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The printed edition used as the base for this ebook has an apparent numbering error in Pink-Eye, going directly from subsection 6 to subsection 8. We have not attempted to correct this numbering error.

THE KIDNAPPING
OF
MADAME STOREY

and Other Stories

by
HULBERT FOOTNER

Published for

THE CRIME CLUB

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A Crime Club Recommendation

Madame Storey, the famous woman detective created by Hulbert Footner, is a character unique in detective fiction. The present volume consists of five of her most outstanding cases, and in these she proves once again how feminine intuition allied to more than ordinary deductive powers may solve some strange mysteries. The stories offer a rich diversity of scene, moving easily from New York to Monte Carlo, and even to far Peking, but Mr. Hulbert Footner is quite at home in each locale and holds our attention through the unravelling of each baffling problem.

By the Same Author

MURDER OF A BAD MAN
THE NEW-MADE GRAVE
DANGEROUS CARGO
MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY
THE ALMOST PERFECT MURDER
THE RING OF EYES
DEAD MAN'S HAT
EASY TO KILL
THE VIPER
THE VELVET HAND
MADAME STOREY
RAMSHACKLE HOUSE
THE OWL TAXI
THE CASUAL MURDERER
THE FOLDED PAPER MYSTERY
THE MURDERER'S CHALLENGE
QUEEN OF CLUBS
THE UNDER DOGS
OFFICER!
THE DEAVES AFFAIR
THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE

Contents

[MADAME STOREY'S GIGOLO](#)

[THE SCENT OF ALMONDS](#)

[PINK-EYE](#)

[THE KIDNAPPING OF MADAME STOREY](#)

[THE MURDERS IN THE HOTEL CATHAY](#)

MADAME STOREY'S GIGOLO

1

When Mme. Storey and I arrived at Monte Carlo she registered us at the Hôtel de Paris as Mrs. Renfrew and Miss Renfrew. I was to pass as her sister-in-law for the time being. She wanted to avoid the attentions of society and the press.

But she couldn't get away with it. I noticed that the clerk looked at her hard and consulted a photograph under his desk. Presently an elegant gentleman came bustling up and introduced himself as *le directeur*. Bowing like a jack-knife he ushered us with his own magnificent presence to a beautiful suite on the second floor. I am sure they were the best rooms in the house; imperial suite; millionaire's love-nest.

"*Ah, tres-belle!*" said Mme. Storey, looking around her. "But much too grand for me, Monsieur. I can't afford it."

"*Non! Non!*" he protested, waving his hands, "you misunderstand, Madame. Your privacy will be respected, but we know who you are. You shall be the guest of the principality of Monaco as long as you will honour us. His Highness the Prince has commanded it!"

"Nice of him," said Mme. Storey.

When the little man had vanished in a cloud of compliments, she said to me dryly, "Something tells me there's a nigger in this elegant woodpile, my Bella!"

However, the rooms were lovely, a corner suite with windows on one side looking out on the Casino and the gardens, and on the other the ineffable blue sea. Whatever they may say, the old Paris is still one of *the* hotels in the world, and they went all out for us. Bell-boys arrived in a procession bringing baskets of flowers, fruit, boxes of chocolates.

Presently, as if to give point to Mme. Storey's words, another elegant gentleman arrived in our salon, less showy than the first, but better style. Prominent Executive was written all over him, or whatever the French equivalent may be;

but I shall refer to our caller merely as Monsieur B.

He kissed our hands and when the inevitable compliments had been delivered, came right down to business. "This lady," he asked politely, looking at me, "may I speak before her?"

"My secretary, Miss Brickley," said Mme. Storey. "She is present at all interviews."

"Nothing could be more opportune than your visit to Monte Carlo at this time," said Monsieur B. enthusiastically. "I have read so much of your successes in solving intricate crimes. Of all people in the world you are the one I most wish to consult with. Professionally, I mean."

"But I'm on my vacation," objected Mme. Storey.

"No matter! No matter! You can deal with this affair without interfering in the least with your pleasures."

"What is it?" she asked.

His face turned grave. "There is a gang of young men operating here," he said, "what shall I say? gigolos. Every day ladies are being blackmailed and in some cases robbed. It culminated last week in the suicide of a lady of title here in one of our hotels."

"I hadn't heard of it," said Mme. Storey.

"We kept it out of the papers," he said, "but of course it's a matter of common gossip. People say naturally that she lost all she possessed at the gaming tables. But that is not so. She was betrayed, robbed and blackmailed by these scoundrels, and the unfortunate lady could not face her family."

Mme. Storey was not attracted by the case. "Gigolos?" she said, running up her eyebrows. "Surely that's a matter for your police."

"They are helpless," said Monsieur B., spreading out his hands. "When we make an arrest there is never any evidence because the victim will not testify. When these young men become known to us we can put them on the train. But soon they return. Or others take their places. We can forbid them to enter the Casino, the Sporting Club or the hotels under our management, but they pick up their victims outside. And if they suspect that the eye of the police is on them, they tempt the infatuated women to accompany them to Mentone, or Nice, or Cannes, where they are out of our jurisdiction."

Mme. Storey sent a droll glance in my direction. Evidently Monte Carlo was losing business. That was the real rub.

"The gigolos, in themselves, they are nothing," Monsieur B. went on, dismissing them with a gesture. "What makes them dangerous is the fact that they are organised and directed by a subtle intelligence here in Monte Carlo. Find that man or that woman, Madame; break up this ring, and you may ask what you will of us!"

She shook her head. "I am on my vacation," she said. "I am weary of crime. Better order me changed to a more modest suite, Monsieur, and forget about me."

"Never! Never!" he protested. "In any case you remain our guest, Madame."

