his nerveless fingers and devoted the next few moments to steadying the machine. As soon as it was running smoothly, he seized the already senseless man by the collar, unfastened the strap, and with the merest jerk of his arm sent him overboard. He went hurtling through space without a soul to watch even the last nervous twitchings of his body. Haven settled down comfortably into his seat and concentrated his whole attention upon the task in hand. He frowned as he looked at the speedometer, changed once more the altitude and changed also the course. Then he touched the electric switch which showed him his map and drove happily into the darkness.

A sound came from below! Anna was standing there, clutching the iron ladder, her hair blown into wild confusion, a thermos flask in her hand.

"Coffee," she called out. "I have just made it hot."

He turned his drawn face towards her for a moment and stretched out his long arm in vain.

"You must come up one step," he enjoined. "There's a westerly gale blowing."

She mounted the step bravely, her skirt in wild commotion. The sting of the wind failed, however, to bring a single gleam of colour to her ashen cheeks. He took the flask, unscrewed the top and drank. When he gave it back to her, it was empty.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"On the last lap, whatever happens," he answered. "We've passed Holland. We're over the North Sea. The other side of this is England."

She clung to the ladder and the wind dealt mercilessly with her clothes. He remembered afterwards how slim and elegant were the lines of her body.

"How far across?" she called out.

"An hour," he replied. "I'm making for Norwich. Only an hour more."

"I can give you petrol if you want it."

"Marvellous!" he shouted. "We may have enough. I'm not sure."

She was gone for twenty minutes. When she came back, the joy of achievement had lightened her eyes.

"I have poured in ten tins," she reported. "I saw Olav do it once."

"Good for you!" he applauded. "Hear the beat of the engine! I'm going to lift her a little. Get down into the saloon. That's a vicious-looking destroyer there. We'll try a smoke screen."

Anna disappeared. They traversed the belt of clouds and Haven's eyes were fixed upon the faint, indefinite horizon. He began to talk to himself—and, realising the fact, stopped suddenly. Presently he found himself repeating a prayer. Then a storm of rain cooled the fever in him. He ached for the grim line ahead, which never materialised.

"Land!" he prayed. "Land! Show me land!"

The weal across his throat had swollen during the last hour and his breathing was laboured. His arms were bruised and blistered. He had sustained a cut upon his cheek and the blood had dried upon the wound. His head throbbed and danced. The wind sang in his ears.

Land! Oh, God, for land!...

She came out once more, in wild disorder of hair and clothes, locked her arms around the rail, and looked anxiously up at him.

"What are you shouting, Wilfred Haven?" she called out. "Are you ill? Will you have brandy?"

He pointed with his right hand ahead.

"Land! Cliffs!" he thundered. "Behind them, to the left there—Norwich! Bring me brandy, Anna. I'm choking. Hang something white out of the window. The place is bristling with guns."

He sat like a frozen body in his seat, but his course was straight as an arrow. She climbed up and poured brandy down his throat. Then she tied a white tablecloth to the ladder. It was torn away. She fetched another. He swayed in his place and she gave him more brandy. It trickled down his throat, but there was blood in his eyes. They passed over sands dotted with lines of bathing huts and gaping fishermen. All the time he was depressing the lever. They drifted, scarcely two hundred feet high, over a golf course.

"I'm coming down, Anna Kastellane," he cried. "Hold on! Wave to them to stand clear."

The aeroplane appeared suddenly above the hills to the startled occupants of the clubhouse. It passed over the railway line and back again. The tops of the trees in a villa garden touched the wings of the plane and Haven rose a yard or two. Then he swept around to give himself a run, tore at the controls, and gripped the steering. They touched the ground like a graceful bird, ran bumpily for fifty yards, and stopped in front of the club paling. Soon they were surrounded by an excited mob.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" some one called out.

"Russia," Anna Kastellane answered. "Fetch a doctor."

Haven stood up in his place and waved his hand.

"Fetch Elisaveta Ostrekoff!" he shouted. "Cry out so that the whole world can hear! Tell the Prince I've kept my word!"

Then he toppled over and lay motionless. They had to lift him from his seat and there were people who whispered that he was dead.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER XXII

There were many days during which all Wilfred Haven knew of life was a tangled series of mind pictures; soft-voiced, white-robed women, ministering to his comforts, but illusionary—surely illusionary—so that his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth when he tried to speak and the visions themselves kept glowing and fading before his eyes; and Anna Kastellane—she too was there—sometimes with that hurt look in her eyes, as though her very soul were bleeding, sometimes with her hair and skirts blowing fiercely around her as she clung for life to the iron ladder and passed him up the coffee which she had prepared. Once he woke with a shout. Her eyes were ablaze into his, her lips were warm upon his own, her breath was mingled with his, the fragrance of her body about his body.... There were other far more horrible nights. Once he could have sworn that at the foot of the bed, his thick sensuous lips parted by that idiot grin, his blue eyes aflame with animal desire, his brute being absorbed in listening, crouched Olav the Finn—behind him always that shadow, the black shadow with the gleaming knife, creeping nearer and nearer. God, if Olav should turn his head! Words! He felt himself searching for flamboyant, scorching words—for speech about women—anything to keep alive the brute in his listener—so near now! That terrible blow! The soft hideous impact of steel gliding into flesh. Anna's face transformed with passion, leaning on the hilt of her knife, driving it in, the blood streaming over her. He beat upon the clean white counterpane, tore at his face, shouted until he felt firm hands restraining him and a gentle voice in his ears. Olav wasn't there, of course! They had dragged his bleeding corpse, Anna and he, between them, the whole length of the saloon and sent it hurtling into space. Some one was bathing his forehead with eau de Cologne. A medicine glass was raised to his lips. The opiate glided into his veins. Once more he slept.

It was on the seventeenth morning that he woke with a curiously changed feeling in his nerves and body. He raised himself in the bed. He knew quite well that those white-capped women around him were nurses, that this must be a hospital and that he was in a friendly world. He called out, feebly enough at first. A nurse, who had been standing at the window, started at the sound of his voice and came to him at once.

"Where am I?" he asked weakly.

"In the Cromer Nursing Home."

"How long have I been here?"

"Seventeen days."

"Is that coffee I can smell?"

"It is, and you shall have some if you lie quiet," she replied, ringing the bell. "Don't talk too much, just for the present."

He was silent for a minute or two.

"Did I bring it down all right?" he enquired.

"Bring what down?"

"The plane."

"Beautifully," she told him. "Every one said it was one of the most wonderful landings they had ever seen."

"Where's the plane?"

"In Pulham Aerodrome. They had to put it somewhere out of the way."

"And I am at Cromer!" he murmured. "I played golf here once when I was a kid."

"You'll be playing golf here again very soon, if you take care of yourself," she assured him.

The coffee arrived and he drank it eagerly. He even devoured the toast which they brought with it.

"Now," his nurse announced, "I must go and telephone for the doctor. He said that it was important that he should see you directly you were conscious."

"So I've been unconscious, have I?"

"Most of the time."

"Did I talk a lot of rot?"

"I don't think so," she answered. "We don't listen, as a rule, to patients who talk in their sleep. Now will you please rest for a short time until the doctor comes."

"A nice thing to tell a fellow who's been out of the world for seventeen days!" he grumbled.

Nevertheless, he felt drowsy, and he drifted off into sleep until he was awakened by the sound of men's voices in the room. He looked past the obvious doctor and stared in surprise at the grey-haired, kindly faced man who came towards the bedside with outstretched hands.

"Dad!" he exclaimed. "How on earth did you get here?"

"They cabled me—some one did—the day after you arrived," Norman Haven explained. "I caught a fast boat and here I am."

"Very sporting of you, Dad. I hope it won't interfere with business too much."

Mr. Haven shook his head. He was a very capable-looking man, which was not surprising in the chairman of one of the largest Bankers' Trusts in America.

"I was coming over, anyway," he confided. "It only meant leaving a day or two earlier. I'm supposed to be on a Commission that's sitting in London now, and another one in Paris next month."

"How is the war going?" Haven asked.

"You'll be too late for it, if that's what you're thinking about," his father smiled. "Our own advance started a week ago and the French and British have both been doing well."

"I'll have to try and get into the show before the end," Haven muttered.

The doctor intervened pleasantly but firmly.

"I think," he announced, "I must take charge of my patient now. He can see you again later in the day, Mr. Haven."

The latter departed. The doctor's examination was long and searching. When he had finished, he leaned back in his chair with an air of relief.

"You are going to be all right, young fellow," he pronounced. "Constitution of an ox."

"Can I have anything to eat?" his patient demanded.

"Anything in reason."

"A drink?"

"A glass of champagne, whenever you like. Go quietly for a day or two. You went through a mighty strain, I should think, in that aeroplane of yours."

"Things happened there," Haven admitted.

"Be sensible then," the doctor begged. "Don't talk much and don't see any one else for a few days. There are some reporters hanging about the town. I've been asked to give you the tip. Don't have anything to do with them," he added impressively. "The Chief Constable is going to have a word with you—some time to-morrow, I expect—and the Intelligence Department want to send some one down. You came pretty well straight from Russia, didn't you?"

"All the way."

"You drove yourself without a stop?"

Haven shook his head.

"Not quite," he acknowledged.

The doctor held out his hands.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I'm breaking my own rule. No questions. I'll see you later in the evening."

"Can I smoke?" was his patient's last request.

"Three cigarettes to-day, five to-morrow and anything you choose as soon as you begin to walk about."

From what he afterwards remembered of that day, it seemed to Haven to have been a carouse of food—light enough in quality, but his appetite was prodigious—and wine, consisting of one glass only, but which had a joyous effect upon him greater than ten times the quantity had ever produced before. Then came sleep.... He woke at six o'clock, feeling almost ready to spring out of bed. The nurse brought him some tea, after which he lit a cigarette.

"Nurse," he said, "when I arrived, I had a satchel locked to my wrist by a chain. No, I didn't," he interrupted himself. "No—I forgot. It was in the plane. I took it off so that I could fight Léon. Still, there was a satchel," he went on, looking around the room. "It had a brass plate with 'American Embassy, St. Petersburg' stamped upon it. Then there was a dark brown chamois-leather belt around my body."

The nurse nodded.

"I dare say," she assented indifferently. "I wasn't here when you were admitted. All your belongings, though, would be very carefully looked after."

"I'm sure they would," he agreed, his eyes still, however, searching the room. "All the same, I shall ask the doctor whether I can have them brought here. You see," he explained, "they were the cause of my adventure, and it was some adventure, I can tell you. I had two dear friends in St. Petersburg and I swore before God that I would bring into this country whatever they entrusted to me. At times I thought I was beaten. At times it seemed impossible to succeed. But we did it in the end. We got through. Do you mind one more question?"

"I don't approve of it," she demurred.

"About the young lady who was with me? I thought perhaps she might have been in to see me. Is she here?"

"I really don't quite know," the nurse replied. "She was here a few days ago—a very beautiful young lady, she was—with a kind of foreign appearance. Spoke English as well as you or I, but with an accent as though she had lived abroad."

"Yes," Haven assented. "She was Russian, as a matter of fact. I hoped that she might be here."

"I'll ask Matron if she is coming back," the nurse promised; "or the doctor would be certain to know."

Haven was only half content. His possessions, here in this Nursing Home were, without doubt, safe enough, and their removal was, naturally, only a matter of routine, but he wanted them. He wanted to feast his eyes upon them, to feel the glow of his accomplishment. And Anna—Anna Kastellane! He closed his eyes as he thought of her. Somehow or other, it seemed to him that the supreme moment of his life would come when the door opened and she stepped in. Presently the nurse left him alone, more than once he heard voices upon the landing, and at last there was a familiar step upon the staircase. His father entered, followed by the doctor.

"Feeling fine," Haven declared, in answer to the latter's enquiry. "There are just one or two questions—"

"Wait a bit," the doctor interrupted, glancing at his chart and thrusting a thermometer under his arm. "I've had enough of these premature recoveries," he went on. "You're as strong as they make 'em, but the worst of you lusty young fellows is that the moment you feel your strength returning after an illness you want to do too much. Everything will come, and pretty quickly too, in your case. What are you in such a hurry about? Do you want to get into what's left of the war?"

"I'm thinking of it," Haven confessed. "I don't fancy I'm a brilliant success in diplomacy. Guess I'll feel myself in disgrace when I get to Carlton House Terrace."

The doctor drew out the thermometer, looked at it and smiled. He felt the patient's pulse and smiled again.

"You'll do," he announced. "How would you like a few newspapers?"

"Later," Haven assented. "Just now there are one or two questions. I can't help it. Nurse doesn't know things—"

"Go ahead," the doctor invited.

"When I arrived here," Haven went on eagerly, "I had a chamois belt around my waist and an Embassy satchel—that was behind in the plane—"

"Yes, I remember the chamois belt," the doctor remarked. "I took it off myself."

"I should like them brought into this room," Haven begged. "In fact, I should like them in bed with me. It sounds foolish, Dad, I know," he went on, turning to his father, "but as you can guess, I've had an adventure—one that I shall never forget. I had two dear friends in St. Petersburg—you've heard me speak of them—Prince and Princess Michael Ostrekoff. They trusted me with the contents of that belt and the Embassy bag, and I brought them through. My God!... Never mind, I brought them through. I want them here whilst I lie and think about it. And Dad—the girl? Anna Kastellane? I thought I should have seen her by now. Where is she?"

The doctor glanced questioningly at Norman Haven. The latter hesitated.

"My dear boy," he said, "it's all right, of course, but naturally enough, whilst you were unconscious, no one here understood the position. Miss Kastellane waited about for several days until the doctor pronounced that you were out of danger, then she hired a car and went away to her friends. She was going to telephone."

"And didn't she?" Haven asked anxiously.

"We haven't heard from her since," was the reluctant reply.

"And the satchel? My belt?" Haven insisted, with a sudden horrible presentiment.

His father frowned.

"She appears to have taken them with her," he acknowledged. "The Matron here—every one—understood that they were her property."

CHAPTER XXIII

London seemed a strangely human city to Wilfred Haven as he trod its pavements for the second time in his life one April morning about three weeks later. Barrows full of spring flowers were on sale everywhere. The sunshine was unexpectedly warm. Notwithstanding the war weariness of the capital, the entrance of America into the arena had filled people with confidence. The fear of defeat had passed. There remained only a great anxiety to have it over and done with. Meanwhile the shops were opening out. A sprinkling of gayer clothes brightened the streets and an increased spirit of hopefulness was apparent amongst the passers-by and the gossipers at the clubs. To Wilfred Haven, after those dreary months of terror-stricken Petrograd, the well-being and sedateness of London was amazing.

He turned from Bond Street into Clifford Street and rang the bell of a small house of singularly neat appearance, with a blue front door and a single name engraved upon the rim of the shining brass letter-box. A sombrely dressed manservant admitted him.

"Is Mr. Felix Drayton in?" Haven enquired.

"If you are Mr. Haven, he is expecting you, sir," was the prompt reply. "Will you come this way?"

The man ushered the caller across the hall into a very agreeable-looking lounge library, the walls of which were hung with a fine collection of sporting prints. He knocked at an inner door and threw it open.

"Mr. Wilfred Haven, sir," he announced.

Felix Drayton had few of the mannerisms of the profession of which he was at once a solid support and brilliant ornament. He had started life as a solicitor and found the routine work of an office altogether too monotonous for his taste. At forty years of age he had set up for himself, still under the mantle of the law, but taking only cases which interested him. He was, as a matter of fact, a particularly skilful and successful enquiry agent. He welcomed his visitor cordially but without effusion and waved him to a chair.

"War?" he enquired, alluding to the other's limp.

"No such luck," was the regretful reply. "I got rather knocked to pieces in that trip across from Russia I told you about. Our medical department at the Embassy here turned me down last week, or I should have been off to training camp in a few days. Told me to go back in six months. Perhaps they're right. I did have rather a twisting. I want to devote the whole of that six months to clearing up—well, that matter about which I wrote you. I sha'n't have a moment's peace until we've got to the bottom of it."

Mr. Felix Drayton was a man with whom middle age had dealt kindly, except so far as his hair was concerned. He was very bald indeed, save for two carefully brushed, jet-black tufts above his ears. His complexion was excellent, although he was inclined towards pallor. He had dark eyes, not very large but singularly bright and clear. His mouth was shrewd with an upward twist which suggested gifts as a raconteur. His tweed clothes possessed just that measure of shabbiness which in a man is sometimes attractive. His voice was pleasant and his manner sympathetic.

"I liked your way of outlining your case, Mr. Haven," he said. "I always prefer to have my facts on paper, although of course there are many loose ends I shall have to ask you about. These, however, seem to be the—er—salient points. You were entrusted by the Prince and Princess Ostrekoff, who had been exceedingly kind to you in St. Petersburg, with practically all that was left of their family fortune—a quantity of jewels which you were to bring to England for the support and subsistence of their daughter Elisaveta. Elisaveta was already in England, I gather."

"The last time the Princess heard from her," Haven explained, "she was in Florence, where she had a studio and was studying painting. I had the address of her lawyers and bankers in London and an address in Paris, but they were contained in a sealed letter deposited in the satchel."

"Very well," Mr. Felix Drayton went on. "That is all quite simple. After a series of amazing adventures, you succeeded in bringing the jewels as far as Norfolk. Whilst you were unconscious in a Nursing Home there, the jewels disappeared. There seems to be no secret about the matter—they were taken away by the young lady who was your companion during the journey."

Haven seemed suddenly to have become more gaunt. There was a suggestion of his recent illness in his hollow cheeks and tired eyes.

"If I may say so without being personal," Felix Drayton continued, "upon your recovery you did a very sane and sensible thing. You didn't rush to Scotland Yard and you didn't fill the newspapers with absurd advertisements, which would have landed you in a great deal of trouble. You wrote down a *précis* of the whole affair and sent it to me. I want to be quite sure about this, Mr. Haven. You have made no further move in the matter, nor taken any one else into your confidence, since you wrote and placed this affair in my hands?"

"Only my father," Haven observed. "He is quite a passive agent in the matter."

Felix Drayton nodded understandingly.

"My duties then were threefold," he proceeded. "First of all, you wanted to discover the fate of the jewels, secondly the whereabouts of the young lady who had confiscated them—the two might be said to go together—and thirdly, having lost the instructions committed to your care, you wished me to discover the whereabouts of Elisaveta Ostrekoff, in order that you might at once explain the position to her. Incidentally, you wished me to set confidential enquiries on foot amongst the best-known jewellers and jewel merchants in case any portion of the stolen property should be offered to them."

"Quite right," Haven agreed a little wearily.

Felix Drayton drew two or three sheets of closely written paper from their position of security under a beautifully carved jade letterweight upon his desk.

"You must not mind," he begged, "if some of my questions seem to be repetitions and if I ask a great many of them. The whole circumstances of your loss are so obvious, and yet contain so many suggestions of something subtler. We don't want a hornet's nest of Soviet agents around us, a contingency which would certainly have arisen if you had chosen the obvious plan of advertising."

"We surely do not," Haven acquiesced. "I've every confidence in you, Mr. Drayton. Go right ahead with your questions. I'm still apt to get a little tired in the afternoons. That's all that's the matter with me."

"The companion of your travels here," Felix Drayton continued, glancing at his own notes, "was a young woman calling herself Anna Kastellane. You were rather vague as to where you found her."

"I meant to tell you about that when I called," Haven explained. "To be truthful, my whole story seems so much like a melodrama that this is one of the incidents I held back. I only found her on the night of our departure from Petrograd, and I found her after I had left the Ostrekoff Palace, where I had been to say good-bye to the Prince and Princess, and was making my way to the Embassy. I heard a woman shriek from a house which I was passing, a house that was evidently in the hands of raiders. They had torn down the front door and were making the devil of a noise inside. In one way I was a fool, because I had enough already upon my hands, but I suppose all the same that nine men out of ten would have done what I did. I made my way into the house and discovered her tied up and half mad with terror in one of the lower rooms. I got her away, after a certain amount of fighting, and took her with me to the Embassy. Nearly every one had left there and I persuaded Mr. Hayes, the Counsellor, who was our senior, to let her come along as one of our typists."