He brought up all the arguments he could muster. Would she not, as a woman, undertake to rescue her fellow-woman from these birds of prey? Some of the victims had been American ladies. Did she not feel it her duty to ... etc., etc. Mme. Storey continued to smile, and to shake her head quite firmly; and being an experienced man he soon saw that it was useless. He left us.

A few minutes later Mme. Storey and I, having changed our dresses, were seated on the terrace behind the Casino. It was in the middle of the afternoon. After the fogs and frost of Northern France, the hot and brilliant sunshine was like Paradise. Below us the calm sea was bluer than ultramarine. The fantastic architecture of the Casino; the gay clothes of the women; the profusion of flowers; the band playing a Strauss waltz; everything contributed to the holiday spirit. We dissolved in satisfaction.

"Let's do something foolish," said Mme. Storey.

Presently a young man came strolling by. One of the handsomest young men I have ever seen. He looked like a Spaniard or a South American; smooth, olive face; glowing dark eyes; slim and graceful as Mercury. He looked at Mme. Storey out of the corners of his eyes, walked on a little way, and came back again.

"Here's one of them," she murmured.

"Surely not!" I protested. "That boy looks like one of the young angels painted by the Italian masters."

"Quite!" she said dryly. "But you never can tell about young men. They don't begin to show their real characters until they pass thirty."

When he passed the second time he looked directly at Mme. Storey with his velvety, compelling eyes. She smiled frankly, and he stopped.

"Charming afternoon," he said, raising his hat. His English was as good as my own.

"Charming!" said Mme. Storey. She glanced at the vacant seat beside her, and he dropped into it. He looked about twenty-four, but may have been older. Dressed with the plainness that the most fashionable young men affect, everything about him was just right.

"You have just come," he said.

"How did you guess it?"

His eyes were fixed on hers. "The terrace has a brightness it never had before," he said seriously.

She laughed delightedly. "Well! You're what we call a fast worker in America!"

He did not smile, he wasn't looking at me, but I could feel the almost hypnotic effect of his eyes. "I mean it," he said. "I have never seen anybody like you."

"Compliments are so nice," murmured Mme. Storey, trying not to laugh; "You see, they've gone out of fashion in my country."

He glanced at me significantly and then back at her as much as to say that if she would get rid of me he would really tell her something. But Mme. Storey made believe not to get it.

"A woman like you is wasted in a country of business men," he said.

"Well, one can always get on a ship," she said. "Here I am!"

"I had a feeling when I got up this morning that something wonderful was going to happen to-day," he murmured thrillingly.

Mme. Storey could no longer hold in her laughter. It rang out delightedly. The young man turned angry and sore. When she was able to speak she said—still rippling with laughter:

"I'm so sorry! I like you, really. You're so easy to look at. But I can't play up to you. Surely it must be a strain on you too, to be so romantic. Be yourself and let's enjoy the lovely weather."

There was a struggle visible in his handsome face. He scowled, and rubbed his upper lip. Then suddenly he joined in her laughter. It changed the whole character of his face. Made him look like one of our nice American boys. He had beautiful white teeth. I began to like him.

"You're right," he said, "it is a strain. But..." He finished with an expressive shrug.

Mme. Storey finished his sentence for him. "You mean it's your job to be romantic. I know. And I ought to tell you that I am a very poor prospect. You'd better toddle along and look for some older lady who is starving for romance."

His head went down, and a spasm of shame crossed his face. "You see too much," he murmured. "You despise me."

She shook her head. "I never despise anybody."

He raised his head. He was humbler now. "I'd like to take a holiday from my job," he murmured. "If you would let me stay with you."

"Why not?" she said. "I'm sure you're the handsomest young man in Monte Carlo. What shall we do?"

"Do you like dancing?" he asked eagerly.

"I adore it!"

"There's a gala at the Sporting Club this afternoon."

"Let's go.... But we must introduce ourselves. I am Mrs. Renfrew and this is Miss Renfrew my sister-in-law."

"I am Raoul d'Aymara," he said as simply as if he had been a Marquis. Perhaps he was. Spanish Marquises have fallen on evil days just now.

"We must have another man," he went on. "There are several fellows I know along the terrace.... There's Nickol Copenhaver the Dane. Dumb, but he can dance." Raoul signalled to an elegant young fellow who was loafing by the balustrade of the terrace, and the latter started towards us.

Raoul said hurriedly, half ashamed, "You understand, I shall have to play romantic when Nickol is in hearing. He wouldn't understand anything else."

The new young man came up and was introduced. He fell to my share. Tall and blonde, he seemed to be slightly in the gauze the whole time. I kept wondering if he had a real man's feelings inside his handsome shell.

It began to grow chilly on the terrace, and we adjourned to the Sporting Club. As the old Casino begins to grow out of date, the management has provided this gorgeous new palace of amusement to keep up the tone of Monte Carlo. There is nothing like it in our country. The ceiling of the restaurant must be forty feet high. One has a grand feeling of spaciousness. And what a floor! what music! what food!

The dumb Nickol danced like another Maurice. It was heavenly, but all the time I wondered if I was in the arms of a blackmailer and a robber. Well, danger added a spice to my pleasure. I envied the other couple a little. Raoul could not only dance, he could talk. He seemed to be filled with a kind of desperate gaiety.

When the four of us were together at the table it was funny to see him start making love to Mme. Storey with a perfectly serious face. I suppose the boys spied on each other. However, as there were two orchestras, there was not much pause between dances.

Once or twice Raoul asked me to dance just for appearance' sake. When he was out of Nickol's hearing the poor lad seemed to be more frank and open. I liked him better and better. He said with a laugh:

"You know, I wouldn't be let in here alone."

"Why not?" I asked.

He spun me around. "Because of my fatal beauty.... You see the management employs dancing men of their own. There's one of them ... there's another on your left. Nice lads but a bit *passé*. Beginning to be a little bald on the crown, and thick through the middle. Anything as fresh and willowy as me shows up the old boys at a disadvantage."

In all his fun there was a bitter, reckless note that made me want to mother him.

Most of the time he talked about Mme. Storey. "Isn't she wonderful? I wouldn't have believed it possible that a woman of brains could be so ... so ... well, you know what I mean; so lovable!"

"Then you know who she is," I said.

"Of course I know. Rosika Storey. Such a thing can't be hidden. I would be willing to bet that everybody here knows who she is. I can hear them murmuring when we dance around together."

We danced for awhile. Raoul's style was bolder and faster than Nickol's. He guided me as smoothly and surely through the crowding couples as a bird goes through the branches of a tree. Presently he said with the laugh that didn't hide the feeling in his voice:

"Meeting a woman like that has pulled me right up by the roots. I'll never be the same man again. What is it you say in America? I'm a gone coon!"

When the dance was over we strolled out into the beautifully lighted gardens. I saw that Mme. Storey and Raoul had some sort of an understanding. They dropped Nickol politely at the foot of the hotel steps, but Raoul came up to our suite with us. There was a sharp mean look in the face of the young Dane as he turned away that I didn't like. Raoul didn't seem to care.

Up in our salon all Raoul's pumped-up gaiety dropped away. His smooth young face looked drawn and haggard. He refused to sit down. "I can't stay," he muttered. "This place is about as healthy for me as Fascist headquarters to a Communist." He moved around the room in a halting way, his head down, stroking the backs of the chairs.

"You said you had something to say to me," said Mme. Storey gravely.

"Yes. I'd better say it and go...." It wasn't so easy for him to get it out. He made a couple of false starts. "Something has happened to me this afternoon. I ... I ... Oh well, never mind me. I don't mean anything in your life."

"If you're up against it you do," she said quickly. "If you're sick of your crooked job here."

He laughed. "Sick of my job! Oh, God! Believe me, I've been sick of my job for a long time. But I kidded myself. Now I can't kid myself any longer.... No!" he cried out sharply. "Leave me out of it! This is what I want to say. You must get out of Monte Carlo. At once. By the first train!"

"But why?" asked Mme. Storey.

"I can't tell you that. I can only say that you're in danger. Horrible danger! You can't fight this thing. It's too well covered. They'll get you if you stay here!"

It was obvious that he thought Mme. Storey had accepted the job of breaking the ring of blackmailers. She didn't undeceive him.

She said, "If I were to leave now it would be suspected that you had warned me."

He laughed a bitter note. "I expect they know it already."

"What will you do?" she said. "You can't go on with your present life."

"Never mind that. Only do what I say. You see that I'm in earnest. It's true I'm taking a risk in warning you. But let that go. It's the first decent act of my life. Let me feel that I've done some good. Will you do what I say? Will you go?"

"I don't know. I'll have to consider it," said Mme. Storey.

He turned to me in a kind of desperation. "You persuade her," he said. "I can see that you're fond of her. Don't let her soil her hands with this pitch. Go away from here. There are plenty of places where you can amuse yourselves. If she stays here they'll get her!"

I could only spread out my hands helplessly. It was not for me to say anything.

"Raoul," said Mme. Storey frankly, "come in with us. You're in wrong. Join up with us and get a fresh deal. With your aid I could smash these scoundrels!"

He shook his head. "No," he said gloomily, "I couldn't betray my mob. That's the right word, isn't it? I've done pretty nearly everything in my short life, but I've never been a traitor."

"Then get out of Monte Carlo yourself," she said. "And keep on going until you are out of reach of the ring. Go to America if necessary. I'll stake you. Because I think you're worth saving."

He stared at her, and a wonderful light broke in his face. He seemed to be dazed by her offer. "A fresh deal?" he stammered. "Could I? ... Could I?"

Mme. Storey unlocked her writing case. "You'd better get away in a hurry," she said.

He pulled himself together. "Yes! I'll be followed from the moment I leave here. But I think I can shake them off. I'll walk out of town. The railway station will be watched. I'll pick up the bus for Nice somewhere along the road, and take the train from there."

Mme. Storey had taken a packet of bank notes from her case, and was writing a card. "Give this to my agent in Paris," she said, "and let me hear from you through him."

Raoul thrust the notes and the card in his breast pocket. His face was working strangely. "I can't say anything," he muttered.

"Don't try," said Mme. Storey.

He seized her hand, and was about to kiss it, but she drew it away. "You may kiss my lips, handsome boy," she said smiling.

He did so; and immediately ran out of the room.

When he had gone I dropped into a chair. I felt as if all the strength had oozed out of my legs. "What will you do?" I faltered. "When he disappears they will suppose that he has confessed everything to you."

"I reckon they will," said Mme. Storey coolly. She considered for a moment. "I don't know what I will do," she said slowly. "But certainly I'm not going to let anybody run me out of Monte Carlo."

I knew she was going to say it, but a little groan escaped me.

"But you don't have to stay here, Bella," she added with quick kindness. "After all, this is a holiday. There is no need for you to be frightened to death."

"I stay where you are," I said grimly.

After Raoul had gone Mme. Storey looked over some mail that had arrived during the afternoon. Amongst it was a note which had been delivered by hand. It was signed Amos Rudd.

"Bless my fathers! Amos Rudd!" she exclaimed. "He used to be a great man in New York. President of the Madison National. Sold out when his bank was merged. I thought he had passed out years ago, and here he is risen like Lazarus in Monte Carlo. He must be about a hundred!"