"What sort of a house was this where you discovered her and what account did she give of her adventures?" Felix Drayton asked.

"No account at all," Haven confessed bluntly. "She avoided all questions about herself. The house was a house of ill fame."

"Did she tell you that?"

"No," Haven admitted. "I found it out afterwards. When I charged her with the fact, she did not deny it."

"In Warsaw she seems to have had some friends," Drayton speculated.

"She knew some men there," Haven assented. "Esterhaczy, from whom we got the plane, was one; Grotzowill, the Polish General, who was in command of the garrison was another."

"What about this Colonel Patinsky who ran you to earth at the Prince's shooting box? He appears to have been the first man after the jewels. Did she know him?"

"Apparently not. I never saw them together in Warsaw and they certainly met as strangers on the plane."

Felix Drayton referred once more to his notes.

"Do you believe," he asked, "that she was privy to the plot between Esterhaczy and Patinsky to take you to Odessa, instead of bringing you to England or France?"

"I do not," Haven replied firmly. "It was entirely through her that we managed to escape. She got permission to leave Odessa from the Governor."

"Would he be a Soviet official?" Felix Drayton enquired.

"I'm afraid so," Haven admitted. "He had only been appointed a day or two before we got there."

"Piecing together your story, so far as it concerns the young lady," Drayton reflected, "there is a strong suggestion that she was a spy."

"There is," Haven confessed unwillingly.

"In league with Red officials."

Haven's acquiescence this time was dumb. Drayton's conclusions were hideous but inevitable.

"I think we may take it for granted," Felix Drayton went on, "that the enterprise of Esterhaczy and Patinsky was entirely a —er—private one. Patinsky was one of the few men in the world who knew about the jewels and Esterhaczy was his accomplice. You got rid of them very cleverly. That left you alone with Miss Anna Kastellane. The attack upon your lives by the pilot and steward of the aeroplane was again, I think, a sheer attempt at personal loot, such an attempt as a person carrying about with him three million pounds' worth of jewels in a confined space is—er—somewhat liable to. We arrive now at the young lady. What was her object in coming to England? Did she tell you?"

"She offered me very little of her confidence," Haven acknowledged. "She seemed to me, at first, at any rate, just like an ordinary refugee."

"Yet, in a sense," Drayton meditated, "she could really have been in no danger at all, if she were a Soviet spy, as seems more than likely. I shall make no apology for the personal note in my questions," he continued mildly, "because, to see the truth from the back of my own mind, I must see it from the back of yours. Were you, or should I say are you, attached to her?"

"In a way, I was inclined to be," Haven admitted, looking down at the carpet upon which the ferrule of his stick was tracing a mystic design. "It was all very difficult," he added. "When I discovered what sort of a house it was from which I had rescued her, I felt that I had been deceived and made use of. At Warsaw there were indications that General Grotzowill considered her his mistress or his possible mistress. Of course, as a Soviet spy—Grotzowill was known to be a monarchist—she may have been trying to get information from him."

"Yet during the later stages of your journey you seem to have trusted her a lot," Drayton remarked thoughtfully.

"What in hell could I do?" Haven demanded. "We had two of the foulest, most degenerate beasts to deal with you could imagine. We had to be allies against them, at any rate."

"By the by, you didn't mention in your account of the voyage what became of them."

"I didn't. I don't mind telling you now, but it was not the sort of thing I felt like putting on paper. I may have to answer for it some day, I suppose. Anna Kastellane killed the worst one. I threw the other out of the plane. They would have murdered us. See my neck?"

He unfastened his collar and Felix Drayton gave a little exclamation of sympathy.

"I was being strangled right enough," Haven continued, "until she butted in. She stabbed the Finn in the neck and saved

my life. Then I went into the pit and threw the other scoundrel overboard. I was half dead with pain all the way across Holland and all the way across the North Sea. I don't remember bringing the plane down at Cromer even now, but I did it. They got me to a Nursing Home in an ambulance, and when I came to—it was seventeen days later—she had gone and taken the jewels with her. There's no doubt about that, I'm sorry to say. She claimed them openly as her own and of course there was no one to deny her. Since then I haven't heard a word from her."

"An amazing story," Felix Drayton murmured. "By the by, are you a son of Norman Haven, the American banker?"

"I'm his only son."

Felix Drayton's already deferential manner showed an added respect.

"They say that your father is one of the shrewdest, hardest-headed men in the world."

"I believe he is."

"You had a touch of brain fever in the Nursing Home, didn't you?"

"I certainly had. Nearly three weeks of it," Haven acknowledged.

"And this story of yours you wrote during your convalescence?"

"Quite true."

"You won't be offended, will you," Felix Drayton begged, with a pleasant smile. "You see, I want to help you, and I am not going to run the risk of feeling any lack of confidence, or anything of that sort. You don't think you imagined some part of it?"

"I surely did not," Haven asserted calmly. "I don't mind the suggestion a bit, because I know that the story reads like a Broadway melodrama, but I will swear to you that every word there is true. It all came back to me in the most amazing fashion when I was lying in my bed. I can see the start from the aerodrome at Odessa, with all the queer-looking people standing about, the signs in Russian and German, and the sentries and flying men in their strange uniforms, just as though it were yesterday. I can see Anna Kastellane creeping through the shadows and stabbing Olav the Finn in the neck, whilst he was strangling me, just as clearly as I can see you. We dragged the body down to the door and she held it open against the wind whilst I sent him overboard. Then she washed out the saloon, mopped up the blood, and afterwards, when I had pitched the other blackguard into the sea and was driving on alone, she brought me coffee."

Felix Drayton lit a cigarette and pushed the box across to his visitor.

"Mr. Haven," he said firmly, "I believe in you implicitly. I believe every word you have written here and I believe that what you have told me is the truth. You have heard no doubt that I am supposed to be a successful—what shall we call it?—investigator. I'll tell you why I've been successful—in some rather difficult cases too. I am not a cynic and I am not an optimist. I claim that I have the gift of recognising the truth and I believe all that you have told me. So you see we are starting well, but we have a very difficult task ahead of us. That young woman, according to your own showing, has the most amazing nerve and courage. She has had several weeks' start, which makes matters all the more complicated. What about her passport?"

"She had two or three," Haven confided. "She showed a passport in the train and I could see that she had another in her bag, which she showed me afterwards at Warsaw. That was what first made me think that she might be a spy."

"I should say there is no doubt about that," Drayton meditated. "The only point is—did she steal those jewels on behalf of the Soviet or on her own account? I'm having the Soviet headquarters here watched already, on the strength of what you've told me. They're not established here properly yet, of course, but they have a sort of meeting place."

"If Anna Kastellane stole those jewels," Haven said deliberately, "she stole them on behalf of the Soviet. That I am certain about. I can see the way she would reason it out. The temporary Republican Government issued a proclamation just before I got away from Petrograd, confiscating all property belonging to the aristocrats. Anna Kastellane, if she is really a Communist fanatic, would persuade herself that the jewels were the property of the new régime and that she was justified—I suppose she would even go so far as to say that it was her duty to take them."

"I expect you're right, Mr. Haven," Drayton acknowledged. "I wonder whether you'd allow me to offer you a drink. You must remember that you've had a bad illness and you look a little tired."

Haven assented with some enthusiasm.

"I'd like a Scotch and soda very much," he admitted. "I could have kicked that doctor this morning at the Embassy, but I guess he knew what he was talking about. Gives you a queer sort of feeling," he reflected, as he watched his companion open a rosewood cabinet, pour whisky into a tumbler and add soda water, "to really kill people. They used to call me a bit rough at football, in my college days, but to kill men in cold blood is a thing you don't easily forget."

He accepted his tumbler and sampled its contents respectfully. As he had somehow expected might be the case, it was the finest whisky he had ever tasted.

"I've never killed anything," Felix Drayton confessed, "except pheasants. I'm not the type of investigator who is called upon to help Scotland Yard rout out gangs of desperadoes. I generally have to wear the kid gloves in my jobs."

"I shot a man dead," Haven recounted, "outside that brothel at Petrograd. I threw the pilot of our aeroplane into space when we were four thousand feet up. They were both murderers at heart and I had to do it as much for the girl's sake as for my own. And now—well, you see what's happened."

"Don't brood upon those things," Felix Drayton enjoined pleasantly. "You've been through a lot, and the one thing you must be careful about is not to get into a nervous state after an illness like you've had. The men whom you killed were asking for it. It was you or they, in all probability. Here's luck!"

They drank to one another and Felix Drayton resumed his seat.

"Now I'll tell you one thing about this affair that puzzles me," he confided. "I can understand the young lady called Miss Anna Kastellane being clever enough to keep out of the way, as she certainly is, but I cannot understand why my people have not been able to trace Elisaveta Ostrekoff. There can be no reason for her living under another title, or anything of that sort. Russian refugees are easy enough to find as a rule and Ostrekoff is a famous name."

"Have you advertised?" Haven asked.

Felix Drayton shivered.

"I have never yet been driven to an extremity like that," he declared. "My agency system is too comprehensive. You need not be alarmed. If she's anywhere in Europe, I shall have news of her within the week, but, if you will excuse my asking a question, what are you going to say to her when she turns up?"

"If the jewels have not been restored," Haven replied, "I shall explain the situation to her and pay her the estimated value. She will have to take money instead of the jewels."

"God bless my soul!" Felix Drayton exclaimed. "What did you say they were worth?"

"Three million pounds."

"But—but, my dear fellow," the other protested, "you did everything that was humanly possible."

"I've fixed it all up with my father," Haven confided. "Thank God, he's a rich man. It's going to be written off my account when he takes me into partnership. She may not have it all at once, but she'll get it within the next few years."

"I don't suppose the jewels would ever have fetched that," Drayton meditated. "Especially in war time."

"Where is the greatest market in the world? Where do people go to buy or sell jewels in large quantities?" Haven asked.

"Amsterdam, London and New York," was the glib reply. "You told me not to spare money, Mr. Haven. I have a man living in Amsterdam."

"Quite right," his visitor agreed. "Even if I had to pay for them over again, it's the jewels I'd like to hand over—not the money."

The telephone on Drayton's desk tinkled. He lifted the receiver to his ear and listened. His face showed no surprise. He might have been considering an invitation to dinner.

"Will you wait one moment, please," he begged.

Drayton placed his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone and looked across the desk at his companion.

"Haskell's, the jewellers in Bond Street," he announced. "They have just rung up to tell me that one of the smaller Ostrekoff emeralds is being offered to them at the present moment."

Haven sprang to his feet.

"Come on," he cried. "How do we get there?"

Felix Drayton waved him back to his place.

"Stay where you are, please," he enjoined. "We can't do things like that."

He turned to the telephone.

"Thank Mr. Haskell very much," he said. "I am on the way over. Please hold the person who is offering it, on any excuse. A woman, is it? No, don't send for the police—anything but that—and above all, try not to alarm her. Get an address out of her if you can."

Felix Drayton hung up the receiver. He stood for a moment in silence and in obvious perplexity.

"I wish I knew," he muttered.

"Knew what?" Haven exclaimed, in an agony of impatience. "Come along, there's a good fellow."

Drayton touched a bell and accepted the hat and stick which his butler handed him in the hall.

"Try to remain as unconcerned as possible," he begged his companion, as they walked together towards Bond Street. "It isn't likely for a moment that the woman who is offering the jewels is Anna Kastellane. Any attempt at disposing of a haul like that would be done in a roundabout way. Remember, we are not after one small emerald—it's the lot we want—three million pounds' worth. Here, smoke a cigarette. You and I are going to look at platinum and gold cigarette cases. Leave everything to me, there's a good fellow. This is my job."

Haven pulled himself together and smiled almost naturally. They were in Bond Street now and exactly opposite to them were the palatial premises of the great jewellers.

"That's all right, Drayton," he promised. "You get on with it. I'll keep my mouth closed."

CHAPTER XXIV

Mr. Raymond Haskell was, of all his craft in London, Paris or Rome, the doyen of fashionable jewellers. He was a thin, cadaverous-looking man of elegant appearance. His linen was always faultless, his nails almost too perfectly manicured. At the time when his manager telephoned to Felix Drayton he was seated in his private office, slightly raised above the level of the shop, his famous magnifying glass in his eye and an emerald poised delicately between his fingers. After a minute examination, he laid the latter down upon the little stretch of black velvet spread out before him and transferred his regard to his visitor. She, too, was in her way unusual, but certainly less distinguished. She was dressed in the habiliments of moderated woe—that is to say, her completely black attire indicated a loss which was probably nuptial, but it was toned down to some degree by the concealing hand of fashion. She had the air of one who had come upon a pleasant errand. Her manner was complacent and devoid of all suggestion of haste.

"If you do not care to buy the stone, Mr. Haskell," she said, "I thought you might possibly be kind enough to give me some idea of its value, in case I should be disposed to advance upon it the sum of which my friend is in need. I do not, as a rule, interest myself in this sort of thing," she went on, "but if I like people, I am always anxious to help them."

"The stone is interesting," Mr. Haskell admitted, "and certainly valuable. It is one of those cases, however, in which, notwithstanding your ladyship's sponsorship, we should require to know the actual owner of the stone."

"As a matter of curiosity—why?" his visitor asked.

Mr. Haskell smiled cryptically.

"In the jeweller's world," he explained, "strange things happen sometimes. Now this stone, for instance, has been set in a very remarkable fashion. I should think without a doubt it came from Russia."

"It may have done," the woman conceded. "I like it so much that, if I could afford to, I should probably buy it myself, if I cannot induce you to do so. You wouldn't object to making it up for me, I suppose?"

"Certainly not, my lady," was the prompt reply. "Bring it to me as your own property and I promise that I will make you a marvellous pendant."

"And the value of the stone?"

The jeweller looked thoughtfully through those high windows down into his elegant showroom. His friend, Felix Drayton, had just arrived and, with a younger man, was inspecting some cigarette cases. He continued his interview with deliberation, however. There might still be business coming to the firm, and, even if the jewel were stolen property, Sir William Bott had been a financier of repute, and his widow never showed the least objection to spending his money.

"It is difficult to say," he temporised. "If it were offered to me with a definite history behind it, and if it were approved by my gem expert, I should be prepared to give four thousand pounds for it."

The woman lifted it up and looked at it lovingly. Somehow, in her pudgy fingers, it seemed a less exquisite possession.

"Put it in a box, will you, please," she enjoined. "I'll carry it in my bag here and you must please send one of your assistants out to the car with me. Other people's property, you know! I'm always nervous with other people's property. My own jewels are insured and I take my risk with them at any time."

Mr. Haskell carefully wrapped the stone in cotton wool, placed it in a box, and dropped it into his customer's hand bag. He walked through the showrooms with her and apparently neglected to salute his friend, Felix Drayton. He himself crossed the pavement and handed her into her car.

"If you decide to buy the jewel from your friend, my lady," he said, "we should be proud to handle the setting of it."

"I'm not likely to go anywhere else," she assured him. "Sir William always declared that he had absolute confidence in you and your people...."

The car drove off. Mr. Haskell joined his friend.

"You don't need to worry with any of your sleuths so far as that lady is concerned, Felix," he remarked. "Lady Bott, her

name is. Her husband was a city Knight and though he wasn't a millionaire, she's good for what she cares to buy. Same dodge as usual, of course. She's offering the jewel for a friend and won't tell her name. They always go about their business that way. You'll have to find out where her ladyship plays cards and the rest ought to be easy."

"You think that it was one of the Ostrekoff stones?" Felix Drayton asked.

"It's a Russian stone, anyway," was the cautious reply, "and, from all the descriptions I've ever seen of the Ostrekoff jewels, it's one of them."

"You didn't buy it, of course?"

"Not I," the jeweller answered. "I only deal with owners."

"A young friend of mine, Mr. Wilfred Haven," Felix Drayton remarked, introducing his companion.

"Delighted," the jeweller murmured. "Is your father Norman Haven, may I ask?"

"He is," the other assented.

Mr. Haskell sighed.

"He once bought a tiara from me," he confided. "We don't get many such customers nowadays."

He turned away with a little nod of farewell. Felix Drayton led his companion across the street into a famous cocktail bar. They seated themselves in two easy-chairs. The solicitor gave an order, then went in search of the telephone box. He returned in a few minutes.

"Lady Bott's club is the Alpha," he announced. "I shall have a man playing there this evening and a list of her principal associates in the morning. I only hope it will help us. I'm not very sanguine. I somehow feel that as your friend had the courage to bring off a coup like this, she'd want to dispose of the lot at once—get hold of a million or so and close up. I can't see her dealing out jewels piece-meal, every one with a clue attached to it. By the by, I suppose there's no doubt that she did go off from Cromer with the goods?"

"None whatever," Haven admitted, a little sadly. "She bought a few clothes and a trunk in Cromer, and the young woman who helped her with her things when she left fetched the belt and satchel from my locker and saw her pack them."

"She did stay around for a day or two, didn't she?"

Haven nodded.

"They told me that she stayed until she was assured that I was in no further danger. They may have told me that just so as not to hurt my feelings too much. I can't tell. Of course, to make a complete confession," Haven went on, a little dubiously, "she also went away with every penny I had in the world. That, however, was insignificant—a few hundred dollars and some Polish notes."

"How did she get at those?" Felix Drayton asked.

"They were loose in the pocket of my overcoat which was hanging in the cupboard where my belt and satchel had been placed. It was a locker, for my personal use only, and I would have had the key of it if I had been conscious. Of course, you must remember," Haven went on, "that the satchel was supposed to have contained papers—that was what it was made for—and the belt too was stuffed with paper all round. You could scarcely expect any one at the Nursing Home to legislate for a patient with three million pounds' worth of jewels in his possession."

"I quite see that," Felix Drayton meditated. "Things seem to have worked out amazingly well for that young lady. I would give a very great deal," he added, tapping a cigarette upon the table by his side, "to catch just a momentary glimpse of her. Your descriptions aren't very convincing."

Just at that moment Felix Drayton's wish was granted, for Anna Kastellane herself walked in.

CHAPTER XXV

For an appreciable space of time Haven was like a boxer taking the count, insensible and insensitive. He sat grasping the arms of his chair, gazing across at the little circle of modish-looking men and women amongst whom Anna Kastellane was seated. There was not the slightest manner of doubt concerning her identity, nor, he reflected with a curious pang, was there the slightest manner of doubt but that she had swept past him into the room without a gesture of recognition, without the slightest sign of ever having seen him before. The amazingness of it almost took his breath away. A few weeks ago they had faced murder in each other's company and had thrown their victims from the clouds into oblivion. They had harnessed life and death to the fury of their emotions and fought in a joint cause like primitive human beings. Now, a few yards away, after one casual glance at him, she was laughing up into the face of one of her attendant cavaliers.

"Really dry," she begged. "No Italian and no bitters."

Every nerve of his body began to twitch with the desire for action. His earlier conceptions had been correct. He knew her now for what she was. This was the girl who had made him break his trust, who had escaped almost incredible perils with his aid, then left him unconscious and absconded with the jewels for which he had risked his life. His eyes dilated as he glared across the room. This girl, with her low musical laugh and her scornful indifference to his presence, was the creature whom he had dragged screaming with fear from a brothel. He dabbed at his forehead. Felix Drayton pressed another cocktail into his hand.

"Drink this," he suggested pleasantly, "and we'll see about a spot of lunch. Never mind about those people. We'll talk about them presently. They won't melt away."

Haven was in a subjective state. He allowed himself to be led upstairs and ensconced by his companion in a retired corner. Well away from the bar and its atmosphere, the latter ventured upon a few plain words.

"We don't want to go at this affair of yours bull-headed," he said. "There's more in it than appears upon the surface. The girl would never have attempted a bluff like that if she hadn't either great confidence in you or if she wasn't pretty hard pressed."

"You know who it was then?"

Drayton nodded.

"How could I help it?" he remarked drily. "It's my job to study expressions."

"Perhaps you know who the others were?"

"Certainly I do. That's what makes it all the more interesting. I can't tell you how glad I am you came to me. If you weren't a millionaire, I wouldn't charge you a penny for this case, I'm so interested in it. We'll just order lunch and I'll tell you who your young friend's companions are."