Mr. Rudd had written to ask her to dinner at his villa. He apologised for the shortness of the notice, saying that he had just heard of her arrival, and as he was entertaining some of his friends that night, he hoped she would waive ceremony and join them. He would be very glad to have her travelling companion also, he said.

"Let's go, Bella," she said. "If he's a resident here we may pick up some valuable information."

I agreed, of course, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that she was about to be drawn into the ugly case of the gigolos in spite of herself.

So a telephone message was sent to Mr. Rudd that we were coming, and we proceeded to get dressed.

Our host lived in almost feudal fashion in a sort of castle on the Cap Martin side. We were welcomed in a salon big enough for kings with a loggia opening on the moonlit sea. Rudd was a tiny man like a fledgling bird, all beak and eyes with no feathers to speak of. Thus age returns to the semblance of youth. He had hardly a fledgling's innocence though. There was a fixed grin in his little withered face.

I disliked his wife at sight. Not the same wife he had left New York with, Mme. Storey remarked later. A tall, luscious blonde with drooping lips and weary eyes. A woman of the highest fashion strung with jewels, she looked, to put it bluntly, capable of any crime.

Mr. Rudd squeaked, "Rosika! You were only a little girl when I saw you last! You've grown older and I've grown younger. He! He! He!" His wife drawled with infinite fatigue, "Chawmed, Madame Storey. I hope you won't find Monte too boring."

The company was a small one. There was a Prince Grimaldi, a tottering old beau with his hair plastered down. Several American women hung around him simply because the taste of his title (which they pronounced "Prance") was like honey on their lips. There was a Count who was a little younger but worse favoured; and there was a bundle of wraps and veils enclosing an aged lady who was related to the late Sultan of Turkey. All we could see of her was a long and inquisitive nose.

Amongst the Americans there was a bloated couple who were always spoken of in hushed voices as the James Wentworth Hawkineses. What they had done to deserve it I couldn't find out. The male Hawkins resembled a bull-dog—but no dog could look so brutal. Something happens to Americans when they forsake their country for good. They hit the skies [Transcriber's note: skids?] morally.

Mme. Storey and I were much the youngest persons present. Amongst that crew my tall friend stood out like a lady in a museum. They all felt the contrast, I think. They all lavished compliments on her—and cordially disliked her.

Dinner was kept waiting by the non-arrival of somebody called Turner Moale. From the conversation I gathered that nothing in Monte Carlo was complete without Turner Moale. His name headed every subscription list. He gave the most delightful entertainments at his villa on the rock of Monaco.

Turner Moale; Turner Moale; the name rang through my head like some old rhyme. Suddenly it came to me that my mother used to talk about Turner Moale. When she was a girl he was the number one matinee idol of New York. Women used to mob the stage door in order to touch him as he passed.

Presumably he had been forced off the stage by age, and here he was established as the social arbiter of Monte

Carlo. I wanted to change the ancient wheeze to run: When Americans die they rise up in Monte Carlo. I felt as if I were in a company of ghosts.

Presently he arrived, a very old man but marvellously preserved. I expect he had been in the hands of his valet for hours. Rosy and dignified, beautifully turned-out, he was certainly a personage. Everybody had to look when he came in. With his cool airs and his affability he was like a little Highness himself.

He made directly for my employer and kissed her hand as if he were conferring an order upon her. "Rosika Storey!" he exclaimed. "The desire of my life is granted!" He drew her hand under his arm. "I shall take you in to dinner. I don't care what anybody says. I shall fight for it!"

Everybody laughed. It appeared that Turner Moale must be allowed to do whatever he liked.

When we sat down at the table there was a burst of animation as if a large tap had been turned on. Everybody smirking, ogling, flirting, while they picked at the different courses which were whisked on and off. But while their lips smiled their eyes were ghastly. Mme. Storey has taught me something about eyes. Every one of those dapper men and jewelled women was frantic with boredom. They hated each other; they hated themselves. People in that state are ripe for anything.

Excepting Turner Moale perhaps. He appeared to be serene. But perhaps it was only because he had a more perfect control over his eyes. He was no better than the others but he had a better style. He was like the popular ruler of some little country a long time ago who had nothing to fear. There are no rulers like that nowadays.

"I haven't been to America for years," he said. "I can't endure their barbarous customs. In America I am told that men wear dinner jackets when there are ladies present. I shall never go there."

Mme. Storey led up to what she had in mind by telling of our encounter with the good-looking young man on the terrace; just the beginning of it. They listened with smiles, but one could see that they disliked the subject. Mme. Storey said with an innocent air:

"I suppose terrible things may happen to a woman who falls for those handsome rascals."

Silence around the table.

She went on. "In fact I have seen various references to women being robbed and blackmailed at Monte Carlo."

Not a word. Mrs. Hawkins tried to create a diversion by asking the Prince if he liked Bèarnaise sauce with his entrecôte. Mme. Storey kept on:

"Mr. Rudd, have you ever heard of these things?"

"Not I!" he said. "I'm the wrong sex."

His feeble joke produced a great laugh. Mme. Storey, undiscouraged, blandly addressed Turner Moale at her side.

"What do you think, Mr. Moale? Are these pleasant young fellows that one sees on the terrace dangerous criminals?"

"I hope so," he said maliciously.

There were loud cries of protest from his admirers.

"It adds a zest to life," he said. "We are too far sunk in our creature comforts. Nothing like a good crime or two to rouse us."

"I like to read about crimes in Chicago," drawled Mrs. Rudd, "but not at my own front door."

"The nearer, the more exciting," said Turner Moale.

"No young man by himself is especially dangerous," said Mme. Storey. "But suppose they combined to stand or fall together. Suppose they are only tools in the hands of a master who uses them for his own ends. That would be a dangerous racket. The boys, you see, would be comparatively innocent. All they would have to do would be to allow the women to make fools of themselves. Then the master would apply the screws."

"Superb!" cried Turner Moale with his noiseless old man's laugh. "You are wasted as an upholder of the law, Rosika. If you were a criminal you would go down in history!"

"Of course it's only the women in hotels who are victimised," said Mrs. Rudd languidly. "It doesn't affect us who live here."

The old Turkish woman shook with laughter inside her wrappings as if she knew some devilish joke of her own.

"Blackmail will soon become a lost art," lisped the old prince. "Because people are proud of being bad nowadays."

"Then you can blackmail them for being found in church!" retorted Turner Moale.

"If you've got a good balance at the bank you don't need to care what anybody says about you," put in Amos Rudd, grinning like a death's head.

His wife flashed a spontaneous look of hatred down the table.

"About those women who are blackmailed," said Hawkins brutally, "if they make fools of themselves I say they deserve no better than they get."

Mme. Storey took no further part in the discussion. She let them thrash it out amongst themselves as if she had learned what she wished to know.

After dinner we all drove in to town to take a whirl at the tables of the Sporting Club. A super gambling house; quiet, elegant, spacious. They don't allow it to become crowded. After all, plenty of room is the greatest luxury of all.

All the members of our party put up large sums at roulette with mask-like faces. The Turkish lady stretched forth a claw from her wrappings that trembled violently. I saw old Amos Rudd staking the dilapidated Prince on the sly. I wonder if they paid him for coming to dinner. Turner Moale played at another table and kept his back to us.

Later we descended to the night club for more dancing. It was not exactly exhilarating to be pushed around by tottering noblemen or resuscitated Americans. I thought of the handsome Raoul longingly.

When the party broke up we were besieged with invitations. These people did nothing in the world but give each other dinners every night. My heart sunk. However, Mme. Storey evaded them politely.

"I may be obliged to leave Monte Carlo to-morrow," she said. "I dare not accept anything."

How thankful I was to get back to our own quiet rooms! "Pretty awful, wasn't it?" said Mme. Storey, smiling. "However, the evening was not entirely wasted."

I looked at her inquiringly.

"Mrs. Rudd possesses a photograph of Raoul," she said, lighting a cigarette. "Along with many other handsome young men."

"What does that mean?" I said.

"I don't know. It's only a beginning."

"Then you are going to take this case!" I exclaimed with a long face.

"I may be forced to," she said enigmatically.

I opened the casements and we stepped out on the balcony, and looked down at the sea, powdered with the shadowy radiance of the moon. The moon itself was over our shoulders. It was very late and the town had fallen quiet. The fantastic Casino over the way was dark. Silence and moonlight, the unchanging things, held the frivolous city in a spell.

Out of the silence we heard a far-off cry. It was very faint, but it vibrated with a peculiar anguish, sharp as a stab.

"What was that?" I said startled.

"Some poor soul in trouble," murmured Mme. Storey.

It had nothing to do with us, so far as we knew, but I found myself trembling all over. "Let's go in," I said. "It's uncanny."

4

I spent a bad night, and got up ready to hate that gay and beautiful place. The air was like wine, the morning sunshine glorious, but I couldn't rise to it. Mme. Storey was a little pale too. We ate our *petit déjeuner* by the open window in silence.

As we sat lingering over our cigarettes, an envelope was brought to her which bore the imprint of a café in Monte Carlo. No name was written on it, but only the number of our room. She read it and handed it over to me without comment.

"DEAR R.S.

"I know that it is foolish of me to write to you, but it eases me so! They have me on the run, but so far I have been able to keep a jump or two ahead of them. I am waiting here for a friend who has promised to bring me a disguise. If I could only say some of the things that I feel! But I must not. I have no right. I can say this, though. Through you I have found myself. Whatever may happen to me now..."

There was a break at this point, and the letter was carried on in a different hand, an uneducated hand, in French. Translated, it ran:

"The gentleman told me who this was for. He had to leave in a hurry. I let him out through a back window.

"PIERRE,

"Waiter at Café des Arcades."

Mme. Storey and I exchanged an anxious glance. "Let's go and see the Grand Vizier," she said.

She was referring to M. le President of the Society of the Baths of the Sea. I nodded, and we got ready immediately.

There was nothing frivolous about his suite. Very handsome and austere. As soon as we entered we perceived that something unusual was up. Excited looking clerks were passing in and out. We had to wait until a couple of gaudy policemen made a report to Monsieur B. A presentiment of evil struck a slow chill through my veins.

When we were shown into his private office he still looked disturbed. In her forthright way Mme. Storey said:

"What has happened, Monsieur?"

"Why, nothing, nothing at all," he replied quickly—too quickly.

Mme. Storey merely looked at him in the way that draws things out of people.

"Well, a distressing accident," he said, "but nothing that need concern you or me, Madame."

She looked and waited for more.

"An unfortunate young man committed suicide last night by throwing himself over the cliffs of La Turbie."

In spite of myself a little cry was forced from me.

"What's the matter with Mademoiselle?" he asked, staring.

"She doubts if it was suicide," said Mme. Storey gravely.

"What else could it be?" he said irritably throwing up his hands. "Some poor fool who has lost all at the gaming tables! He killed himself outside our borders anyway, but the French authorities seem to think we are responsible."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, Madame. All marks of identification had been destroyed. An investigation is in progress."

"Where is he?"

"At a mortuary in Beausoleil."

Mme. Storey's face was like marble. "Is he ... recognisable?"

"Yes, I am told that his face escaped mutilation though almost every bone in his body was broken."

"I wish to see him."

He jumped up waving his hands in distress. "No! No! it is too horrible! Isn't there somebody who could act for you? Some man?"