The function was duly performed and Felix Drayton added a few words in the *maître d'hôtel's* ear.

"I just told him," he explained, as he leaned back in his seat, "not to put those others anywhere near us. They wouldn't be likely to, anyway, because this isn't the popular end of the room."

"Who are they?" Haven demanded.

"Well, the dark, elegant-looking young man is Boris Roussky, who was once in the Russian Embassy here and who was sent over at the beginning of the Revolution to try and create friendly feeling with the new régime. The stout man with the black beard is Serge Melgounoff. He is a Russian of a different type—a great shipping man. I must confess that I don't know much about him or what he stands for. The languid lady with the beautiful eyes and sables is his wife. The pale young man with the face of an archbishop is the Grand Duke Peter—one of the heirs to the throne, if anything should happen to the Romanoffs."

"What on earth is Anna Kastellane doing in that crowd?" Haven exclaimed.

"She might easily have found her way there," Felix Drayton pointed out, "if my surmises connected with her are correct. I'm afraid that you'll have to make up your mind that your young lady friend is a spy—a very scheming young person indeed. As such, she might easily be connected with the two Russians—Roussky and Melgounoff. What they're all doing with Peter, though, one can't imagine. There are explanations, of course, very simple ones. Even if the Revolution in Russia fades out, I think, the Romanoffs would have to go."

"This is all very well," Haven broke in, "but what about the Ostrekoff jewels? I'm terrified to death that at any moment Elisaveta Ostrekoff may arrive to claim them. Can't you approach this young woman at once and find out at least where we stand?"

"That would mean changing our tactics a little," Felix Drayton mused. "Your ideas, then, would be to accost this young lady, accuse her of having stolen the jewels, and demand their return."

Haven winced but he stuck it out.

"Well, why can't we do that, anyway?" he insisted.

Felix Drayton continued his lunch for a moment in silence.

"I suppose we could," he admitted. "And if you wish it, we will. It certainly is the most obvious course. On the other hand, it seemed to me that there was more than one mystery connected with the young woman's desertion of you at Cromer and the theft of the jewels."

"There certainly was that," Haven agreed. "But if you let her walk away now, what are you going to do when Elisaveta Ostrekoff comes along?"

Felix Drayton smiled.

"I can assure you, Mr. Haven," he said, "I do not neglect the A B C of my profession in thinking out its finer ramifications. The young woman will not be able to move a step, enter a house, a shop or a restaurant, without our knowledge until I call my men off."

"But you haven't even been to the telephone since we came across her," Haven observed doubtfully.

"The telephone," his companion expounded, "is the most obvious of all devices. You didn't happen, perhaps, to see me shake hands with a man who was lounging about at the top of the stairs? Anyhow, that was quite sufficient. Your young lady friend is just as safely ours as though she were locked up, and we have the additional advantage of knowing what she's going to do.... Delicious sole, that. Have a little more of the sauce? Here come our friends. You see, they are going to sit at the other end of the room. Well, I can foretell the result of their luncheon party. There will be even more cocktails, there will be vodka with the caviare, there will be powerful Rhine wines, champagne to follow and then old brandy. It will make no difference. They will never move Peter. Where I stay I rest! Peter has no fancy for an uneasy crown. The Romanoffs are finished and with them goes all hope of a dynasty. Tell me, Mr. Haven—you must have formed some idea while she was with you—for whom is Anna Kastellane working? What does she want out of all this turmoil? What would be the final destination of those jewels if we allowed her to keep them?"

"We're not going to allow her to keep them," Haven said firmly. "If Anna Kastellane had disappeared off the face of the earth, I was quite prepared to carry out my word and hand over the three million pounds to Elisaveta Ostrekoff, but with Anna Kastellane here in possession of the jewels, I naturally sha'n't do anything of the sort. They are the property of Elisaveta Ostrekoff and our business—yours too, Drayton—is to see that she has them."

"Oh, she'll have them all right, in the end. I'll promise you that," Felix Drayton declared. "There may be a little more bloodshed, there may be even a few more undiscovered crimes before she comes into her own, but finally she'll have them. I should very much like to know what sort of a young woman we are to expect in Miss Elisaveta Ostrekoff."

"If she takes after her mother," Haven confided, "she is one of the most charming women in the world."

Felix Drayton nodded thoughtfully and helped himself to a cutlet.

"Well," he observed, "it's queer how little reliance there is to be placed on Russian consanguinity."

Other people besides Wilfred Haven turned their heads and forgot to look away when, a few minutes later, a young woman with two companions was ushered into the restaurant. Beautiful girls, were rather the rule than the exception at the Embassy, but her beauty was of an unusual type. Her hair, even in the shadowful room, was yellow as corn. Her eyes were dark and deeply set. Her lips were parted with an almost childish interest as she glanced around. With her came an elderly woman with something of a presence, although her clothes were simple and unfashionable, and, following them, an elderly man with grey hair and moustache and a military bearing, one of that not uncommon type whose clothes and *tout ensemble* seem equally well preserved. Mario himself conducted them, with outstretched hand, to the most desirable of the remaining tables and Haven gave a long-drawn sigh, which was almost a gasp, as she sat down.

"A very beautiful young woman," Felix Drayton remarked, "and a stranger, I think, to all of us. I have seen the old man about at intervals for the last twenty years. He was one of the earliest Russian refugees—Colonel Oliastransky his name is. But the girl—she is not only wonderful, but she is unusual. I never saw such colouring."

"But what is more remarkable still," Haven confided, staring across at her in dazed fashion, "is that, except that she is taller, she is the image of the Princess. I never thought that I should see hair and eyes like that again."

"The Princess who?"

"The Princess who with her husband is responsible for my trust. The Princess Ostrekoff, the mother of the girl for whom we are searching—Elisaveta Ostrekoff."

Felix Drayton lost his appearance of complete imperturbability. He glanced across the room. The entrance of the newcomers seemed to have created no comment amongst Anna Kastellane and her friends.

"It would be a queer coincidence," Drayton meditated, "if this should turn out to be the young lady of whom we are in search. Perhaps we had better hope that it isn't. To be asked to produce the jewels at a moment's notice might be embarrassing."

Haven shuddered.

"This decides me, Mr. Drayton," he said. "Some of your suggestions have been interesting but they're too dangerous. Whilst we wait, the Ostrekoff jewels may be slipping away. You must approach Anna Kastellane before she leaves this place. If necessary," he added, "I will go with you."

Felix Drayton's faint air of discomposure became more pronounced. His brilliant little eyes kept wandering from the distant table where Anna Kastellane sat with her friends to the nearer one where the new arrivals were engaged in ordering their luncheon. He sighed.

"In my profession," he confided to Haven, "one hates to have one's theories upset. Look at the young lady again."

"She is adorable to look at," Haven agreed, "but I've seen all I want of her for the moment, until I have the jewels back. If that isn't Elisaveta Ostrekoff I'm surely going to get the surprise of my life. Her eyes and the setting of them are her mother's; so is the colour of her hair and a little trick she has of throwing back her head every now and then. Drayton," he went on with a groan, "if we were anywhere near the door, I can see myself creeping out on all fours. It's a hell of a mess to be in, this—after all one's been through too."

"It appears to me," Felix Drayton confessed, "very much as though you were right concerning the identity of the young woman."

Mario, the manager, who had been talking to the new arrivals, came smilingly across the room. He little knew what a bombshell he carried in his hand. Arrived at their table, he bowed to Felix Drayton.

"Mr. Drayton," he remarked, "you have the good fortune as always. The most beautiful young lady who has entered my restaurant this season is enquiring about you. Her *dame de compagnie* and guardian tell me that they have brought her from abroad to see you. They called at your office, it appears, this morning, and were told that you would probably be lunching here. Madame suggests that you pay your respects."

"They came in then without being members," Felix Drayton observed, as he rose to his feet.

"The fact was pointed out to me," Mario admitted, "but what can one do when divinity shines upon us? The young lady can be an honorary member of my club for life if she wishes!"

"And her name?" Haven intervened eagerly.

Mario leaned a little farther over the table.

"The Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff," he confided.

CHAPTER XXVI

Mario drew out the table to enable Felix Drayton to pass and escorted him across the room. The elderly man rose from his chair and shook hands in dignified fashion. The woman bowed. The girl smiled dazzlingly.

"We were unfortunate enough to miss you this morning by a few minutes," the man observed. "Permit me to present you to my wife, Madame Oliastransky, and the young lady who for some years has been our ward—the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff. I am Colonel Oliastransky, in my younger days of His Imperial Majesty's Guards."

It was all very formally done. Felix Drayton, who had lived abroad long enough to have imbibed Continental customs, lifted the fingers of the two women to his lips.

"I feel it is really my client's acquaintance you should make," he remarked. "I am acting for my young friend, Mr. Wilfred Haven, who happens to be lunching with me."

"Will you not present him also?" Madame Oliastransky begged.

Felix Drayton turned and signed to Haven, who rose at once and crossed the room—six foot two of very forceful manhood. His illness had left no traces, except for a few deeper lines about his mouth and at the corners of his eyes.

"Let me present my client," Felix Drayton begged, laying his hand on Haven's shoulder. "Mr. Wilfred Haven—Madame Oliastransky, the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff, Colonel Oliastransky."

Haven greeted each in turn. It seemed to him that Elisaveta was even more beautiful at close quarters. The colour of her hair was entrancing and the texture of it like fine silk. She smiled up at him with becoming timidity.

"I have heard just a little," she observed, "of your wonderful voyage from Russia. Not very much. I hope soon to hear from you the whole history."

He groaned inwardly and abandoned the subject after a casual word.

"Your father and mother were very kind to me in Petrograd," he told her. "It was my first diplomatic position and your father made it very easy for me."

"He was always kind to any one he liked," she remarked.

"You will forgive my saying that your resemblance to your mother is very striking," he went on. "I used to think that no one else in the world could possess such wonderful hair and eyes. I see now that I was wrong."

She blushed charmingly and turned to her companion.

"Madame has been almost a mother to me for some years," she confided.

"It is long since you were in Petrograd?"

"I have not visited Russia since I was a child," she replied. "The climate did not suit me at first and afterwards my father did not wish me back whilst things were so unsettled. Always they wanted to come abroad, but my father's position with regard to the Tsar made it difficult. Nicolas hated to be left by his old friends."

"We are interfering with your luncheon, I fear," Felix Drayton suggested.

"Let us meet for coffee," the Colonel proposed, with his eyes upon the dish which had just arrived, "or we will come around to the office of Mr. Drayton after luncheon—whichever you prefer."

"Might I suggest my office?" the latter begged. "This is a very *intime* place and the matters of which we must speak are of some importance."

"Wherever you say," Madame assented graciously.

"In an hour's time, then."

"We will be with you."

Elisaveta caught at Haven's wrist and drew him down towards her. Her eyes were dancing with expectation.

"When shall I see my jewels?" she whispered.

Haven groaned in spirit, but it was impossible to look at her without an answering smile.

"You shall see them before long," he promised....

The two men returned to their table. Haven leaned back in his place with his hands in his pockets and a despairing frown upon his forehead.

"Drayton," he grumbled, "what a hell of a mess I'm in! Our friends at the far end have left, I see. You're sure your man will keep tabs on Anna Kastellane?"

"Quite sure," Drayton assured him. "I am inclined to agree with you. I think she will have to be approached. The matter, however, isn't quite as easy as you seem to imagine."

"Why not?" Haven asked sharply. "She took the jewels away when I was unconscious. She knew very well that they were mine, or rather that they were in my charge. Although I hate to say it, it was a downright, bare-faced theft."

"Precisely. But—excuse me one moment, my young friend. We have lunched lightly. I think a little cheese—that Stilton there, for instance. Capital. You'll join me, won't you? You want building up after such an illness as you've had. Capital stuff, cheese. Pity it's too early for celery."

"I don't think," Haven remarked with a grin, "that you'd have cared much for our food on the plane. Herring soup with cabbage and bits of rough meat in it most of the time."

"Herring soup is a new proposition to me," Drayton admitted, "and cabbage, I must confess, is a vegetable I have no liking for. What do you think of our friends?"

"The Colonel and his wife seem about the usual type," Haven decided. "The girl is almost the most beautiful creature I've ever seen in my life."

"And you say she's like her mother?" Felix Drayton reflected, helping himself to another glass of hock.

"Marvellously. Precisely the same eyes, and her mother's hair must have been exactly that colour when she was young."

"Elisaveta Ostrekoff," Felix Drayton repeated thoughtfully. "The Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff. Yes, it sounds well. Our search, after all, wasn't a long one," he went on. "It's astonishing, when you have a great fortune to offer, how soon you discover a missing person. If it had been the other way, my agents might have failed everywhere."

"I didn't imagine there would be much difficulty about it," Haven observed. "They told me in Petrograd, though, that the last time a letter got through it was from Florence."

"A beautiful city, Florence," Drayton remarked. "Always wish I could get there oftener. It's rather off the beaten track somehow.... Regular military presence, the Colonel, hasn't he? Good figure. Quite the cavalry officer type. I wonder whether his wife is Russian or French."

It occurred to Haven that his companion was being somewhat discursive. He wheeled around upon him.

"Look here," he said. "We haven't got very much time before I've got to face those people. Will you tell me what I'm going to say about the jewels? Remember, you're partly responsible for this. I suppose I would have gone up and taken Anna Kastellane by the shoulders and sent for a policeman, if you hadn't been there. What am I going to tell that young goddess Elisaveta about her jewels?"

"That is rather a poser, isn't it?" Drayton admitted. "All the same, if you'd played the fool like that down in the Bar, I'm quite sure your young friend would have laughed at you. She would have maintained that the jewels that came out of Russia had been declared the property of the State, and her two revolutionary friends would have backed her up."

"Then what do you propose?" Haven asked anxiously. "You don't suppose I can tell Elisaveta that I have allowed the jewels entrusted to me by her father and mother to be taken away by another girl without a word of protest on my part?"

The elder man pushed back his plate and ordered coffee and the bill. He had lunched very well and he had no intention of allowing a difficult situation to interfere with his digestion.

"I think," he declared, "that you had better leave most of the talking to me. By to-morrow I shall know something about your friend Anna Kastellane, and even if I have not discovered the whereabouts of the jewels, I may have discovered the best way to approach her."

The coffee arrived and two bills. With a little murmur of apology, and a glance across the room, the waiter explained the matter.

"The gentleman over the way, sir, Colonel Oliastransky I think he said his name was—the gentleman with the Princess—begged that you would sign his for him. He was told that you were lunching here and he followed, thinking that it was a restaurant. We didn't realise that he was not a member until too late."

"Quite right, quite right," Drayton assented. "I'll sign and pay for both, Henry. Charming people, but not often in London."

The two men took their leave. Drayton touched his friend's arm as they passed out.

"It is quite possible, Haven," he warned him, "that in the absence of the jewels you may be called upon to write a cheque on account for our friends."

"There will be no difficulty about that," Haven sighed. "What I resent so bitterly," he added, "after all I've been through, is having to make excuses instead of handing the jewels over."

"Everything," Felix Drayton prophesied tritely, "may work out for the best."

In the pleasant afternoon sunshine which flooded Felix Drayton's library, Wilfred Haven found something pathetic in the appearance of the two older visitors. Colonel Oliastransky held himself with the same military precision, but his black coat showed signs of many pressings, his trousers were faded, and the carefully repaired shoes and gaiters had passed their epoch of seemly service. His linen was frayed, his large black bow carefully folded to show to the best advantage. The lines of his aristocratic face were deeply indented and his drooping mouth almost tragic. His wife's toilette, too, left something to be desired in style, even though she carried herself with ease and confidence, as though the garments she wore were of slight concern. Elisaveta alone represented luxury. Apart from her beauty, her black georgette gown was cut by an artist, her silk stockings and shoes were of the latest mode. She wore no jewellery and the simplest of hats. Curled up in her easy-chair she presented a fascinating picture.

"Mr. Haven, please," she called to him softly.

He came over to her side at once.

"Tell me what it is you have brought really. Is it jewels?"

"I am forbidden to open my mouth," he told her good-humouredly. "I had a very difficult job getting out of Petrograd and journeying over here, and I made one slight blunder. For that, my man of affairs has sentenced me to silence—whilst business is being considered."

She laughed up at him.

"I'm glad of the proviso," she murmured. "Is that the right word, or should I say condition? My English is a little rusty."

"It will do," Haven assured her.

Felix Drayton had seated himself behind his desk. He commenced to talk, very informally but with carefully chosen words.

"We are very lucky, my young friend Haven and I," he began, "to have found you people and the Princess so quickly and with so little trouble."

"That we are here so soon," Madame said graciously, "is due to the cleverness of your agent in Paris. We were living in the greatest retirement but he discovered us, it seems, with no difficulty. We took our tickets for England within an hour of our interview with him."

"So you were in Paris, were you?" Felix Drayton observed.

"We were staying at a small pension near Versailles," the Colonel explained hurriedly. "Elisaveta's remittances had ceased altogether and our own were very irregular. Our anxieties have consequently been great and we should like to know from you at once, Mr. Drayton, what this young gentleman has brought us from the Ostrekoff family. If it is jewels—where are they? If it is money—how much is it?"

"The original bequest," Felix Drayton confided cautiously, "was a packet of jewellery."

"Jewellery!" the Colonel repeated. "To what value, Mr. Drayton? You must pardon our anxiety. The matter is of vital importance to us."

"You can set your minds at ease," Felix Drayton assured him. "The value of those jewels will be sufficient to free you all from financial anxieties for the rest of your lives."

"The amount?" Madame demanded.

Felix Drayton fingered his miniature moustache.

"You must prepare for a shock," he said. "The jewels might realise as much as one or even two million pounds—"

"They are valued at three," Haven interposed stubbornly.

There was an absolutely awe-stricken silence. The girl's soft fingers twined themselves in Haven's. Even she could find no words, but her eyes were full of adoration. Haven was, after all, a man of ordinary mould and his senses thrilled responsively. It was she who first found words.

"When can I see them?" she asked. "When can we—sell something?"

The Colonel coughed.

"You must not think my ward too mercenary," he apologised. "The fact of the matter is that, like a great many of my countrypeople stranded in Europe, we have been short of money for some time."

"It is easily understood," Felix Drayton sympathised. "But that state of things need exist no longer. Concerning the delivery of the jewels themselves there may be—I speak to you quite frankly—a brief delay."

Dismay settled upon their countenances. The girl withdrew her fingers from Haven's and suddenly sat upright. There was a flash in her beautiful eyes—half of fear—half of anger. She seemed to be years older.

"Delay?" she repeated, and even her voice had changed. "Why should there be any delay? The jewels are my property. Mr. Haven, to whom they were entrusted, has arrived. Where are they, please?" she concluded almost sharply, as she swung around to face him.

"Delay in the delivery of the jewels themselves," Felix Drayton reiterated. "As regards money, there need be no delay whatever. Mr. Haven is, I understand, prepared to advance any reasonable sum before the banks close this afternoon," he added, with a glance at the clock.

The pinched expression which had suddenly made him look like an old man had left the Colonel's face. Madame half closed her eyes with relief on hearing those blessed words. The girl's fingers sought Haven's again, although something had gone from her feline abandonment. The seductive light, however, was back in her eyes.

"How good you are," she murmured. "But why did you frighten us?"

"Perhaps, Mr. Haven," Felix Drayton went on, "if you would make out a cheque for, say, a thousand pounds, it will prove to our friends here that there is no serious hitch in the proceedings."

"A thousand pounds!" the Colonel gasped. "Certainly, certainly, Mr. Drayton. I am sure that Elisaveta would appreciate it. We should all feel much relieved."

The girl's eyes were fixed upon her companion's in puzzled fashion. She alone of the trio seemed to be thinking beyond the one amazing fact that a thousand pounds was about to tumble into their laps.

"It will be wonderful," she acknowledged, as she watched him draw a cheque book and a fountain pen from his pocket. "But I suppose I am stupid. I do not understand why I should not see my wonderful jewels."