"I am accustomed to acting for myself," she said.

A moment or two later we were in Monsieur B's car climbing through the narrow winding streets that lead to Beausoleil, the upper town. All Monte Carlo is built like a flight of steps up the side of a mountain. Beausoleil is in French territory.

The mortuary was a private one attached to an undertaking establishment. There is a stark, nightmare quality about such places in France. At the door of the inner room Mme. Storey said kindly:

"You don't have to come in, Bella."

I shook my head, and followed at her heels like a shadow. It would have been worse to wait outside for her.

A small bare room with whitewashed walls and cement floors. A smell of iodoform. In the middle there was a slab with a sheeted form upon it; a table at the side with the dead man's clothes under another sheet. An attendant standing beside the slab pulled down the sheet a little way and we saw—what we expected to see; Raoul's beautiful head.

He was no longer glad nor sorry; neither proud nor shamefaced. Death had shaped a perfect mask of beauty. The rich brown wavy hair; the clear olive skin; the lovely mouth; and so young! so pitifully young! I began to shake inside; the tears were running down my face without my knowing it. Mme. Storey, as always when under strong emotion, was pale and cold.

She said, "This man was murdered!"

"How do you know?" gasped Monsieur B.

"His lips were sealed with surgeon's tape. If you look closely you can see traces of the gum... I wish to see his hands."

The sheet was pulled down farther and I turned away. I could not bear any more. I heard her say:

"Observe those marks on his wrists, Monsieur. He was bound and gagged when he was carried to La Turbie."

Monsieur B. made incoherent sounds of distress.

When we had returned to his car Mme. Storey told him what we knew about the dead man. The name he had given us was no doubt an assumed one. Mme. Storey said, "I am now ready, Monsieur, to undertake the work you offered me yesterday."

Now that murder had come into it, he was not so eager. "There must be no ugly publicity," he muttered.

She looked at him coldly. "It suits me to have as little publicity as possible," she said. "But I won't consent in advance to conceal anything."

"An ugly murder! just at the beginning of the season! ruinous! ruinous!" he cried.

"You can't clean up a mess without making a bad smell," said Mme. Storey bluntly.

"Ruinous! Ruinous!"

"Very well," she said crisply, "if you wish to withdraw your offer, that is quite all right. But in that case I must warn you that I shall go ahead on my own. Whatever happens, I am going to see that the murderer of this man—I mean the *real* murderer, is brought to justice."

That brought him down on the run. "No! No! Madame! Of course not! Don't speak of such a thing, I beg! Certainly my offer of yesterday stands. I am anxious to co-operate with you in every way possible. No expense must be spared!" And so on. And so on.

5

We went right on to La Turbie in the car. Monsieur B. said we should find his chief of detectives on the spot. The road zigzagged endlessly back and forth across the face of the almost perpendicular mountain back of Monte Carlo. Though La Turbie almost overhangs the resort it is a half-hour's drive around those hairpin curves. We had no eye for the glorious views beneath us.

Like all the ancient villages thereabouts, La Turbie is almost a solid block of masonry tucked in the folds of the mountains. It is dominated by a huge ruined tower built by the Romans. Below the ancient part is a more modern esplanade ending in a sort of round bastion at the very edge of the cliffs. It was from this bastion that the body had been flung.

Mme. Storey had the car stopped some distance short of the end of the road, hoping to find the tracks of the car that

had preceded us some eight hours before. But the pavement was hard and so many people had shuffled back and forth that all marks of tyres were obliterated.

Within the circular parapet at the end, a knot of people were gathered, peering over, discussing the affair. The chief of detectives joined us. Mme. Storey looked at him and looked at me ruefully. A worthy man! When Monsieur B. asked him what had developed he shrugged and spread his palms. Every soul in La Turbie had been asleep when it happened. Some perhaps had been wakened by the young man's cry, but they didn't know what had wakened them.

The village people drew back wonderingly at the sight of Mme. Storey. They suspected a tragic romance. We looked over—not at the glorious panorama of mountain and sea, with the red-roofed town two thousand feet below, but straight down where we could see a dark stain on the rocks at the foot of the cliff. I shivered. I can't say how far down it was, hundreds of feet.

They told us that the spot where the body had fallen was inaccessible from below, consequently, men had been lowered from the parapet to fetch it up. Indeed the ropes were still there, and the men who had gone down, telling the story to their neighbours over and over.

Mme. Storey said: "I will go down."

There was a chorus of remonstrances from the Frenchmen. She merely waited with a cold smile until they had talked themselves out.

"I will go for you," said the detective.

She shook her head. "I must use my own eyes."

In the end, of course she had her way. The men who manipulated the rope constructed a sort of sling for her. They helped her over the parapet, and presently I saw her swinging between rocks and sky, seated in the sling, clinging to the rope above her head with one hand and holding a cigarette in the other. It made me giddy, and I drew back. The village people were staring as at a marvel.

There was no accident. In half an hour they helped her over the parapet and she stood beside us safe and sound.

"Did you find anything?" asked the detective excitedly.

"No," she said coolly. The village people were listening and gaping.

When we drove away in the car she opened her hand and showed us a brown button. Clinging to it was a scrap of frayed woollen cloth of the same colour.

"When they took off his bonds there was a brief struggle," she said. "He caught hold of a button on the coat of one of his assailants and it came away in his hand. Observe that the cloth is of the finest quality, and that the button is sewed on with silk thread."

The French detective struck his fist into his palm. "I will find the wearer of that coat, Madame! You may leave it to me!"

"Quite!" she said dryly.

Back in the town we parted from our companions. The detective went off to set the usual machinery of the police in motion, while Mme. Storey and I went in search of the "Café des Arcades."