Haven wrote out a cheque and Felix Drayton handed it to his secretary, a young man who had entered the room at his bidding.

"Plenty of small notes, Robbins," he instructed him. "Be sure you get to the bank before it closes and come straight back here."

The young man bustled out. Felix Drayton, as though he realised that the girl was the only person from whom trouble was to be expected turned to her.

"Princess," he said, "Mr. Haven and I, as his representative, have simply to throw ourselves upon your indulgence for a few days. The jewels are close at hand and we believe them to be in safe keeping, but, for the moment, we cannot produce them and we cannot say where they are. But listen, please," he went on hurriedly, as he saw the frown forming on her forehead. "You should remember this—Mr. Haven has practically accomplished his mission at the repeated risk of his life, and I do not think that any other messenger to whom the jewels could have been entrusted would have achieved the same measure of success. You must please remember that, and, in my unprejudiced opinion, you should be immensely grateful to him. There is also this point for you to consider—we have not asked for any proofs of identity or anything of that sort. Mr. Haven is too much impressed by your likeness to your mother to think it necessary, but when the larger amounts are dealt with, you must, of course, produce proofs that you are the person we know you to be. When that is done, Mr. Haven will hand over to you either the jewels or their full value in money."

The ecstatic look was returning to the girl's face, but there was still the shadow of that calculating gleam in her eyes.

"Who is going to value them?" she asked shrewdly.

"All that will be equably arranged, Princess," he assured her. "Mr. Haven will discharge his trust honourably."

"I know I can rely upon you," the girl said, looking up into her companion's face. "It is just one's curiosity which almost hurts. You say so little, but there is a mystery somewhere, is there not?"

"There is a mystery," Drayton confessed. "It is a mystery which I hope will be cleared up within the next few hours, and, so far as the financial part of it is concerned, it will never affect you, because if you do not get the jewels, you will get their full value."

"I am not a business man," Colonel Oliastransky intervened dubiously, "but this all seems to me to be a little quaint. This amiable young gentlemen is entrusted with a packet of jewels by Princess Elisaveta's father and mother for delivery to her. He succeeds in bringing them through to England and getting into touch with us. So far everything is very commendable. But—instead of producing the jewels, he hints that he may possibly offer the money instead. Well, the money can only come from the sale of the jewels. Why does not my ward have the jewels to dispose of herself?"

"That is where you are wrong, Colonel," Felix Drayton pointed out. "Our young friend here is one of the fortunate persons of the world. He has a father who is known throughout England and America as a multimillionaire. If you," he went on, turning to the girl, "are the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff, a fact which we look upon as already demonstrated, and he should be unable to produce the jewels, he will pay you their full value in cash. I think I can say that, Haven?"

"Surely," the young man agreed. "If you could just make up your mind," he went on, turning to the girl, whose fingers were now tightly holding his, "not to think of the jewels for a day or two but just to be content with the realisation that there are three million pounds coming to you, probably before the end of the week, certainly before the end of the month

—well, that would take a load off my mind."

A young man who could produce three million pounds! She looked at him with the fullest measure of her old adoration. He was handsome too. A fine, strong-looking young man, and a millionaire!

"Very well," she promised. "Anything in the world you ask me I will do. But you must be my guardian. You must not leave me alone again."

He laughed uneasily.

"I've got an idea that being guardian to you would be a pretty difficult matter," he said. "However, I'll have a shot at it."

There was a knock at the door and the secretary reappeared. He handed a bundle of notes to his employer. The latter counted them, put them in an envelope and passed it across to Elisaveta. She took out some at random and entrusted the remainder to Colonel Oliastransky. Drayton scribbled some form of receipt. She moved to the table at his invitation and signed it. Even her handwriting seemed in character with herself and the strange proceedings with which she was concerned. "Elisaveta Ostrekoff," she wrote, in bold letters which spread from one side of the sheet of paper to the other. Drayton looked at her signature and smiled.

"You will have to have a special cheque book made," he remarked.

She laughed.

"I shall be signing my name very often, as soon as I get it," she declared joyfully. "There are so many, many things I want. I wonder if you are going to think me extravagant, Guardian?" she asked, turning to Haven.

"I guess I never think it extravagant to spend money when you have it," he answered. "You must give me your address."

Colonel Oliastransky coughed nervously.

"We were not quite sure how things would be with us financially," he explained. "We are staying at a very small boarding house in the Bayswater Road, Number 23a. If Elisaveta wishes, and I am sure she will, we can move to-morrow."

"How would it be," Felix Drayton suggested, "if you and your ward, and Madame if she cares to, of course, were to come here at the same time a week from to-day? We might have further news for you then."

The girl put her hands upon Haven's shoulders and dragged him down.

"Will there be some more money?" she whispered in his ear.

He ignored the faint quiver of anxiety in her tone and laughed encouragingly.

"You can draw ten thousand pounds if you like to-morrow," he promised. "That is—unless I hand you over the jewels."

She held his head between the palms of her hands and kissed him on both cheeks. The colour flamed into his face. A strand of her beautiful hair had brushed across his forehead. She released him, laughing mockingly.

"I discover that my guardian is a little shy," she murmured. "Never mind. There will be a time when he knows me better."

Madame glanced suggestively at the clock and rose to her feet.

"In less than two hours," she announced, "the shops will be closed."

Drayton saw his visitors out himself, returned to his study and, standing on the hearthrug, took a cigarette from the box, which he first passed to Haven, and lit it.

"Well, we staved that off pretty well, on the whole," he remarked. "Quite a reasonable old bird, the Colonel, but by George, what a beauty your ward is! You will find your hands pretty full, young fellow. How about the likeness to her mother, eh? Does that grow on you?"

"It is the most amazing thing I ever knew," Haven pronounced. "There is a picture of the Princess in court dress, painted at the time of her marriage, in which her height is not noticeable, and you would swear that it was a picture of Elisaveta. Her voice too—everything. Drayton, do you think she is going to be absolutely furious if we don't get back the jewels?"

Drayton smiled.

"I think she will put up with the money," he replied. "I want you to clear out if you will now. If you can see me at seven o'clock, I will tell you all I've been able to discover about Miss Anna Kastellane."

"You don't think I ought to go and see her myself?" Haven suggested doggedly.

"As a last resource only," Drayton enjoined.

CHAPTER XXVII

Anna Kastellane, one morning a week after her luncheon party at the Embassy Club, stepped out of a taxicab in front of the Times Library to find herself immediately accosted by a passer-by. Her face scarcely reflected the pleasure which the latter seemed to find in the meeting.

"This is the most fortunate thing that has happened to me for days," Boris Roussky said impressively. "Why do you never answer letters, Anna Kastellane?"

"Why do you write them?" was the cool rejoinder.

The very elegant young man bit his lip. Anna Kastellane was one of the conundrums of his very conceited existence. Her manner towards him was a continual source of surprise.

"I wrote you officially because it was my duty," he confided. "I wrote you privately because I wished to see and speak to you on a very important matter."

"What you have to say to me officially—which is all I want to hear—could have been said in your letter," she pointed out. "I live by myself in a small flat and I do not receive visitors. I explained that to you once before."

"When will it please you, then, to receive the official communication which I am asked to make to you?" he enquired stiffly.

"Here on this pavement and now," she answered. "I am listening."

He looked at her in astonishment. He was quite the Beau Brummel of his party, a young man for whom a great future was predicted, and he could scarcely pass through the various departments of the great undertaking with which he was connected in London without at least a dozen pairs of eyes following him wistfully. Yet this girl, for some inexplicable reason, was more than cold to him. She was even inclined to be rude.

"Official business," he protested, "cannot be conducted in such a manner. It is twenty minutes to one. Will you lunch with me?"

"To be seen with you in a public place," she reminded him, "is almost the same thing as my coming to the offices. At the Embassy, there was a reason for our meeting—to lunch *à deux* is a different thing."

"We can have a private room, if you like," he suggested. "There are several little places I know of close by."

She drew away from him in momentary disgust. He suffered no loss of composure. He looked upon her gesture as due entirely to nervousness.

"You can come to my flat this evening at tea time," she conceded—"at four o'clock or soon after. The address is Number 4a Harford Street."

"Delighted," he murmured. "And for luncheon?"

"Of that there is nothing to be said," she replied. "Good morning."

Boris Roussky passed on unwillingly, after a very florid farewell. He lit a cigarette and continued his stroll into Oxford Circus and down Regent Street, casting about him in his mind for some possible explanation of her attitude. There had been reports about his cruelty during that month he had served on the Cheka. Officially he had been successful enough; as a human being, some even of his own associates had turned from him. After all, with his social gifts, London was perhaps the place for him. As for the girl, he had never yet found difficulty with any member of her sex. Her aloofness was beginning to intrigue him. She was different from these others who had imbibed the new doctrines. They were acquiescent to the point of sloppiness. After a course of them, Anna Kastellane would be a positive tonic....

He drank green tea with lemon and smoked cigarettes in the sitting room of her miniature flat in Harford Street that evening with a sense of great contentment. He was artist enough to appreciate the good taste of her simple furnishings, the value of her etchings and her other few, but priceless, *objets d'art*. The pearl-grey colouring of the walls pleased him. She, too, must be quite an artist, he decided. They would make a wonderful pair.

"Now for the business, please," she requested, as soon as he had finished his second cup of tea.

"It is you who drive one to forget," he observed. "However, you shall have your way. Here is one of the official matters which I am asked to discuss with you. In this country the need for absolute secrecy does not occur as in Russia. Serge Melgounoff is of the opinion that you should now become formally associated with us."

"I do not share Serge Melgounoff's opinion," she announced. "I prefer to work, if at all, from outside."

He tapped a cigarette upon the table, hoping that she would notice his beautiful hands—the ring with the marvellous coat-of-arms—he forgot from whose dead finger he had snatched it. Anna Kastellane, he reflected, was inclined to be a little difficult. She must be reminded of certain things, very delicately but firmly. The mission was entirely to his liking.

"I do not think that a positive refusal would be acceptable to the committee or, if you will pardon my saying so, advisable," he remonstrated. "There is excellent work which you could do regularly in our organisation. You must remember that here in London there are no longer facilities for the work which you did so well in Russia and Poland."

"I agree with you there," was the calm reply. "It seems to me that my work has come to a natural termination. I am thinking therefore of discontinuing it or, at any rate, taking a holiday."

He shook his head gravely.

"Holidays are not yet for us," he declared didactically. "There are many nations to be taught the new doctrine, a whole world waiting for enlightenment. London should be a great centre for us. There is much work which we could do very well together. My present secretary is stupid—I was thinking of offering you the post. The salary would be worth consideration."

That was a very curious expression which shone sometimes in her blue eyes, he meditated, as he looked across at her through the mist of cigarette smoke. If he had not been a very clever man, he might have misunderstood it. He might even have believed that his suggestion had been offensive. Then he suddenly remembered what probably lay behind it all. She meant perhaps to keep this great fortune which had fallen into her hands. Russian women were all lazy *au fond*, unless they had some strong impulse towards work. She was far too pretty really to be kept in the serious walks of life, although the attraction of working with him should have made more appeal to her. She dismissed the matter flippantly.

"I do not think that I should make you a good secretary, Boris Roussky."

"Nor should I perhaps make you a good master," he admitted indulgently. "I may seem hard and severe officially, but in private life I have my weaknesses. I dare say you have realised, Anna Kastellane, that you are one of them."

"Am I?" she rejoined. "Well, go on, please, with the rest of what you have to say."

"The rest of what I have to say," he confided, "concerns the Ostrekoff jewels."

She looked up quickly. She had always known that this would come some day, but its arrival at that particular moment was a little unexpected.

"The Director thinks, we all think," he continued insinuatingly, "that it is time we came to an arrangement with you concerning them."

"What sort of an arrangement?" she demanded.

"You are making my task difficult," he complained. "You know perfectly well that the property of the aristocracy of Russia has been declared forfeit to the people. The Ostrekoff jewels are part of such property. You did your duty as one of us to rescue them from the hands of the young man, Wilfred Haven. If he had had his way, they would have passed out of our reach for ever. For several reasons, we think it best that you should now be relieved of them. The first is that we need money; the second is even more serious. Our position in this country is, as you know, precarious. The young man Haven, or even Elisaveta Ostrekoff herself, may appeal to the police, claiming that the jewels were stolen. In that case, you might have to give them up—"

"So might you," she interrupted.

"We think not," he replied calmly. "In the first place, we have special facilities for disposing of them. In the second, although we may not yet be recognised, we are the only Government which exists in Russia to-day and the enactment providing that the property of the aristocracy reverts to the people, from whom it came, has received the official seal. We can deal with the jewels, Anna Kastellane. You are not in a position to do so."

"How do you know that I have not sold half of them already?" she demanded.

"I am convinced that you have not done anything so foolish!" he exclaimed. "The jewels are not yours to dispose of. They belong to the Government, which will soon be officially recognised as the Soviet Government of Russia. There would be very serious trouble if it were discovered that they had been tampered with."

Anna Kastellane leaned back in her chair and laughed. With half-closed eyes but widely parted lips, she laughed with the full enjoyment of one whose sense of humour has been irresistibly appealed to. He watched her at first tolerantly, afterwards with something approaching annoyance.

"You are really very funny," she said at last. "I was not working for you at all when I fell in with that dear lamb of an American and made use of him to help me to get to Warsaw. I have worked for you—perhaps—but I am not your slave nor the slave of your Government. I stole those jewels on my own and I rather think that I am going to keep them."

A very different Boris Roussky made himself evident. His mouth had contracted until the corners formed a sharp line. A frown which looked as if it had come to stay was upon his forehead. His eyes were like twin pieces of steel.

"If you talk in that way, Anna Kastellane, you may find yourself before long in great danger," he warned her, "danger from which no power on this earth will be able to protect you. You are a servant of the Soviet, a fact which you cannot be allowed to forget."

"And the Soviet demands from me the Ostrekoff jewels?"

"It does and it intends to have them."

"And you would like me to be your private secretary?"

"It would be a suitable post for you and one which I think you deserve."

She began to laugh again. He watched her in intense anger.

"Perhaps you are right," she admitted, wiping her eyes. "Perhaps I do deserve to become your secretary, to atone for ever having been mixed up with any of you. I will not punish myself so severely, though. Sooner than give up the jewels, I would rather return them to the young man from whom I took them."

"You are talking now like a fool, Anna Kastellane!" he exclaimed, with fury in big tone.

"You have never talked like anything else," she rejoined promptly. "You talk like an animated puppet, not like a human being. Do you think that I am to be impressed by such nonsense? You want to take three million pounds away from me and divide it amongst yourselves—you and the others—to spend it on your clothes and your motor cars and your mistresses. I have a fancy for some of the pleasant things of life myself, Boris Roussky."

He opened his lips and closed them again. He paused to reflect. The girl was not such a fool after all. Why should not she be entitled to a share? He would probably be able to get it away from her afterwards.

"Let us," he proposed, "explore the possibilities of an arrangement. I am inclined to agree with you. I think that some share, at any rate, should come to you for your courage and enterprise. Make a suggestion to me. I am your friend. I will talk it over with the department this evening."

She leaned forward and pressed the bell.

"Sorry to send you away," she apologised. "I have another visitor due and I think that I hear the lift. You can talk it over with your department, Boris Roussky, but the suggested arrangement had better come from you."

A trim little servant made her appearance. Boris Roussky had no alternative but to go. He bowed over Anna's fingers courteously enough, but it was not in the least like the visit he had intended, nor had it terminated in the hoped-for

fashion.

He paused outside, looking up and down the street in search of a taxicab. His attention was almost immediately attracted by a man who was lounging on the pavement opposite and gazing meditatively up at the windows. Notwithstanding his many weaknesses, Boris Roussky was by no means a fool and he recognised a detective when he saw one. This man might be of the police—English or foreign—he might be the agent of a Private Enquiry Office or he might be doing this on his own account. One thing, however, was very certain—his present occupation was watching the block of flats in which Anna Kastellane's abode was situated. Boris Roussky turned on his heel, entered the automatic lift, mounted to the third floor and caused himself to be readmitted to her presence. She looked at him in surprise.

"Back again," she observed coldly.

"I have come back," he confided, "to give you a word of warning. I do not think that you realise the dangerous position in which you have placed yourself by retaining possession of those jewels. For instance, a detective—an agent of the police, I think he is—is watching your flat at the present moment."

"If he is of the police," Anna Kastellane remarked, "he is probably there to protect me."

"He is more likely to be there to arrest you," the Russian rejoined bluntly. "I have warned you and I warn you again, Anna Kastellane, you cannot hold those jewels safely. From the point of view of the law of this country, you are nothing more nor less than a thief. Either the authorities will seize the jewels by force or some private persons will take them from you by theft. If the latter, they may cost you your life. You had better hand them over into our keeping and we will make a generous arrangement with you."

She rang the bell once more.

"I will consider the matter," she promised him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Colonel Oliastransky, his wife and his ward, the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff, lunched on the following day in much magnificence. There had been no difficulty, with his slim, military figure, about buying clothes for the Colonel. His black morning coat and dark grey trousers, Burlington Arcade shoes and spats, and Scott's silk hat all became him well and helped him to present a dignified and aristocratic appearance. With his wife the "ready-made" shops had not been quite so successful, but she too was a changed woman. Elisaveta had found a dark brown costume at the establishment of a famous French dressmaker in which she was more distractingly beautiful than ever. They did not repeat their mistake of the week before and invade the sacred precincts of the Embassy, but descended instead from their hired motor car before the much humbler premises of the Golden Calf Restaurant in the neighbourhood of Oxford Street. Monsieur Cochot, the proprietor, struck an attitude at their entrance. He hastened to relieve himself of the dish he was carrying and came forward all smiles and bows.

"*Monsieur le Colonel!*" he exclaimed. "*Madame! Mademoiselle!* One perceives that things have happened. The good fortune? It is arrived, yes?"

"It is arrived," the Colonel assented solemnly. "Mademoiselle no longer, Monsieur Cochot. My ward has received the fortune long promised to her by her parents in Petrograd. With it she takes once more her title. Behold, Monsieur Cochot, the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff."

Monsieur Cochot bowed and bowed again. He summoned Madame from behind the little counter from which she dispensed wines and *apéritifs*. They all talked together until the Colonel interrupted.

"It is enough," he declared. "The business of the moment is to lunch, to eat and drink of your best, Monsieur Cochot, and to receive a note of what, owing to your kindness and consideration, we still owe you."

Monsieur Cochot wiped a tear from his eye with the corner of the napkin he had been brandishing. Nothing could have been more welcome than such a windfall. He bustled his patrons to the best table in the restaurant, then darted off to interview the chef. Madame mixed *apéritifs* with her own hands and graciously accepted one. They were all remarkably gay.

"I wonder," the Colonel speculated, "what is to happen to-day—whether Mr. Haven will produce the jewels or more of these exceedingly pleasant bank notes."

The girl smiled happily.

"I do not very much mind," she confided. "I shall, of course, marry Mr. Haven. He will deserve it for bringing me this great fortune. Besides—I like him."

"Elisaveta is right," Madame Oliastransky declared. "The young man pleases me too. He is handsome and, to judge from what his lawyer said, of great wealth."

"I am glad that he is rich," the girl reflected, pushing back an unruly strand of hair from her forehead. "I am delighted to know that we shall be rich for all our lives. If he were poor, I think I should reward him in the same fashion—I should still marry him. I have grown so weary of our life."

Madame coughed.

"It would be discreet," she suggested, "if the details of what we have been through, of our dear child's sufferings, for instance, remained locked in our own bosoms for the present. Just at the moment, I think—what do you say, Henry my dear? I think no mention at all of the Folies Bergères, for instance, of the Carlton at Monte Carlo, the negotiation with the Hippodrome here."

The Colonel looked around nervously.

"Not a word, my dear," he agreed. "I am entirely of your opinion."

"It is a matter of common sense," the girl declared. "There are one or two friends whom we must forget also. I shall be as nice as I can to Wilfred Haven. Perhaps he will want to marry me very quickly—that would be better."

There was for a moment something calculating in those beautiful eyes, the mouth seemed a little older, the girlishness less evident. It was only a brief interlude, however. A moment later she was sipping her *apéritif* luxuriously, the cynosure, as usual, of every pair of male eyes in the vicinity.

"I think," Madame Oliastransky assured her, with rather heavy archness, "that when he sees you to-day, he will want to marry you as quickly as you can trot off to a Registry Office."

"I wonder how long it really does take in this country," Elisaveta speculated. "America is so wonderful for that. You can get up from the luncheon table and come back to dinner married."

"With a Registry Office it is not a long affair," Madame Oliastransky surmised. "The young man was very much attracted yesterday, it was easy to see. To-day it will be his finish."

"And the good God be thanked," Elisaveta murmured fervently, "that this time it will be a serious affair. We shall travel. Yes, I have made up my mind about that. I shall have the most beautiful frocks in the world. I shall have my picture painted by that crazy French artist. We may have a yacht. For certain we shall have an apartment in Paris. There will be enough always for you two," she went on. "Very likely you will like to live in one of my houses while we are away. That can be easily arranged."

Madame Oliastransky sighed. She had drunk two glasses of old red wine in the middle of the day and she was becoming sentimental.

"I remember your mother when she was your age," she mused, "before she became an Ostrekoff. She was the image of you as you are to-day. She too would always wear brown and dark brown fur. But the men who were in love with her!"

"No scandal, my dear," the Colonel begged.

Elisaveta smiled.

"Perhaps in time," she meditated, "there may be as many men in love with me."

Madame Oliastransky, after sipping her third glass of wine, became a trifle didactic.

"My child," she admonished, with some severity, "let us pray not. Too many admirers are bad for a beautiful woman, however good and sweet her disposition. Your mother, one could see, was sometimes bewildered with life and her husband was not always happy. A man does not like to have would-be lovers around his house like bees about a honey pot. You will be rich and independent. No man will be able to offer you more than you will have. Keep your husband faithful and for the rest—a few privileges, perhaps, to one or two—but one or two only. In that way you are spared from embarrassments."

"Oh, la, la!" Elisaveta laughed. "Look at Père Cochot's chicken which arrives!"

Haven, by arrangement, arrived at Clifford Street half an hour before the other three were expected. Felix Drayton waved him to a seat.

"That's a queer young woman you rocked across Europe with," he remarked bluntly.

"You have found her then?" Haven asked.

"Oh, yes, I found her easily enough," Drayton replied. "She was found from the moment you pointed her out to me in the Embassy. She's living in Harford Street and I should say that she's mixed up with some exceedingly dangerous people."

Haven folded his arms and sat back in his chair.

"Go on," he begged. "Tell me the worst."

"She's badly mixed up with those damned Russians who are streaming into the country," Drayton continued. "There's a colony of them already settled in London, you know—Bolshevists, every one of them—here to do all the mischief they

can. I'm afraid that your young woman, Anna Kastellane, although she doesn't show up at their premises, is one of them, all right. That man, Boris Roussky, whom some of the refugees declared was so fiendishly cruel that the Moscow Committee sent him over here to save him from being torn to pieces—the good-looking fellow who was with her at the Embassy a week ago—is one of her friends. He was at her flat yesterday for an hour and he was seen with her in the West End during the morning."

"What I want to know is why she went off with my jewels," Haven remarked bitterly.

"I'm very much afraid," Felix Drayton confided, "that she was after them all the time—for the Bolshevists. They collect trifles like that, you know."

Haven sat looking gloomily into space for some minutes.

"If she has not already handed over the jewels," Drayton went on—"and I can assure you that she has been watched day and night, and I have even devised a scheme to stop her entering the Aldwych premises, if she ever presents herself—there is just one chance of your being able to get them back. You may not like it, but you must remember that there is some one else concerned besides yourself. The young lady has been very clever throughout, but she has made a bad mistake—I dare say you can guess what that is."

"I'm damned if I can," Haven replied.

"She had to raise money, I suppose," Drayton continued. "Anyway, she did it. She took one of the emeralds and disposed of it—disposed of it and she has been paid."

"The devil," Haven murmured. "You mean the emerald that was shown to Mr. Haskell?"

Felix Drayton nodded.

"I have rather encouraged that little transaction," he admitted. "It seemed to be the only way of getting a hold upon the young woman. I have gone so far, Haven, as to guarantee Haskell against loss. He has bought the stone."

Haven bit his lip but he said nothing. The last hope was gone. Anna Kastellane was a thief, a common ordinary thief. She had made use of him. He had risked his life for her. This was the way she had repaid him.

"Tell me how it came about, Drayton?" he asked at last.

"Very simply," the other replied. "Lady Bott played bridge at a popular and quite high-class club in the West End of London. One of the members was a Frenchwoman—a Madame Lefarge—wife of the great jeweller in Paris. It was easy to discover that it was Madame Lefarge who had offered the stone to Lady Bott. It was almost as easy to discover that Madame Lefarge had visited Anna Kastellane twice at her flat in Harford Street. The connection once established, everything was easy. A servant at the Club saw Madame Lefarge hand over the stone to Lady Bott for valuation on the same day that she had visited Anna Kastellane."

"Why didn't you interfere and stop the sale?" Haven protested.

"Simply because on your behalf I wanted this hold over the young woman," Felix Drayton repeated. "Now you know how you stand. If it had not been for this single transaction, I am afraid your chance of getting the jewels back would have been a pretty slim one. You see, after all, we can despise what they call their Government in Russia, but they have passed that law confiscating the jewellery and property of the aristocracy, and if you go to Anna Kastellane this afternoon and demand your jewels, I should say it is ten to one that that would be her explanation. It may be true that she has parted with them. If so, it is for you to decide what to do. If she has not, you can threaten her with the police court. She has tricked you badly enough, but we are one up on her now. Whether she has the rest of the jewels still or whether she has not, you can send her to prison. She may get away with her story of having handed them over to the Government to whom they belonged, but she cannot get away from the fact that she first helped herself to one of the stones, sold it and accepted the money. Madame Lefarge paid her in bank notes."

"It is damned clever of you, of course, Drayton, but I hate the whole business," Haven declared. "I'd rather she had flung them into the sea, I'd rather a hundred times she had handed them over to her filthy friends without meddling with them."

Felix Drayton raised his eyebrows.

"Will you give me her address?" Haven requested.

"She has a flat on the third floor of Number 4a Harford Street," Drayton replied. "Shall I write it down?"

"You needn't. I can remember it."

"You're going to see her yourself?"

"What else is there to do?" Haven demanded passionately. "She left me lying unconscious at Cromer and decamped with three million pounds' worth of jewels which were in my care. I don't want to go to the police, although you seem to have trapped her, all right. I just want to hear her own explanation from her own lips."

Drayton was toying with a pencil, drawing a little design on his blotting paper, and made no remark.

"If she really is one of these crazy Bolshevists," Haven went on, "and simply sold one of the stones because she had no money, I guess I will have to let the whole thing go. If she has once parted with them, she certainly would never be able to get them back again, whether she was sent to prison or not."

"I doubt," Felix Drayton mused "whether she has parted with them. I think in all probability, if we sit tight, within a week or two we will hear of another stone upon the market. You'd have her then where she belongs. She couldn't put up her bluff about the jewels belonging to Russia any longer. She'd either have to hand them over or go to gaol. I don't want to influence you too much, Haven," his adviser continued, "but those jewels belong to Elisaveta Ostrekoff. She may accept your money instead, because the poor kid seems to be half starving and she's a decent sort, but the jewels are hers, and if you carry out your trust as you should, I take it that you ought to chuck sentiment and see that Elisaveta Ostrekoff has what belongs to her."

"I expect you're right," Haven acquiesced, a little drearily.

"You take my tip, my dear fellow," Felix Drayton concluded. "Go and see the young woman if you want to and have it out with her, but if you have a fancy for Russians, I should go nap on your little Princess. She's the most beautiful thing I have seen and the sweetest. She's taking this affair very well, too. Some girls would have turned sulky and declared that they wanted nothing but their jewels."

"She's all right," Haven admitted. "All the same, you can't alter things."

Drayton leaned over and patted his young friend upon the shoulder.

"You'll have to stick it out, Haven," he enjoined. "Take it straight from me—don't get mixed up with that young woman, Anna Kastellane. I'm sorry if my advice goes against the grain, but I've got to give it to you all the same. She's proved that she's a wrong 'un, proved it up to the hilt. Cut her out."

There was a discreet knock at the door. Punctual to the moment, the three expected visitors had arrived.

CHAPTER XXIX

There was a slight air of nervousness about two of the newcomers for the first few minutes after their arrival, and, even though fortified by their very excellent luncheon, they took their places with some trepidation. Elisaveta alone seemed perfectly at her ease and beamingly happy. She let her hand rest in Haven's and drew him towards her with a smile of invitation.

"Will you please come and sit where you did last time?" she begged. "You give me confidence. I can feel that the whole thing is not a dream when you are there."

Haven obeyed with a touch of self-consciousness. She smiled irresistibly across the room at Felix Drayton.

"Well," she continued, "have you any more bomb shells? Remember I have not lived in Russia since I was a child and I am not used to them. Am I to see my jewels or is there to be another shower of bank notes?"

"You take this little *contretemps* in very sporting fashion, Princess," Felix Drayton observed, with an appreciative bow. "I wasn't at all sure that you wouldn't march along to-day with a lawyer and a Scotland Yard detective and start bullying my client and myself."

She stole an upward glance at her companion.

"I should never try to bully Mr. Haven," she murmured. "Why, it is he who has brought me my fortune."

She held his hand for a moment tenderly. Madame smiled beneficently from her place. The Colonel nodded approvingly. Felix Drayton sighed.

"I congratulate you, Princess, upon your common sense and your discrimination," the latter declared. "Now we are all going to be very frank with one another. I must ask you these questions as a matter of form. You have told us that you are the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff, but the law would require some proof."

Elisaveta dipped into her bag and handed out a passport and a small packet.

"I have eleven other names," she confided. "You will find them all there, also you will find my mother's photograph and my father's. There is a bundle of letters written by my mother from the Ostrekoff Palace in St. Petersburg. There is also my birth certificate. Beyond that, it is well known that Colonel Oliastransky was in the Tsar's household and was afterwards my father's steward. Madame here was *dame de compagnie* to my mother before she married the Colonel. They went to live in Nice eighteen or nineteen years ago, and when the doctors ordered me out of Russia as a child, I was sent straight to them."

"Our own passports are here," Colonel Oliastransky volunteered, "and we can produce any other evidence of identity you require."

"There is also this locket of my mother's," Elisaveta sighed, producing an old-fashioned ornament set with brilliants. "I am supposed to be remarkably like her."

"Is all this necessary?" Haven intervened, a little impatiently. "We can all make mistakes sometimes, but nature can't. You are more like your mother, Elisaveta, if I may call you so, than I could have believed possible. I was very fond of your mother."

"I hope some day," she said softly, with another swift upward glance at him, "that you will be very fond of me."

Her eyes compelled his, but there was a touch of sadness in his smile as he looked down at her. She was distractingly pretty. If only that could mean what it ought to mean to him!

"Very well, then, we will proceed," Felix Drayton announced. "It is my duty to tell you, Princess, that Mr. Haven—after having literally fought his way across the continent with your jewels, and met with a variety of adventures, which he will tell you about some day, I have no doubt—temporarily lost possession of them on his arrival in England. Whilst he was unconscious, they were taken away. At present we do not look upon it as an ordinary theft and I know that my young friend is hoping to recover them. Supposing, however, he is not successful, he is fortunately well enough off to be able to

do the great and quixotic thing. He intends to hand you the amount that the jewels would have produced—as near as it can be determined—in cash."

"I think it is noble of him," she declared enthusiastically.

"It is an honourable action," Colonel Oliastransky conceded.

"I am gratified to hear you say so," Felix Drayton observed, "because, although no conversation has passed between my client and myself upon the subject, you must know that legally he is not in any way liable. He has brought you to-day a cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds."

For a moment, no one spoke. Then the sense of those wonderful last words seemed to reach them all simultaneously. Madame beamed. The Colonel nodded in grave appreciation. Elisaveta's expression was seraphic. Drayton rose to his feet and brought the cheque across to her.

"Within the next twenty-four hours," he continued, "we shall probably know whether the jewels are recoverable or not. If not, we shall have to try to arrive at some idea of their value, and my young client has arranged with his father, who I dare say you know is a very wealthy banker, to transfer stocks and securities to the amount decided upon into the name of the Princess. In the meantime, any further sum of money you may require my client can procure. He thought that this would probably give you a convincing proof of his intentions."

The Colonel turned to Elisaveta.

"You are satisfied, Princess?" he asked.

"Entirely," she assented. "I would trust Mr. Haven in any case. I think he has been wonderful. The only complaint I have," she added, "is that up to now he has told me so little about my father and mother and of the last time he saw them."

"It won't be very cheerful hearing, I'm afraid," Haven admitted. "It was only an hour or so before the final tragedy."

Madame leaned forward.

"If that is all the business for to-day," she suggested graciously, "why should we not invite Mr. Haven to dine with us to-night and tell us what he can of those last days? Elisaveta's mother," she added, turning to Haven, "was my devoted friend when we were young together."

"Do come," Elisaveta whispered.

Haven hesitated. He was conscious of a queer sort of apprehension as he met the soft invitation of her eyes. She was too beautiful for any man to look at unmoved. She fired his imagination almost as much as she puzzled his inexperience.

"May we reverse it?" he begged. "Let me ask you all to dine with me. My father has had to go back to New York and has saddled me with a great house—Number 12a Grosvenor Square—many servants and nothing for any one to do. It will be such a relief to the chef—probably stop his giving notice before my father gets back."

"We shall be delighted," Madame assented, rapidly running through in her mind the list of shops where she would be likely to find a suitable evening gown.

"At eight o'clock, I suppose—or half-past?" the Colonel suggested, rising.

"How I shall look forward to it!" Elisaveta murmured.

"Let's say cocktails at eight o'clock," Haven replied. "We can sit about before dinner if it isn't quite ready. What about joining us, Drayton?"

"Delighted," the latter accepted promptly. "Do you mind staying on for a moment, Haven? I want just a word with you about a different matter."

The visitors took their leave. Drayton resumed his seat, lit a cigarette and pushed the box to his companion.

"I'm glad you asked me to dinner, Haven," he confided. "Not only because I'm sure I shall get a thundering good one, but

I find those three people immensely interesting. I can't think why one has never heard of the girl before."

"She told me that she had been living very quietly abroad," Haven observed. "The Ostrekoff remittances seem to have become very irregular since the war. She has not even used her title until this news came."

"Very sensible of her," Drayton agreed. "I find all three of them most intriguing. I'm afraid I haven't been of much use to you yet, Haven, but I'm awfully glad you came to me. I can promise you won't have a very heavy bill of costs. I'm getting all my fun as I go along."

"You mustn't say you've been of no use to me," Haven protested. "You traced the sale of that stone the moment it was offered and you have given me the thing I wanted—Anna Kastellane's address—almost as soon as I asked for it."

"You are going along there now, I suppose," Drayton reflected, stretching himself out in his chair.

Haven acquiesced.

"I am going there at once. It will be the devil, but I want to get it over."

"You wouldn't like me to go with you, by any chance, I suppose?" Drayton suggested tentatively.

"Thanks very much, old fellow. I certainly shouldn't."

Haven had risen to his feet but his host remained seated.

"Are you going to tell your young friend that Elisaveta Ostrekoff has materialised and is asking for her jewels?" he enquired.

"I don't know," Haven replied. "I don't know what I shall say and what I sha'n't."

"Well, for example," Felix Drayton persisted, "are you going to tell her that you know she has sold one of the stones belonging to the Ostrekoff jewels to Lady Bott and had the money for it?"

"I may. I just want to see her look me in the eyes and answer one question I shall ask her. Very likely, when she has done that, I shall come away. It is all that matters really."

"Bad as that?" Drayton murmured.

"As bad as that. I'll be getting along, if you don't mind."

"Don't be in such a hurry," the other begged. "It isn't four o'clock yet—barely time for calling. I wish you'd let me go with you."

"Well, I sha'n't."

"You see," Drayton went on, "you're back in London now, a city of law and order and all that; taxicabs, omnibuses, crowds of people in the streets, policemen at every corner. It doesn't seem as though there's much of a chance for wrong-doers in London, yet there's a hell of a lot goes on here, Haven, that you never read about in the papers."

"You'll read about it in the papers, all right, if anything happens to me," Haven promised. "I dare say you think I'm a fool in London, but I don't mind telling you that I still have my favourite automatic in my pocket, just as I had in Petrograd, and on the way over, and I am boxing for half an hour every morning, so as to get back into fighting trim. If any of Anna Kastellane's Russian friends are lying in wait for me, they won't find it a walk-over."

"You've had some sort of a warning?" Drayton asked him suddenly.

"No, I shouldn't say that," Haven answered, after a moment's pause. "I fancied I saw a fellow slouching about in front of my house last night who was remarkably like one of the two we left in Odessa. They were the ones who were really after the jewels on their own account."

Felix Drayton coughed.

"What about the young lady?" he suggested drily.

"Oh, I know," was the impatient reply. "But I haven't begun to believe yet that Anna Kastellane is a thief. This man is, I know. He wanted to go shares with me when he ran me to earth in the Prince's shooting box in Poland. He's the sort of fellow who would have murdered me afterwards for my share if I'd agreed."

Felix Drayton rose thoughtfully to his feet.

"Perhaps it's just as well, then," he remarked, "that the jewels aren't in your possession. If he finds that out, he may leave you alone. Number 12a Grosvenor Square, isn't it? Very well, then, I'll be around about eight."

Felix Drayton, when his friend had left him, returned to his place at his desk and sat for a moment in gentle and apparently aimless meditation. Then he drew the telephone book towards him, found a number and asked for it. In a few moments he was connected.

"Is that Barclays' Bank," he enquired. "Audley Street Branch?... Good. Could I speak to Mr. Gubbins?... Yes.... No—a private matter. I won't keep him a minute. Felix Drayton, the name. Thank you."

There followed a brief silence during which the latter studied his finger-nails thoughtfully. Then he became alert.

"That Mr. Gubbins? Felix Drayton speaking. Look here, Mr. Gubbins, I don't want to ask you to do anything unprofessional or to divulge any bank secrets, but if you feel at liberty to do so, I should like you to answer me a perfectly harmless question. You know my profession. You know I wouldn't suggest anything that might reflect on your discretion.... Good. That's understood, then. If you don't wish to answer my query, I promise I sha'n't be offended. A client of mine—Mr. Wilfred Haven, son of Norman Haven, the great American financier—gave a cheque an hour ago in my presence to a certain young lady in this office. It was an open cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds payable to Elisaveta Ostrekoff.... Yes, all that. Well, my question's harmless enough, but don't worry yourself. There is no doubt about the genuineness of the cheque. If it was for two hundred and fifty thousand, Mr. Haven could meet it many times over, and so far as I know the young lady has a perfect right to the money. I simply want to ascertain whether it has been cashed yet.... It has! I rather thought it might have been.... Beautiful? One of the most beautiful young women I've ever seen in my life.... You're quite right—Russian.... No, the elderly gentleman wasn't her father. He was the husband of her *dame de compagnie*—a Colonel Oliastransky. I'm exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Gubbins. The matter has no significance except that it helps me to build up a theory and you know how difficult that is sometimes. Good-bye. Many thanks."

Felix Drayton replaced the receiver. Not a cloud disturbed his serene countenance. He was, in fact, perfectly happy. There was nothing in the world he loved so much as being puzzled—and he was puzzled.

CHAPTER XXX

Haven stepped into his car and arrived within a few minutes at Number 4a Harford Street. He ignored the automatic lift, mounted the stairs two at a time and rang the bell of the third-floor flat. The neatly attired maid looked at him enquiringly. It occurred to him that Anna might have adopted some other name and he changed the form of his question.

"Is your mistress in?" he asked.

"I'm not sure, sir," the maid replied. "If you will tell me your name I will see."

"Mr. Haven—Mr. Wilfred Haven."