There was none of the Monte Carlo glitter about this place. The sort of shabby and inviting little resort in a side street, where French people love to sit by the hour, talking, playing dominoes, writing letters. At this time of day it was almost empty. When we sat down a waiter assiduously wiped the marble table in front of us. He was a young man with a friendly smile, and all the stored-up wisdom of the café waiter in his wary eyes.

"Are you Pierre?" asked Mme. Storey.

"But yes, Madame," he said, startled. "How do you know my name?"

"You signed it to a letter that you sent me last night."

"Yes! Yes!" he said. "And you are the lady? Ahh!"

"What do you know about the young man who gave you that letter?"

Pierre spread out his hands expressively. "I know nothing, Madame. He is a customer. He is generous. I do not know his name."

The proprietor was looking at us curiously from behind the bar, and Mme. Storey ordered *aperitifs*. Pierre flew to get them.

When he returned she asked: "What made the young man leave so quickly last night?"

"I do not know," said Pierre. "He show me fifty-franc note. He say quiet: 'Is there a way out at the back?' I say: 'Follow me.' I take him in the storeroom. He goes out through the window like a bird. Shove the letter in my hand. Say: 'Send it to suite "A," Hôtel de Paris.'"

"He was waiting here for a friend. Did his friend come?"

"Ah, yes! the mademoiselle. She often meet him here. Very pretty. She come and I say: 'Your gentleman is gone.' I didn't want to frighten her." He gave us a good description of the girl.

"You must have some idea of the danger that threatened him," said Mme. Storey.

Pierre shrugged. "Well, there were four young men waiting in the street," he said. "Afterwards they went away."

"Could you identify them if you saw them again?"

An expression of prudence came over the waiter's face. "Ah, no, Madame," he said quickly. "It is impossible. It was dark in the street. Their hats were pulled over their eyes."

"Pierre," said Mme. Storey gravely, "they got him!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said softly. "Is he dead?"

"He is dead!"

Pierre bustled away towards a table at a little distance, and fussed among a pile of magazines that lay upon it. He came back bringing one with his professional smile. This was for the watching proprietor's benefit. Pierre's eyes were full of tears.

"*Voilà! L'Illustration, Madame,*" he said briskly. He leaned over and gave the table a swipe with his cloth. His back was turned towards his boss. "I have something else for you," he whispered. Digging into a pocket under his apron, he produced a tiny book in a pretty white binding. Mme. Storey slipped it out of sight.

"He give me that with the letter," whispered Pierre. "He say: 'If they get me you will hear of it, Pierre. If they get me I want the lady at the Hôtel de Paris to have this. If you hear nothing, throw it into the sea. It is dangerous to have on you.'"

Somebody called him, and he hustled away. He could give us no further help.

Under cover of the magazine, we examined the little book. To our astonishment it was—a dictionary! The slip cover

was a handsome affair of vellum decorated with gold, green and red bands, but it held just a common little five-franc English-French dictionary. Every traveller knows them.

Mme. Storey ran over the pages hastily. They showed no marks of any sort.

"Just an ordinary dictionary!" I said disappointed.

"No!" she said thoughtfully. "He had some special reason for sending it." After a moment or two the explanation came to her. "This is the code book used by the gang in exchanging messages. It is not the first time that a dictionary has been used for that purpose. It will come in useful later."

We returned to the hotel. On the way Mme. Storey telegraphed to Philippe Grandet in Paris, asking him to come to Monte Carlo; a clever man who had worked for her on several former occasions. I had an uncomfortable feeling that we were being followed through the streets but I couldn't spot anybody. When I suggested to Mme. Storey that we ought to have protection, she merely shrugged.

"They would never dare murder us, Bella," she said lightly. "That would cause a sensation big enough to drive them out of business.... It would be one way of winning our case."

A busy day followed. Mme. Storey was in hourly consultation with the police. They were efficient enough as police go, but lacking in originality. I needn't put down everything we did, because in a case of this sort you have to start a hundred lines of investigation of which ninety-nine come to nothing. The chief of detectives did not find the coat from which the button had been torn; neither did he locate Raoul's little friend. Perhaps it was she who had betrayed Raoul.

During the afternoon Mr. James Wentworth Hawkins called up. He wished to know if Mme. Storey was still in Monte Carlo, and if she was available for dinner that night. The sound of his thick cruel voice over the wire made me shiver. Mme. Storey declined. Awfully sorry, she said, but she had a business engagement she couldn't get out of.

"Business in Monte Carlo!" he said with an unpleasant laugh. "That is uncommon!"

While the band was playing we sat down on the terrace for a breather, and there we had an odd experience. No handsome young man made eyes at us to-day, but one such sat down in a chair perhaps a hundred feet away, and my eyes almost popped out of my head when I saw him take a little white book with gold, green and red bands on the cover, and start reading it.

In a minute or two another young man approached him, showed him something in his hand—I had a glimpse of the red and green on white, and the first man made a somewhat lengthy communication. If we could have heard it! The second man strolled on, while the first remained sitting. Ten minutes later a third young man appeared, and the same performance was gone through with.

"The little book increases in importance," said Mme. Storey dryly. "It is their code, and it is also the badge by which they know each other!"

She had not said anything to the police about this book. "Shall you point out these men to the police?" I asked.

She shook her head. "The police will accomplish nothing. And it is up to you and I to complete a case before we strike."

When we returned to the hotel she looked at the little book thoughtfully. "It would be unlucky if they discovered that we possessed this," she said. "It is possible that they have spies in the hotel. Our rooms may be searched while we are out." She sealed it up, and posted it to herself in care of *Poste Restante*, Nice, where we could pick it up at any time.