He stepped into the tiny hall. The maid was absent for some minutes. When she returned she threw open the door of a sitting room.

"The gentleman, Miss," she announced.

Haven passed into the room, and, for a moment, he was conscious of an unexpectedly poignant surge of emotion. His knees felt as they had done the day he first stepped out of his hospital bed. His eyes were hot. He was aware of an immense anxiety. There was no change in her, though. It was Anna Kastellane, precisely as he had known her, who rose and came forward to meet him. There was something faintly deprecating in her upraised eyebrows, something in her expression, he fancied, which asked for his kindness. He held out his hand, which she took readily.

"So you found me out and you really mean to be friendly with a thief and a criminal?" she asked.

"I mean to be friendly with you," he answered.

"You have come after your jewels," she challenged him.

"Of course I have," he assented. "Where are they?"

She motioned him to a chair.

"You would not care for a cup of tea instead?" she suggested.

"I'd like the tea, anyhow," he admitted. "We might talk about the jewels later."

She rang the bell and gave an order. All his impatience seemed to have departed. He was quite content, lounging in his low chair and looking at her. Although she appeared very little changed physically, he detected now a certain alteration which he found it difficult to define. During those hectic days of tragedy and wild excitement which they had spent together she had been all the time inspired by a tumultuous spirit of life. She was ready for any emergency, mistress of herself on every occasion. To-day, when she must at any rate have reached some measure of security, the sustaining fire of those days seemed to have burnt out. She was inclined to be listless. She reminded him of a person who had achieved success and found disappointment at the same moment.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" he asked. "You're different somehow."

"Observant man. I have brushed my hair back. They will not believe you are Russian unless you wear it that way, and it really had such an awful time during that expedition of ours that at first the hairdresser here could do nothing with it. There used to be a very good coiffeur at Odessa, but we had no time for frivolities there, had we?"

"We certainly had not," he admitted.

"Talking about changed appearances," she remarked abruptly, "what about yourself? You are ever so much thinner."

"I was quite ill at Cromer," he confided. "I wasn't likely to feel much better, was I, when I recovered consciousness and found you gone? I'll be all right soon. I'm too big to kill."

"You have been worrying about the jewels?"

"Of course I have," he answered wearily. "I'm not worrying so much now, though. Your eyes are exactly the same

glorious shade of blue. Just at present that seems more important."

"Have you come here to pay me compliments?"

"No, I came here to wring your neck," he rejoined. "How dared you leave me like that without a word?"

"I have often wondered myself. I just had to. I thought I saw something huge tumbling into my hands. It disappointed me. Most things do."

"You not only robbed me of my jewels," he went on, "but you took away every penny of money I had."

She laughed softly.

"Why, that was nothing—the money, I mean," she protested. "I had to come to London, had I not? Your father was there—a wealthy man. I knew that you could get whatever you wanted. Think how much we saved by not having to pay for the aeroplane!"

He too smiled.

"It was not the money," he reflected. "It was the sheer brutality of the whole thing—to leave me without a word, stranded there, after all that we'd been through together."

She lit a cigarette and pushed the box across to him. When she spoke, she ignored his last words.

"How have you been passing your time in London?" she enquired.

"Finding out things about you."

"Well, what have you found out?"

"That you are a Bolshevist spy, for one thing."

"Yes, I am a spy," she confessed. "But that was not a discovery. I had already told you that."

"That you had sold one of the Ostrekoff jewels, for another thing," he went on. "Rather dangerous that, wasn't it?"

"I had to live," she answered simply.

There was a lengthy silence. There were many things he wanted to say, but the glamour of her presence kept him curiously tongue-tied.

"Perhaps it was as well for you," he reflected, "that I had more muscle than brains. I might have left you in that narrow house that looked out upon the boulevard."

She shook her head.

"You could not have done that," she told him. "You would have heard my cry in your ears for the rest of your life."

The maid brought them tea, a straw-coloured beverage with a slice of lemon floating on the top and two quaintly formed cigarettes in the saucers.

"You need not touch that, unless you like," she remarked. "There is whisky and soda on the sideboard."

"You have men visitors, I see," he muttered jealously.

"All my visitors are men."

"Do they come after you or the Ostrekoff jewels?"

"Both. One—the most dangerous of all—comes for the jewels, but he would like me thrown in. Some day I shall probably ask you to kill that man for me."

"Why put it off?" he asked. "I felt danger in the air when I got up this morning. I have that same wicked little automatic in

my pocket that served us so well a short time ago."

She sighed.

"It is a pity I do not expect him this evening," she said. "You saw him at the Embassy Club."

"The elegant-looking bounder?"

"How well you describe him! He is terrible."

"Why do you get mixed up with such a crowd?" he asked passionately. "What have you to do with them or they with you? Break it off, Anna. I'll stand by you. I'll find plenty of others who will too. They probably got hold of you before you understood. You can chuck it. If they want the jewels, let them have them. I didn't come here to talk like this," he stormed, his features quivering with emotion, "but I can't help it. I'm going to say the one thing I swore I wouldn't—whatever you are and whoever you are, Anna, I can't get on without you. I love you, Anna. I want you more than anything else in the world. I'll get you out of any trouble you're in. I don't care a damn for anything that happened before you stabbed that man's fat neck in the aeroplane and I kissed you afterwards. We'll start life from there. If you've been a spy, you're not bound to go on spying all your life. I'll buy you off or fight for you—I'll do anything so long as you come to me."

Her eyes called him and he was across the room with a single movement. His arms were around her. For one long minute their lips met.

"You really do care—like that, Wilfred?" she whispered feverishly. "Can you take the past for granted? Are you sure that the ghosts of it will not rise up and haunt you?"

"Give me yourself—now and for the rest of my life," he begged. "I'll deal with the ghosts."

Her arms tightened around his neck.

"Perhaps they may not be so terrible, after all," she confided.

"Nothing that you have ever done or could do is terrible," he insisted. "I'll hear it all when you choose to tell it me—in five, ten, fifteen years' time, if you like. Take me to those men who've been making a spy of you. Let's deal with them and finish the whole thing. Let them have the jewels, if they want them. I'll pay Elisaveta Ostrekoff for their loss. I'll take you to America. You'll be safe there. We'll settle down and I'll chase the nightmares out of your life."

She was sobbing quietly in his arms. He tried to dry her tears but she stopped him.

"Let me, please," she begged. "It is the first time I have broken down and it has been so difficult...."

It might have been any time later when he rose to his feet and she let him go. The maid had come in to draw the curtains but Anna had waved her away. The grey twilight had a charm of its own. She took him by the arm and led him to the window.

"You see the man standing there?" she pointed out tensely.

"I see him," Haven answered cheerfully. "What do you want me to do with him?"

She wiped the remaining tears from her eyes and laughed at the same time.

"I want him left alone," she declared. "He is not really doing any harm—only they watch me—these men—day and night. You are right, Wilfred. They have not got them yet but they want the Ostrekoff jewels. Think of the irony of it, my dear—they want the Ostrekoff jewels to pay for their printing, to pay for their foul licentious living, to pay for all the things their terrible creed stands for."

He gazed at her, puzzled. She swung away from the window. Suddenly she gripped him by the arms. Her fingers seemed imbued with a strange force. She looked up into his face and there was a terrible anxiety in her strained lips, in her beseeching eyes.

"Wilfred," she cried, "this is the real you, is it not? You meant what you said? You would forget—if it were written that

you had to forget? You would forgive—if those things you believed of me were true? Take me at my worst. You care for me enough to forget?"

He folded her in his arms. He said very little and what he said was incoherent, but she was content.

With the coming of happiness life flowed so easily back into the ordinary channels. In a quarter of an hour's time Anna Kastellane was mixing cocktails at the sideboard. Haven had moved across towards the telephone.

"You don't mind if I ring up my people?" he begged. "I've four guests coming to dine at eight o'clock and I forgot all about it and it's past six now."

She laughed.

"That seems a little hard upon your friends."

"You can be a guest too, if you like," he suggested. "In fact, there'd be an element of humour in the situation if you came along."

"Why?" she asked. "Don't tell me that you are giving a dinner to some of my Bolshevist chiefs?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," he promised, as he took up the receiver. "Just let me speak to Parkins.... That you, Parkins?... Good. Look here, I've got four—perhaps five—people coming to dinner. Will you make it all right with François? Cocktails at eight. Dinner as soon as he can let us have it afterwards.... No, I'll leave it entirely to him. Anything he likes. You'll see to the wine, of course. I shall be back in plenty of time to dress. Tell François that one of the guests is a young lady, so he'd better have ices and that sort of thing."

He set down the receiver. She held out a wineglass to him.

"Come and hold this whilst I shake," she invited. "Then you can shake mine for me."

The cocktails were poured out. He passed his arm around her waist. There was only one toast they could possibly drink.

"And now?" she asked, as she set down her empty glass. "Perhaps you will tell me what you mean by saying that there would be an element of humour in my presence at your dinner party to-night and that you have a young lady coming? Let me warn you that I am slowly making up my mind to accept your invitation."

"So much the better," he rejoined with a grin. "Only, if you come, do bring the jewels along with you. I'm entertaining the disappointed young lady and her entourage."

"What disappointed young lady?" Anna demanded.

"The young lady who has been waiting for the jewels," he explained.

She paused in the act of mixing another cocktail and looked around at him with an expression of hopeless bewilderment.

"Am I crazy or are you?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know," he replied. "I'm a little crazy with joy, but I don't think it's affected my intelligence. I mean the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff."

She continued to look at him blankly.

"What about her?"

"She's my guest at dinner this evening. She's arrived from abroad with a Colonel and Madame Oliastransky to claim her jewels. You don't need to worry, dear, if you've parted with them or if it means danger for you to give them up. I can square the young lady. She seems a good sort and I think she'd just as soon have cash."

"Where did you say you found her?"

"I employed a sort of private detective to track her down directly I arrived," he explained. "I couldn't think of anything else to do, because you had the letter in the satchel, containing instructions as to how I should find her. It wasn't a long

job, either, and if I'd met her in the street, I would have gone up and told her all about it. Her likeness to her mother is the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen."

Anna Kastellane set down the shaker she was holding and retreated to her easy-chair. She covered her face with her hands and whether she was laughing or crying Haven had no idea.

"Please mix some more cocktails," was all she said and all she could be persuaded to say.

CHAPTER XXXI

Haven's dinner party was a great success. Colonel Oliastransky, in a dinner suit which fitted him perfectly, although he frankly admitted that he had bought it from a famous second-hand emporium that afternoon, looked the very prototype of the elderly and distinguished guardsman. In his slow, deliberate English he told several amusing stories, and if he drank an extra glass or two of champagne, he remained at least coherent and dignified. Madame, with the lines of anxiety smoothed out from her face, was perhaps a little too sentimental, a little too tearfully reminiscent of past glories, and she had a habit of patting Haven's hand and then Elisaveta's in a manner which the former found distinctly embarrassing. Her complete happiness, however, and her deep content with life and all her immediate surroundings, was so ingenuous that every one accepted her exuberance with toleration. Elisaveta herself and Felix Drayton were perhaps the two most silent members of the company; Elisaveta because she could scarcely keep her eyes from her host, and Felix Drayton because he was bored stiff with Madame Oliastransky and completely fascinated by Elisaveta. Haven, from the first, had been in wonderful spirits. Life had suddenly become a delightful and riotous adventure. All his gloom and depression of the last few weeks had vanished. He found it a positively humorous affair to have to part with three million pounds to Elisaveta because Anna Kastellane had only laughed at him when he had demanded the return of the jewels. He was happy for the first time for months. He wanted every one else to be happy. He took wine with the Colonel, patted Madame Oliastransky's wasted fingers, and only just saved himself from accepting the invitation of those exquisitely tantalising lips on his other side, which leaned so often towards him. Every one seemed busy making arrangements for the future, building fairy palaces, stuffing them full of dreams, and planning visionary voyages to enchanted lands. Haven, amongst whose faults conceit was certainly not included, realised somewhat late in the day that in all Elisaveta's sentimental imaginings he himself was the central figure. He tried to tease her into a different frame of mind.

"You wouldn't drag an old bachelor like me half over the world to smell drugged flowers and bask on golden sands," he mocked. "What about my work?"

"Why should you work?" she pleaded. "You are rich—I shall be rich too. One only works to make money."

"You'd soon get that out of your head, if you lived in the States," he laughed. "My dad's one of the best in the world, and there's nothing he wouldn't give me if I asked for it, but I know that he expects me to have learnt enough about banking to take his place when he's had enough of it. Look at him now. He's over sixty years old and he was in the chair at the biggest conference of bankers that's ever been held at Geneva."

"All the world knows about Norman Haven," the Colonel declared expansively. "He is a very remarkable man. It will be a great privilege and a pleasure to meet him."

"I know that I shall love him," Elisaveta whispered.

Haven proposed coffee and liqueurs a little abruptly and led the way into the library. Elisaveta and Madame, accompanied by the Colonel, wandered off into the drawing-room to see the Corots. Felix Drayton took his host by the arm.

"You're in great spirits to-night, Haven," he remarked. "You found the young lady?"

"I found her, all right," was the joyous acknowledgment.

"Did she hand over the Ostrekoff jewels?" Drayton enquired curiously.

"To tell you the truth," Haven confessed, "we scarcely spoke of them. I gathered that there was some slight difficulty which she seemed to find rather humorous. And then—well, we talked about something else and I forgot all about them."

"Forgot all about the Ostrekoff jewels!"

"Absolutely!" Haven acknowledged. "You see, old man," he went on, passing his arm through his companion's, "I don't know whether you've guessed it, but I'm crazy about her and it's all right."

"You mean that you've asked her to marry you?"

Haven assented, looking as little like a fool as was possible under the circumstances.

"You're not serious about the girl here, then?" Drayton went on.

"I never was serious about her," Haven rejoined indignantly. "She's terribly attractive and she seemed to start in by being affectionate and that sort of thing, but I've never cared a snap of the fingers for any girl except Anna."

"Well, I'm damned!" Felix Drayton murmured.

"Aren't you going to congratulate me?" Haven asked, as he lit a cigar.

"I'm not sure that I am able to," was the candid reply. "You see, Haven, you mustn't be angry with me, my profession has made me rather a pessimist, and, from the scanty information we have, this young woman is something of an adventuress, isn't she? She's distinctly mixed up with the worst gang of political desperadoes in Europe and you know for yourself that she's a thief."

"No trifles of that sort," Haven declared, "make the slightest difference. I've seen her kill a man in what you would probably consider the most bloodthirsty fashion. I've seen her use her influence with the Red Governor of Odessa, and I know she stole the Ostrekoff jewels and that I've got to pay for them. All the same, I'm going to marry her the first moment I can and I wish it were to-morrow."

"You appear to be a young man who knows his own mind, at any rate," Drayton observed. "Will you promise me to wait just one week till I get some more reports in?"

"I won't even promise to read your reports," was the indifferent reply. "In fact, if you gave them to me, I should probably tear them up."

"What about the Princess?"

"Well, I think I'm doing enough for her," Haven declared bluntly. "I'm giving her a fortune, and the money is the chief thing with her, anyway. If you ask me what I think about her present attitude, I believe she's a simple little thing and she's just carried off her feet with gratitude."

"I'm not altogether so sure about the simplicity," Drayton meditated, "but she certainly is the most beautiful creature I've ever seen in my life. How you can—"

Elisaveta and Madame reappeared, followed by a footman carrying the coffee tray. A moment or two later, the butler, who acted as major-domo of the household, entered the room and approached Haven.

"You are being enquired for on the telephone, sir," he announced. "I was unable to distinguish the person's name. You are connected in here, sir, unless you would prefer to speak from His Grace's study."

Haven accepted the instrument from the man's hand and glanced apologetically around.

"Wilfred Haven speaking. Who is it wants me?"

It was the cockney voice of Anna Kastellane's maid that answered him.

"I'm sorry, sir, if I've done wrong," she apologised, "but I don't know another soul in London to ring up and it's about Miss Kastellane, sir."

"What about her?" Haven asked quickly.

"She's been and disappeared, sir."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Just that, sir," the young woman confided. "She gave me permission to keep a little dog and I take it out for a walk every night from nine till half-past. When I went out this evening, Miss Kastellane was in the sitting room, reading the evening paper. When I came back, everything was as usual, the newspaper was on the floor near the chair where she had been sitting, but not a sign of her there or anywhere else. I've been worriting around for the last hour and then I remembered that you'd left your address in Grosvenor Square and telephone number on her table. I hope I did right, sir, to ring you up."

"I'll be round in five minutes," was the swift reply.

Haven replaced the receiver with steady fingers. Nevertheless, he had lost all his colour, there was a steely look in his eyes, his lips were set in a murderous curve.

"I'm terribly sorry, but you'll have to excuse me, all you people," he announced. "I must go out for a short time. Something unfortunate has happened."

Elisaveta clung to his arm.

"Must you go, Wilfred?" she whispered.

"I must indeed," he answered, moving towards the door.

"It isn't any trouble about—about the jewels or my money?" she asked tremulously.

"It hasn't anything to do with you at all," he assured her. "Your jewels, or your money, are perfectly safe. Drayton, can you come with me? It's important."

"Rather," was the prompt reply. "My car will be here. I told him to be early."

"Do excuse me, all of you," Haven begged, looking back from the threshold. "Order what you like. Parkins will send for a car to take you home. We'll all meet to-morrow."

Elisaveta released her grip of his arm reluctantly. He had never even noticed her tremulously upraised lips. He dashed down the hall without hat or coat, followed by Felix Drayton. They were in Harford Street in less than three minutes.

On the whole, the little maid was fairly coherent. She admitted noticing that a large limousine car had been drawn up within a few yards of the entrance to the flat. It had been empty, the chauffeur had been standing about in an attitude of inattention and he had winked at her. She had gone on to the corner, and there, perhaps, she had to admit herself at fault. She had induced the policeman on duty—who was her beau for a few minutes every evening—to walk some distance along Down Street with her. They had stayed talking very likely for quite ten minutes. She was allowed out for half an hour, and the dog apparently had many acquaintances in the neighbourhood. They then strolled slowly back and talked for a few minutes in front of the flat, after which she bade him good night. The limousine had disappeared when she reëntered the house. She was quite sure of that. She went into her little kitchenette to prepare some hot milk which her mistress always drank before she retired. About half-past ten she took it into the sitting room. The apartment was empty. She knocked at the door of her mistress' bedroom and eventually found that room also empty. She then searched the whole premises, inch by inch. Her mistress was nowhere to be found, and as the door of her kitchenette had been open the whole of the time since her return from her promenade, it must have been during her absence that her mistress had left. Felix Drayton was a skilful cross-questioner. His tone was too crisp to invite prolixity and too friendly to provoke alarm.

"Who is your mistress' most frequent visitor?" he enquired.

"She never had but one regular," the maid replied. "A very tall, elegant gentleman he was, with beautiful eyes and a grand smile. He must have been a Russian gentleman by his name."

"What was his name?"

"Mr. Boris Roussky."

"Did he come often?"

"Oh, we haven't been in Harford Street more than a month," the maid confided. "He's only called once or twice."

"You seem a very intelligent girl," Felix Drayton said smoothly. "What were your impressions of his visits?"

"I should have said," she replied, "that he was always asking for something from the mistress which she wouldn't give

him."

"Might have been in love with her, perhaps?"

The girl looked doubtful. It was obvious that her opinion of Mr. Boris Roussky's attractions was a high one.

"Shouldn't have thought so," she declared. "If there'd been anything of that between them, she wouldn't have spoken so sharply to him as she sometimes did."

"Did your mistress get any letters or notes yesterday evening? Did the telephone ring at all while you were there?"

"Not all day," the girl replied. "There wasn't any letters or notes, neither."

"And you are sure that none of your mistress' out-of-door clothes are missing?"

"Don't I know?" the girl scoffed. "There's one or two of her things she promised me in a few days, when she had time to go off shopping, and wasn't I keeping my eye on them?"

"Good," Felix Drayton commented. "Now you just carry on as usual. Sit up for some time, in case your mistress comes home and, if she does, ring up Mr. Haven at once and let him know. By the by, did you close the front door when you went out for your walk?"

"Can't be sure—sometimes I do and sometimes I don't," the girl answered. "What about the police, sir? That young man on this beat that I was speaking about—"

"Not yet," Felix Drayton interrupted. "If ever this gets to be a matter for the police," he reflected, as he and Haven left the house together, "I'm afraid it will be a bad day for Miss Anna Kastellane."

CHAPTER XXXII

Anna yawned and let the newspaper slip from her fingers. After all, the tragic happenings which the evening press so delighted in blazoning out were trite and stale compared to her own adventures during the last few months. The lift outside rattled into its place and she looked curiously towards the door. It was improbable that her little handmaiden should have returned so soon. Even realising that, however, she felt no uneasiness when she saw it slowly opened. It was closed more quickly. Boris Roussky stepped into the room. He held out his hand in deprecation of her angry gesture.

"Anna Kastellane," he begged, "I ask your pardon for this intrusion. Believe me, it was wholly involuntary. I rang the bell in vain. I thought you must be out and I just opened the door to see."

"My servant is away for a few minutes," Anna replied. "I am surprised that I did not hear the bell. I am alone and I do not choose to receive you as an evening visitor, Boris Roussky. What do you want at this hour of the night?"

He sighed. It was impossible for such a man to make any but the obvious reply to such a question.

"I want," he told her tenderly, "what I feel that you are not yet prepared to give me, Anna Kastellane, so we will not speak of that. You have not heard the news, perhaps?"

"I have heard no news."

"Slakoff is here—Ivan Slakoff."

"How on earth did he get into the country?" she asked.

"These things have been arranged before," he reminded her, with a shrug of the shoulders. "This time, I admit, he has risked his life and liberty, but he gained the interview he desired with a Cabinet Minister. He leaves at midnight to-morrow and he is at Aldwych Buildings for an hour only. The matter of the Ostrekoff jewels and your letter of resignation from our Secret Service are both under discussion. It was suggested that I should come around and see whether you were willing to confer with Slakoff and all of us before our decision is taken."

"You could have telephoned," she pointed out.

He brushed the suggestion away with a motion of mild contempt.

"For a woman with a brain, Anna Kastellane," he declared, "you sometimes surprise me. In what words would one have announced to you over the telephone that such a man was in this country and waiting to see you?"

She smiled.

"It might have been difficult," she admitted.

"He does not press you to come," Boris Roussky continued. "I myself am inclined to think that it might be almost hopeless. Your case is a bad one and although we have done our very best to gloss that over, you may know that there has been a very serious leakage of information from your department to Grotzowill in Warsaw, who is undoubtedly in sympathy with the Whites. Your letter of attempted resignation is in itself an offence. Slakoff has scant feeling for those who look backwards."

"If you do not think it is worth while my going, then," she asked calmly, "why do you trouble to fetch me?"

He hesitated.

"We are all human," he acknowledged. "You have never scrupled to hurt me, Anna Kastellane. I saw evil coming to you and the worst side of me whispered 'Why interfere?' However, I did. I suggested an interview. Slakoff does not press it. I do not press it. As a matter of fact, in ten minutes it will be too late. My car is downstairs. If you care to drive to Aldwych Buildings and talk with Slakoff, it might make a difference—otherwise I am afraid that not even the Ostrekoff jewels will buy your life."

She looked at him intently.

"Why should my life be in question?"

"Because Slakoff does not recognise neutrality," he explained. "If you abandon an enterprise, he counts you as an enemy, as surely as if those leakages of information of which I spoke had been traced to you and you were discovered to be a traitress to the cause. If you are an enemy, you sign your own death warrant."

Anna Kastellane sat back in her chair, twining and untwining her fingers. She knew very well that twenty-four hours ago she would have laughed this man out of the place, she would have felt in her blood all that gay contempt of death which a love of adventure had bred in her. To-night there was a difference. She wanted to live. Life meant something new to her. Risks were no longer so well worth taking.

"So Slakoff is against me," she murmured.

"We all are, more or less," was the firm but regretful reply. "You have not treated us well, Anna Kastellane. You did good work when the Revolution started. You have done excellent work once or twice since. Lately, however, you have wandered. You have spent periods of time immersed in your own affairs. We have evidence that your outlook itself has changed. Slakoff is gravely suspicious that you never intended to hand over the jewels to the Committee. He thinks that you intended to break away. He believes that is your present intention. He will not have it."

"Then what is the use of my coming with you?" she insisted.

"I do not want to seem an alarmist," Boris Roussky continued earnestly. "We are in a country where deeds of violence are best avoided. They create prejudice against us and they are, in fact, our last resource. Slakoff himself realises that. We are in a perilous position here and were any suspicion of illegal actions cast upon us, we might be given our papers. You see how frank I am with you. Therefore Slakoff wants to make one more attempt to arrive at an understanding with you face to face. You need have no fear. I don't suppose one of us has touched a firearm since he landed in this country. The old methods do not do here—we know that. This is simply a matter of a few plain words between the head of the cause which you are offending and yourself. I have a closed car and you can be back in half an hour. You need not even trouble to put on outdoor clothes."

"Very well," she assented suddenly. "I will come with you."

She smoothed her hair carelessly before the glass, followed him out of the room and into the car. Just at that moment the policeman was discovering in the shadows of Down Street the exact colour of her handmaiden's eyes.

The premises of the Anglo-Russian Trading Company, as that organisation boldly called itself, were apparently making little effort to conceal their nocturnal activities, although no gleam of light was visible except in the hall. The blinds of a long row of windows were closely drawn and the front door, with a burly commissionaire on guard, stood open. The latter saluted Roussky and permitted his entrance and the entrance of his companion without question. They mounted in the lift to the fifth floor and Roussky led the way to an apartment at the end of the corridor. Here another commissionaire was guarding the door, but he too allowed the arrivals to pass in without question. They found themselves in a large office filled with a crowd of about twenty people, mostly young women typists. Every one seemed to be working at great pressure and most of them wore green shades to protect their eyes from the electric light. Boris Roussky paused to whisper for a moment in the ear of a grey-bearded man who sat at a desk by himself. He nodded, rose at once and softly opened an inner door behind his desk. Almost immediately he reappeared. Roussky and his companion were ushered into the apartment which a brass plate engraved in three languages announced as being the

DIRECTORS' ROOM

Six men were in conference—four seated at a long table, and one, apparently a secretary, standing by the side of Ivan Slakoff, who was seated in an armchair and was evidently presiding over the meeting. The latter rose, with the aid of a stick, and bowed to Anna Kastellane. He uttered no word of greeting nor did his lips part at that moment in any sort of smile. She took her place in the chair pointed out to her, which was next to Slakoff himself, and, for the first time in her life, though she had often been summoned to conferences which might easily have meant disaster, when she had felt the

need of measuring every word she spoke and knew that she was all the time in peril of her life, she was conscious of an unusual sensation which she recognised as fear. There was something portentous in this silent and peaceful gathering which had been lacking in the fiercer atmosphere of those rooms guarded by soldiers with drawn bayonets, whilst the rifles of the executioners were spitting in the street outside. The curved middle window of the room, half open, a heavy screen before it blocking all outgoing light, faced city-wards. The traffic in the streets had long since diminished to an almost negligible quantity. There was the occasional hooting of taxicabs, but the two most human sounds in the world—the roar of a ceaseless stream of vehicles and the continual falling of footsteps on the pavements—had died away. Below the window, the roofs of the buildings spread out to where the barely visible dome of St. Paul's reared itself in the far distance, like a shrouded monument rising out of a misty sea. Slakoff's quiet voice called her suddenly back from her involuntary mind-wandering.

"I am glad that you have come to see us, Anna Kastellane," he said. "A few minutes' talk was necessary."

She listened to his voice and she looked into his face with a new confusion of ideas. It was the face of a visionary with sad, rather tired grey eyes, sunken cheeks, a mouth that was firm and severe but not necessarily cruel. His voice seemed to her one of the softest and most kindly she had ever heard.

"They tell me, Anna Kastellane," he went on, "that after having served those who have worked for their country's freedom since your college days, and stood with them through some of the cataclysms of the earlier Revolution, you wish now to desert them; also that you have stolen, or shall I say acquired, a quantity of valuable jewels which, according to the laws of the new Russia, are the property of the State, and that you refuse to give them up. Are these things true?"

"They are true," she acknowledged, "except that I deny the theft."

He looked at her thoughtfully for several moments. Meeting his eyes, it seemed to Anna Kastellane that she saw something behind their kindness which caused her to shiver slightly when he spoke again.

"Why do you wish to desert the cause which you have adopted, Anna Kastellane?" he asked.

She steeled herself for brave words.

"Because of the hideous atrocities which have been committed in the name of freedom," she replied. "Because of this wholesale killing of innocent and guilty alike, if they happen to be monarchists or suspects. Because of the cruel and unrestrained way in which the men who have been placed in authority have behaved towards their prisoners. Because of the foul, ugly licence which has broken out like a disease on every side. I have come even to doubt the ultimate aims of those who have become the rulers of the people."

Slakoff leaned back in his chair. His finger tips were pressed together, his eyes commanded her attention.

"Yours, alas, is the purely feminine mind, Comrade Anna," he pronounced. "You cannot realise the eternal truth that to pass forward to a new era, when one is engulfed in a disastrous epoch, there must be ugliness and sin, cataclysms and the letting loose of a whole flood of evil passions. To build a great cathedral, the whole neighbourhood around is made foul and ugly with broken roads, with masses of concrete and mortar, with the hideous tangle of scaffolding poles. Yet the time comes when the scaffolding poles disappear, when the cleansers have completed their tasks, nature has done her part, and the cathedral is built, a standing monument of beauty. Supposing the builders had stayed their hands because of the sordid ways they had been forced to tread, then there would have been no cathedral and a great inspiration would have been lost to the world. There are so many illustrations, Anna Kastellane, that I shall leave you to think them out for yourself, but you, in your attitude to-day, represent so much that is precious to the coming Russia that I must talk to you. Remember that the fairest summer morning is always the one after the thunderstorm of the night, when trees have been ripped out of their beautiful homes and killed, flowers have been destroyed in great and ruthless masses, fruit trees have been stripped of their offerings. Yet in the morning, the black, jagged clouds have gone, the sun rises in the blue heavens and the air is sweeter for what has occurred. That is what we pray for, even now, Comrade Anna.... France is a fine and prosperous country. The massacres of her Revolution, the destroying of her weeds, was as ruthless as anything that has happened amongst us. Remember, Anna, that the Russian mind is the hardest in the world to convert, the wills of the people are stubborn, their temperament a strange medley of idealism and grossness. They had become so accustomed to the existence of the aristocrats that their vicious lives seemed sacred. In your scholarly days you saw the beauty of what might come and what will come—a free people, moving on shoulder to shoulder, to a millennium of spiritual and material happiness; a people with nothing to fear; a people whose only judge and whose only God is their conscience.

You made your own beautiful dreams, Anna, without a doubt. You have the broad forehead of intelligence. I appeal to that quality now. Can you tell me that you think even the beginning of your country's freedom could ever have been accomplished by missionary work, or with that terrible barrier of a voluptuous, soul-sapping mob of people exhausting and stultifying the land of their birth, still in existence?"

Slakoff paused for a minute. Leaning back in his chair, his hands now resting upon its arms, his eyes seemed to be seeking earnestly, almost pleadingly, for her sympathy.

"You see, Comrade Anna," he went on, "it is this first generation of ignoramuses whom we must labour to set free, but it is to you—the young intelligentsia of Russia—to whom we must appeal for sympathy, or, after all, we may make a most colossal failure of what I still claim has been so finely begun. It is not our aim to make of Russia a nation of sensual robots. We want to make it the freest and the greatest country for the most enlightened race of human beings. Therefore, Anna Kastellane, we do not wish to lose the sympathy of such women as you."

"You could never have lost it," she found herself saying, "if the others had moved towards their ends with your spirit."

He shook his head sadly.

"My dear Anna," he protested, "that was not possible. Think for a moment of my simile of the cathedral. Let me glorify myself and claim to be the architect, and those others, the builders and dredgers, the diggers and the hod-men. I could not have done my part without them. The cathedral would never have become a thing of beauty without their aid."

"You may be right," she admitted. "Perhaps you are. But, I am only a human being. You are living too much in the spirit for me. I have lost my home, I have lost my relatives, I have lost dear friends throughout these days of horror. I can no longer soar to your heights. I am sick with the blood-guiltiness and the cruelty. I have come to believe that nothing good can ever result from anything so foully begun. I want to turn my back upon it all and know a few years of happiness."

The secretary, a deformed young man with an intelligent, but almost terrifying face, and the hot eyes of an enthusiast, leaned over his master and spoke a few rapid sentences. Slakoff listened to him unmoved. Afterwards he turned back to Anna.

"Remember this, Comrade Anna," he said impressively, "even the architect's fingers are sometimes stained by the building materials. You must not look upon me as one apart from the evil deeds that have been done in these days, that good may come of them. I, too, have signed death warrants and have seen them executed. I, too, have refused to reprieve the guilty and have had those swept out of this life who have stood in the way of progress. On this sheet of paper, for instance, which has just been pressed into my hand, are the names of four people whose deaths are demanded. One of them is yours."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Anna gave a little start at Slakoff's quietly spoken announcement. Curiously enough, instead of looking at him, she glanced immediately away at the hunchback by his side. She saw in his eyes exactly what she had expected—the lust for blood—which had first revolted her. He whispered again in his master's ear. The latter motioned him gently but firmly to be silent.

"I am to die if you are able to kill me," she demanded, "because I hesitate about giving up the Ostrekoff jewels?"

"By no means," Slakoff assured her. "You are down on this list, the fatal list I suppose I should call it, for other reasons."

"May I at least know what they are?" she begged.

He looked at her sorrowfully.

"You are here," he confided, "because—very likely in your first instinctive revulsion against the terrible Juggernaut which your delicate fingers, together with the hard hands of millions of others, had started on its progress—you repented of your activities and you went to the other extreme. You became a traitress to the cause which you had embraced. You went to the enemy's camp, not openly, but secretly."

Real fear now for the first time seized upon Anna. She suddenly seemed to realise the ruthlessness which lay behind this simple reception of her. No wonder they had not troubled to plan an abduction or to risk leaving her in her flat with a dagger through her heart. As a traitress sentenced to death her end was certain. There was another branch which dealt with such affairs.

"Since when have you made that discovery?" she asked.

The secretary replied. He licked his dry lips and spoke in a hard clear tone.

"Anna Kastellane," he announced, "visited several times, during the course of the present year, a house in the Boulevard Nevsky, frequented by various members of our Committee. She kept herself aloof, but sought to make the acquaintance of our friends. She appears to have gathered news from Comrade Thoroff, since executed, concerning suspected people—four of whom were warned by her and two of whom escaped. Amongst others, she caused to be conveyed to the Prince and Princess Ostrekoff, dangerous enemies of the people, an intimation of the exact day on which their arrest was planned and suggestions as to a probable means of escape. Before then she was in communication with members of the staff of the White Army, who are in arms against the Republic, and she supplied them at times with news as to the movements of our troops and our plans concerning Warsaw. She visited General Grotzowill—"

Slakoff waved his hand a little wearily.

"That will do, Michael," he interrupted. "You have proof—ample proof?"

"Ample proof of these and other misdeeds," the young man replied greedily.

"That is sufficient, then," Slakoff observed.

"Your signature attached to the paper," the young man reminded his chief, "will end the matter."

Slakoff took the paper into his hand.

"Yes," he agreed calmly, "it will end the matter. Well, Anna Kastellane, even the great Robespierre permitted his victims sometimes to speak in their own defence. You have something to say to us, perhaps?"

The blind was flapping against the screen and she gazed thoughtfully out of the briefly disclosed window space. It all looked so homely and placid. The night mists had rolled away and the weatherbeaten façade of St. Paul's was clearly visible now, with its exquisite curves and its grey nebulous background. It would have simplified matters, so far as she was concerned, if after all the plane had crashed into the North Sea. Then she thought of her preserver and she hated herself for that momentary regret.

"I have only one thing to say," she announced at last—"certainly nothing to plead. As a student, perhaps my dreams, and

those of the others, were a little too Utopian, but all the same I was disgusted to the very soul with that foul bogey of a Revolution which was born of our efforts and our visions. I could see no hope for its future, no merit but only evil in keeping the thing alive. For that reason, it is true that I tried to undo some of the harm I had done."

"You admit, then," Slakoff asked, "that the sentence against you is a just one?"

"Yes, it is just," she acknowledged. "Traitors, honest or otherwise, have always known their fate beforehand."

A man from lower down the table rose and approached Slakoff. He was a neatly dressed man, wearing a well-tailored waistcoat cut to hide, as far as possible, his disfiguring paunch. He whispered impressively in his Chief's ear, the latter's face remaining all the time like a mask. When he had finished, Slakoff waved him away with a slightly impatient movement.

"There is this matter of the Ostrekoff jewels, Anna Kastellane," he remarked. "My friend and Comrade Kohnstam there, who has much to do with finance, has justly reminded me of it. The Ostrekoff jewels, Anna Kastellane—are you disposed to hand these over to the Government of Russia?"

She made no reply for several moments.

"It does not seem," she reflected at last, "that they are going to be of much use to me."

"For whom were they intended when this rash young man took charge of them?" Slakoff enquired.

"For Elisaveta Ostrekoff, the daughter of the Prince and Princess," she confided.

Slakoff frowned. It was a very slight gesture, but his whole expression seemed transfigured.

"A fitting but an unworthy end," he pronounced bitterly. "We will try our best, Anna Kastellane—especially with you, an educated woman—not to revert to the language and phrases of which we are all heartily weary. Logically, however, you and I know well that these jewels represent allegorically, if not actually, the sweat of the serfs of Russia. They exist by reason of the blood of Russia's children. They have been dragged out of the soil to adorn the necks and throats of gay court ladies and courtesans by the starving peasant, living on his crust of black bread and drinks of water. They represent one of the foul inequalities of life which the altruism of the Revolution has planned to extinguish for ever. They are legally confiscate to the State. I think that you yourself, Anna Kastellane, must recognise the justice of that edict. I think that you would do well to obey the law of your country in this instance."

The man with the protuberant stomach spoke. He glanced first at Slakoff, as though for permission, and then went on rapidly and with many gesticulations.

"It may be," he pointed out, "that our ex-comrade Anna Kastellane hesitates because she has seen the fate of many of those donations in the early days of what I still boldly pronounce to be our Glorious Revolution. There were months, I admit, of madness. Peasants and soldiers and shopkeepers grabbed anything they could find, went off to the country and buried it and came back greedy for more. Those things do not happen any longer. We have a rudely constituted, but a perfectly efficient State Bank to deal with such matters as these jewels. They will be converted into cash and they will pass into one of five accounts. That is to say, the money will be devoted towards the erection of schools in country places, the endowment of universities, the state-aided purchase of agricultural machinery, the payment of civil servants of the State or the rebuilding of houses as authorised by the Soviet Building Council. That is where the money derived from the sale of the Ostrekoff jewels will go, if it passes into the hands of the Russian Government."

Their eyes were all fixed upon her. At the moment when it seemed that she was about to speak Slakoff intervened.

"Before your decision is given, Anna Kastellane," he announced, "there is one thing more to be done. It is this."

He dipped a quill pen in the heavy inkstand which stood before him, and, smoothing out the paper which had been pressed into his hand, he drove it deliberately, scratching and spluttering, through her name. Beneath he wrote—

"Anna Kastellane is pardoned this day.
Signed: SLAKOFF."

He held it out to her. She glanced at it and looked back at him without understanding. In the background the hunchbacked

secretary was nervously snapping his fingers, his features convulsed with fury.

"The State does not bargain with individuals," Slakoff pronounced. "It is not by such means that her councils rise to dignity and greatness. We shall not offer you a free pardon for giving up what we claim is not yours to keep. That pardon is already given. We excuse your treachery, Anna Kastellane, on account of services already rendered to the State. We claim, however, that the Ostrekoff jewels belong to us, and we request that you make delivery of them. In this matter you must be guided by your own sense of justice."

There was a portentous silence. Slakoff, as usual, dominated the gathering, but they were by no means at one with him. They were reluctant to accept his ruling. They wanted the jewels. To Anna, looking into the faces of that little company of men, the names of most of whom were infamous in the records of the day, it still seemed that she had stepped back for a brief while into the morning land of her fresh enthusiasms, when, as a student, she had thrown herself heart and soul into the cause of the people. She was bewildered. The one man whose eyes she dared not meet were Slakoff's.

"Until to-morrow," she said at last, slowly, "I could not produce the jewels before then to save my life. Let me have until that time for consideration. At any hour or place you may appoint after midday to-morrow, I will present myself with or without the jewels."

A murmur of criticism rose from the men seated round the table. Slakoff disregarded it. He looked towards Anna.

"Boris Roussky will fetch you at an appointed hour," he directed, "and may your choice be the right one."

"You will wait for me, then, Anna Kastellane," Boris Roussky enjoined.

Her eyes took small count of him. She was looking across at Slakoff and there was a beautiful smile upon her lips.

"I think that I shall do your bidding, Ivan Slakoff," she decided. "But, whether I do or not, you are a great man, and I only pray for Russia's sake that our people may keep you where you are."

This time there was a chorus of assent, for they knew that that prayer was needed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Anna shook her head when Boris Roussky would have ushered her into his car outside the great building in Aldwych.

"There is no need for me to inflict myself upon you any longer," she said. "It is barely eleven o'clock and there are plenty of taxis on the stand there."

"I brought you here," he replied, "and I must beg of you to allow me the privilege of taking you back. It is my duty as Slakoff's ambassador. It happens also to be my pleasure."

"Well, mine," she rejoined wearily, "would be to step into that taxicab and say good-bye to all of you for the present. I want to think. I am too tired to argue. However, I suppose you must take me back if you insist."

He handed her in and they drove off. They were almost at once immersed in a theatre block. Boris Roussky removed his hat and passed his hand thoughtfully over his forehead. Of a certain type he was really extraordinarily good-looking.

"Anna Kastellane," he pleaded, "it is absolutely necessary that I talk with you and what I have to say and what you must say in reply will take at least half an hour. Will you ask me into your flat when we get there?"

"I certainly will not," she refused. "Furthermore, I am tired to death and I want to go to bed. Remember that I have to arrive at a very important decision before morning."

"Will you come to my rooms for twenty minutes?" he begged.

"That," she assured him, "would be still more impossible. I cannot conceive what you could have to say to me. Everything from your point of view has been wonderfully expounded to-night by Ivan Slakoff. You would do your cause more good by permitting my impressions of what he said and how he said it to remain unimpaired."

"You do not know what my cause is," he rejoined. "I am not sure that it is Slakoff's cause. I sympathise deeply with many things you said this evening. I cannot see clearly myself where we are drifting. You have shown that you have the brain of a man; I should like to talk to you as a man."

"I wonder whether I can believe you?" she asked, a little insolently.

"You need have no fear at all, I assure you," he promised. "The most I shall do is to make a business proposition to you. I am parched with thirst, and Slakoff will allow no wine at any of our meetings, nor any smoking. I shall tell my chauffeur to stop at Ciro's Club—we can sit up in the balcony there out of sight of everybody—and soon after midnight you can be back in Harford Street."

"As you wish," she assented reluctantly.

He gave the order to his chauffeur. A few minutes later they were being ushered to an out-of-the-way table at the back of the balcony of Ciro's Restaurant. Anna was human enough to thoroughly enjoy her first glass of dry, cold champagne. She watched its replenishment and lit a cigarette.

"Now you can go on," she invited.

He leaned across the table. His long nervous face was set in tense lines, his dark eyes were soft, his tone was convincing. He was slimly built, but manly enough in carriage. Women in all walks of life had found him attractive.

"Anna Kastellane," he began, "you know little of me. To these men I am Boris Roussky, the lawyer. I have passed fine examinations. I have had a great reputation in the Law Courts; I am known as Boris Roussky the pleader. Just an ordinary lawyer, you think, perhaps. I am not that. One does not speak of one's birth, however, nowadays. I am ambitious. I am ambitious of Russia and for myself. I plunged heart and soul into this Revolution. I have had enough of it. The ship has got into the wrong hands. We are drifting towards horrible disaster and my heart beat with sympathy at your words to-night."

"Yet very likely Slakoff knew what he was talking about," she meditated. "You can only create by pulling down. It seems terrible, but he may be right. One may have to plough one's way through these awful things to reach the desired end."

"But the end of these men is not the desired end," Boris Roussky argued eagerly. "Look at their programme. They would demolish everything. They would trample out religion. I am not a religious man, but with it would go all hope of ever becoming an artistic nation. They are setting their heel on beauty wherever they find it, they are driving on towards a drear mediocrity, they are trying to extinguish talent, to destroy individual mentality, to barbarise women. Anna Kastellane, it is time that we who have brains realise this."

He spoke like a man in earnest. Notwithstanding her prejudices, she was interested.

"What can we do about it?" she asked. "It is too early to try and stem the torrent: one can only wait and see what is to happen."

"I am an individualist," he cried. "The measure of my country's greatness to me is the measure of greatness to which it can attain during my lifetime. If she goes on as she is going now, fifty years will see her still in the slough. Listen to me, Anna Kastellane. There are some of them on the Council who think well of me. I have been offered the post here of English representative, Minister or Ambassador, or whatever it may be. I will guarantee that I attain a larger measure of recognition from the British Government than any other man would. Very well—ask yourself this—what finer centre could there be in the world than London from which to secretly set out to remodel our country's future? We are of finer mould than these others. We have no real place in the present holocaust."

Anna sipped her wine and regarded her companion thoughtfully.

"You are being much more interesting than I expected you to be," she confessed, "but I think you are running great risks in talking like this in a public place. Slakoff is a noble character and I feel that if he has his way, this vile Secret Service, from which every one suffers so much, will become purified. The last official word I had was that forty of our friends have arrived here with forged passports. If there is one of them to-night who suspects your leanings, you are probably being watched, as I have been ever since I went to Harford Street."

He moved uneasily in his place.

"I would rather have spoken in your rooms or mine," he muttered, "but you were immovable."

"Let us change tables," she suggested, rising to her feet. "There is an empty one farther down."

The move was made and they reëstablished themselves.

"You had a reason for that?" he asked anxiously.

"There was a little man behind us who might have been listening," she confided. "Anyhow, we are completely out of earshot now. Go on, finish what you have to say. The music and clatter downstairs will probably drown your voice."

"I can propose nothing definitely," he continued, "but this is what I suggest. I go to Slakoff, tell him that I accept the position of Russian Minister, or whatever this coming Soviet Government like to call me, to Great Britain. I take a large house in the middle of the fashionable London and we entertain—as we should have every right to do."

"Who is we?" Anna asked, suddenly alert again.

"You and I," he replied, without hesitation. "I propose that you marry me and bring as your dowry the Ostrekoff jewels. You create a salon and in that salon we plot for the restoration of the monarchy to Russia. It can easily be done, although it would take too long now to explain to you the various channels through which we must work. Already I have hinted at this to a certain personage whom I was instrumental in your meeting the other day."

"You mean at that luncheon—the Grand Duke?" she exclaimed.

"Naturally. You think I am raving, I dare say, but I know how sane I am. I could laugh at the tons of Bolshevist propaganda which lie in our cellars for distribution in this country. As soon as I am alone in power here, it will go into the furnace."

"Do tell me," she begged, "in what country could you possibly make any definite movement in this matter?"

"In our own," he answered confidently. "Listen a little longer. What about Royalist propaganda in Petrograd and

Moscow? What about holding out to the Russian public the return of the old gay life—money everywhere, the cafés and theatres all open in the old style, American capital pouring into the country, a sane Parliament with a limited monarchy like this. England knows how to govern, Anna Kastellane. The only trouble is that she had no politicians with brains other than the brains of rabbits to do it for her."

"I very seldom," Anna declared, leaning back in her chair, "have been more interested in my life."

His face flamed with joy. She drew her hand away from the long, nervous fingers stretched out towards hers.

"I knew!" he murmured triumphantly. "I knew!"

She drank a little water and then suffered even her third glass of champagne to be poured out.

"Up to a certain point, you are a very clever man, Boris Roussky," she said. "But, understand me, please, and attempt no arguments. I shall speak in very plain words. First of all, your scheme would fail, because as a man you are exceedingly distasteful to me and I am already engaged to be married—very shortly I hope—to some one for whom I care more than I thought I could ever care for any one on earth."

Boris Roussky became very pale and there were drops of moisture on his forehead.

"The man from whom you stole the Ostrekoff jewels," he gasped.

"Never mind. If I did, he will forgive me. Now listen whilst I proceed. I would take no part in such a scheme as you suggest because at the present moment, and to do it in the manner which you describe, would be treachery to Slakoff and those who may come after him. When a real, honest campaign for the overthrow of the Soviet power is started, I may have enthusiasm enough to join it or I may not. At present, you are ahead of your time. I am terribly and overpoweringly a woman. I am in love and the years of my life that are to come, that I see ahead of me now, shall be given to love and to being loved. That is just my answer to you, Boris Roussky. You have interested me more than ever I thought you could. I find something splendid in your scheme, notwithstanding its meanness. At the same time, I will have none of you. I have not made up my mind yet, but I rather fancy that the Ostrekoff jewels will go to the Government we both hate."

"Because of the silver-tongued Slakoff," he muttered.

She lit another cigarette.

"Slakoff is a great man," she pronounced. "You and I both know that. He could have bargained with me for the Ostrekoff jewels with my life on one side of the scale, and he was too proud to do it. Whatever happens," she added, rising to her feet, "I do not regret our conversation. I looked upon you as a very ordinary sort of person. I find that you have the makings of a magnificent schemer. You have a quality," she went on, as they passed down the stairs, "for which I never gave you credit. Perhaps in your profession it is a weakness—you are courageous to the point of rashness."

"Do you mean that I talk?" he broke in.

"I only surmise. I make no statement—except that I have a feeling that to-night we were followed and spied upon. From the first, I suspected that little man who was seated at the table near us and who looked as though he had been there all the evening. He had not. I saw him slip up the stairs ahead of us."

Boris Roussky was disturbed and anxious. He had only just presence of mind enough to lift her hand to his lips.

"I have told the man to fetch you a taxicab," he said. "Very likely we shall meet to-morrow, wherever the meeting place is to be."

But when the meeting which he had in his mind should have taken place, Boris Roussky was not present. He was lying on his back in the Casualty Ward of a great London hospital, and even at the inquest which was held in due course a few days later, there was no evidence produced as to how he came by the revolver bullet through the heart which had ended his life.

CHAPTER XXXV

The Ostrekoff jewels! There they lay, in wild profusion, spread out upon the library table of Wilfred Haven's house in Grosvenor Square, displayed to the human eye for the first time since that young man had buckled the chamois belt around his body and locked the satchel attached to his wrist. They had fallen like a flowing cascade on to the table—jewels of all shapes and sizes and colours, from the flaming, wine-hued ruby or the lizard-green emerald to the flawless, scintillating white fire of a diamond. Some, the emeralds especially, had been torn in haste from ancient settings, and fragments of the gold of a massive Russian tiara, with the jewels still embedded in them, were mingled with the rest. In the background—a grim suggestion of the dangers with which their very existence was linked—stood two of Felix Drayton's men, alert and watchful. Farther away still, Felix Drayton himself watched and wondered, although he alone had any idea of what might take place.

There was not a person in the room who could look down upon that table's glittering burden unmoved. The silent drama of the display seemed to have fired even the blood of old Colonel Oliastransky, who stood gazing at the jewels with upraised hands, muttering to himself. Elisaveta was clinging feverishly to Haven's arm, her glorious eyes filled with a sort of lambent fire. The joy of the jewels seemed to have intoxicated her. It was with difficulty that her companion kept her from falling upon them bodily.

"Tell me again," she begged. "What happened? How did it come about that they were returned to you?"

"Ask Mr. Drayton," Haven replied. "He knows as much about it as I do."

"And that is not very much," Felix Drayton put in. "They were brought to my house at eleven o'clock this morning in an iron coffer. The manager of my own bank in South Audley Street was with them and two of his clerks. I signed the receipt, sent for some of my men, and brought them around here."

"But I want to know who stole them," Elisaveta demanded passionately. "How do we know that they are all here? There may be some missing."

"There are," an unexpected voice from the threshold declared. "Two emeralds. I sold them because—well, I had to. One must live."

All eyes were turned towards the door which had been silently opened a moment before by the butler. Anna Kastellane stood there, with Slakoff leaning upon her arm.

"I told your man not to announce us, Wilfred," she continued. "I thought that our joint names might upset this little company."

Madame Oliastransky, who had been standing at the end of the table, collapsed into an easy-chair, dumb, but with a strange questioning expression in her eyes. Her husband adjusted his horn-rimmed monocle with trembling fingers and stared uncomprehendingly at the new arrivals. Haven would have hurried to Anna's side, but she held up her hand to restrain him.

"I have repented of my indiscretion, you see," she continued, pointing to the table. "I restore to you your jewels, Wilfred. Your trust finishes here and now. It has brought you all the adventure you want, I should think, for the rest of your life."

Elisaveta was laughing almost hysterically. The newcomers meant nothing to her, except that she realised this must be the girl who had shared Haven's perilous journey and of whom from the first she had been vaguely jealous.

"So this was the mysterious thief!" she cried. "Well, that is all over now. You will not have to part with your money, after all, Wilfred. Let us put them back in the iron box. Afterwards, will you come to the bank with Colonel Oliastransky and me and Mr. Drayton? Your trust will be over then. We must sell a great many of them because we have not any money, but I shall have some made up. We will choose together."

She leaned towards the table, but Anna, who had been busy establishing Slakoff in a chair, turned around.

"Not quite so fast, please," she begged. "It is true, Wilfred," she added, turning to him, "that your trust is over. You have brought these jewels, through many dangers, to Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff from her father and mother. That is so, is it not?"

"It certainly is," Haven assented. "Trust or no trust, I'm mighty glad to get rid of them. Pack them up, Elisaveta, and take them round to the bank."

Anna Kastellane laughed softly. She laid her hand affectionately upon his shoulder.

"A bank, I think, would be a very good place," she said, "but first of all, you must let me thank you. I know better than any one what you have been through in order to keep your trust, and I was the only one who made you think for a moment that you had betrayed it. I am sorry about that. It was an ill-considered action, but—"

"What are you talking about?" Elisaveta interrupted, with a sudden bewildered fear dawning in her eyes.

"I am trying to thank Mr. Haven," Anna Kastellane replied, "for having brought me the jewels from my father and mother. *I* am the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff. Who are you?"

There was an astonished and spellbound silence, broken only by the sound of Madame Oliastransky's sobs in the background. No one in the room was more completely astonished than Haven.

"But you are Anna Kastellane!" he gasped.

She shook her head.

"Anna Kastellane has been the name which I have borne through the burden of many adventures," she declared. "It was as Anna Kastellane that I left home when I was seventeen years old and became a student at the Moscow University. It was as Anna Kastellane that I became a Socialist. It was as Anna Kastellane that I reverted to sane principles, when I saw how foul a thing the long-wished-for Revolution had become and, pretending to carry on my work for the revolutionaries, became a spy for the monarchists. I saved many lives in those last few months. I should have saved the lives of my own mother and father if they would have listened to me. It is a very easy matter to prove that I am the Princess Elisaveta Ostrekoff. If you want to know your history," she added, turning not unkindly to the girl by her side, "ask Colonel and Madame Oliastransky."

Colonel Oliastransky had been born a gentleman and served his life as a soldier. His withered hands were shaking; his eyes, in which had always lurked the shadow of some fear, were closed now in a sort of convulsive horror. He spoke as though with a sob in his throat.

"The child is your sister," he muttered. "She has a right to something."

"The child, as you call her, has had a great deal," Anna reminded him gravely. "As Elisaveta is her sixth name and my first—a confusing custom, that of giving the same name to Russian children of the same family—I shall now call her Vera, which is her first name, and, as it is no longer necessary for me to conceal my identity, it is by the name of Elisaveta Ostrekoff that I desire to be known. Vera, you had a very large sum of money settled upon you, some of which I am afraid your guardians have misapplied. They have lived too near the gambling centres of the world."

The Colonel sank into a chair.

"We had a hundred thousand pounds," he confessed. "Some of that we have spent on Vera, the rest we stole—we must call it that."

"We had to live," Madame Oliastransky moaned. "One hundred thousand pounds does not last for ever. It was not we who came to beg. The agent of this Mr. Felix Drayton found us out. There was a great fortune, he said, arrived from Petrograd for Elisaveta Ostrekoff. Vera's name was also Elisaveta—why should not the fortune have been for her?"

"You need have no fear," Elisaveta assured them calmly. "I will tell you now, if you like, what the fate of this great fortune is to be."

They were all looking at the table, at the heterogeneous mass of jewels, strange flashing pieces of iridescence that meant so much.

"I have received an offer of three and a half millions for the jewels," Elisaveta continued, "from a syndicate which has been formed in Hatton Gardens. The half a million I shall divide between Vera here and myself, and the remainder goes

into the hands of my friend, Ivan Slakoff, to be devoted by him to the cause of Russian progress."

There was a universal murmur of amazement.

"The Bolshevists," Colonel Oliastransky muttered.

Slakoff leaned forward in his chair and spoke. There was something about his quiet voice, wherever he was and in whatever assembly of people, which always inspired a respectful silence.

"If the extremists triumph," he said, "Elisaveta Ostrekoff will have thrown her money into the sewers. We believe, though, that there are enough of us real patriots to save our country. We are banded together to try. We have faith and we have hope. If we fail, the Ostrekoff jewels will go back to where they came from."

"Anna, I mean Elisaveta, does not need the money, anyway," Wilfred Haven declared. "She will have plenty, if—" he added, with a little grimace—"I can ever screw up sufficient courage to marry a Princess."

"I shall marry you, my dear," she answered, thrusting her arm through his. "You need not worry about that."

Felix Drayton was holding his forehead.

"A word or two of explanations," he begged.

"I'm right with you there," Haven echoed. "Why was Elisaveta the first, banished, for instance?"

Madame Oliastransky had somewhat recovered. This, after all, was very far from being a disaster. She addressed herself to the two men.

"My husband would wish to tell you everything, but he cannot," she said. "He is no longer young and this shock has been too much for him. I will make things clear. I was *dame de compagnie* and I kept in order the houses of the Princess Ostrekoff. It was before the Russo-Japanese War, when the Prince was away for over two years that the disaster happened. My mistress fell in love for the first time in her life. You look shocked, but why? The Prince was a just man but he was also cold and stern, devoted to the Tsar and to his duty, and with his face always turned away from the lighter side of life. Vera here was born before he came back and she was entrusted to me. The Prince forgave. He recognised her, he refused to dishonour his wife, but the child was never to enter Russia."

"What about her real father?" Haven asked.

"He was killed commanding an army corps during the Russo-Japanese War," Madame Oliastransky replied. "We may have looked after Vera badly, but in her way she has been happy. Since we have had no money, this is the truth and it must be told. She has sung and she has danced in Paris and even here in London. Men have been crazy about her, but she has been a good girl. She has always been a good girl, although she wanted money very badly and all the things to which she was entitled. We heard that Elisaveta Ostrekoff had joined the Bolshevists. We tried to persuade ourselves that it was true, we tried to persuade ourselves that this money was really meant for Vera, so we called her Elisaveta, her almost forgotten name. Of course, it was wicked. We were tricksters. It was for her sake, though. She is not to blame. She will be very happy with what she has."

"So long as she does not try to vamp my Wilfred," Elisaveta said, smiling.

Felix Drayton crossed the room, and the thing which comes to most men at some time or other during their lives was in his face as he seated himself on the arm of Vera's chair.

"She can vamp me, if she likes," he said, with a great deal less than his usual assurance.

THE END

[The end of *The Ostrekoff Jewels* by E. Phillips Oppenheim]