We worked very late that night. The Commissaire de Police sent Mme. Storey a batch of reports from the various men who had been at work on the case during the day, and after studying them she had dictated suggestions for the work of the following day.

All this had been sealed up and sent off by a waiting messenger, and we were sitting in the salon of our suite, smoking, talking idly, letting ourselves relax in preparation for sleep. It was about half-past one I suppose, and a great silence had fallen on Monte Carlo, broken only by the occasional dull roar of a car on the main road at the top of the gardens. The Southern French, like their neighbours the Italians, have a great fondness for roaring through the small hours with their cut-outs open.

Suddenly there was a discreet tap on the door. We had heard no one approach.

"Who is it?" asked Mme. Storey coolly.

A low voice answered: "A letter from the Commissaire de Police, Madame."

There was something not quite right about that voice, and Mme. Storey's face turned grim. I was thankful that the door was a stout one, and securely bolted. "Shove it under the door," she said.

There was a silence. No letter appeared. Then the voice whined: "It is too thick to go under the door, Madame."

"Then it must wait until morning," she said coolly. "I have retired."

Another pause. Though I put my head to the door I could not hear a sound from the other side. But I had the feeling that there was more than one man in the corridor, conferring. Then we heard retreating footsteps.

I looked at Mme. Storey questioningly. My heart was beating like a motor. Still, the incident appeared to be over. She lit a fresh cigarette, saying:

"They must think we are downy birds."

There was another tap on the door.

"Well?" said Mme. Storey.

"If you please, Madame," said the whining voice, "the Commissaire says it is very important."

Mme. Storey's lip curled in contempt. "Go away!" she said. "If you bother me again I shall telephone to the office."

We were both facing the door listening for the sound of his footsteps. One of those mysterious intimations caused me to turn my head. I saw four masked men. They had entered through the balcony windows. One of them was wearing a brown suit with a button missing. That was the thing which struck me.

Before I could scream a soft mass was thrown over my head and drawn tight; a down coverlet. A bent arm was flung around my head, drawing it back until I thought my neck would break, stifling any cries. I was held thus while a rope was cast around and around my body, binding my arms and legs fast. I guessed that Mme. Storey was being treated in the same way but I could hear nothing.

I struggled with all my might. I did my utmost to cry out. But it was no good. The men who had hold of me knew just what they had to do. I was like an infant in their hands. They worked with terrifying swiftness. Before I had recovered from the shock of being seized, I was hoisted over the shoulder of one of them and run out through the door.

All this time something hard, a towel I suppose, was pressing the coverlet into my face and I was at the point of suffocation. Fiery spots danced before my eyes, and my ears rang. My senses wavered. Down the corridor; through another door and down a flight of steps. I could hear nothing. They must have been in their stocking-feet.

Endless corridors, scraping against one side then the other. My senses weren't registering properly. We stopped, and

I heard a voice say as from an immense distance: "Open the door and look out." Another answered: "All clear." I was shot into the open air and immediately flung into a car which started with the exhaust wide open. Then I passed out.

But only for a moment. When consciousness came back the exhaust was still roaring. I could breathe more freely now. The pressure had been removed from my face, but there was a rope drawing the coverlet into my mouth so that I could not cry out. I groaned, but that feeble sound was swallowed in the noise of the engine. Suddenly the exhaust was shut off, and I judged that we had passed out of town.

We slowed down for a sharp turn, passed it and increased speed again. We almost stopped, crawled around a complete half turn and speeded up again. Another turn, and I knew where we were. Climbing to La Turbie. I hope I may never know such another moment. Up to that moment I had been blindly resisting like an animal. Now I knew fear, and it drained all the blood from my heart.

I pictured the hideous cliff I had looked over that morning with the stain of blood on the rocks below. A phrase rang through my head: Broke every bone in his body! The prospect of such a death was worse than death. I died a thousand deaths on that mountain road. I went mad because I could not scream and struggle.

I had no sense that Mme. Storey was anywhere near me. So far as I could tell I was planted on the back seat of a closed car with a man on either side of me. They never spoke. Silent on each side of me they afflicted me with an unspeakable terror, like two death's heads conducting me to my death.

As we crawled around one of the close turns, I heard a speeding car above us, and then I knew why Mme. Storey was not beside me. For awhile I forgot myself in the horror of her death; a life like hers to be cut off!

When the car stopped, I went mad with fear again. I was all fear. In my imagination I was screaming at the top of my voice: No! No! No! But I could make no sound, or almost none.

There was a pause while the two parties conferred together. A voice said: "Send the little one first." Another answered: "No, both together."

Suddenly all fear left me. I suppose it is like that with men in battle when faced with inevitable death. The thought comes to you: Well, what's the difference?

One man took me by the shoulders, another by the ankles. They gave me a little shake as if to make sure of their grip. From the other party came the cold voice:

"Swing them well out. Three times. Let go when I say three."

At that moment my whole life seemed to spread out before me. Every loved face that I had ever known passed before my eyes.

They began to swing me. One! Two! Three! They let go.... I knew nothing more.

After awhile, as it seemed to me, I began to dream. A delicious dream of running water; a swift little river in the American countryside with alders and willows growing overhead, the sunlight striking through and dappling the water. A drowsy June afternoon with the hum of bees. Blue sky, white clouds, grass rippled by the wind.

Suddenly I realised that it was faintly light, and that Rosika was bending over me with a face of concern. She was bathing my temples with a wet handkerchief. For a moment I thought I had wakened to a new existence.

"Where are we?" I asked.

She smiled. "In the same old wicked, world, my dear!"

I was filled with a grinding confusion. "But ... but ... but," I stammered.

"Look around you!" she said.

Raising myself on my elbow I saw that I was lying in grass at the foot of a low stone wall. We were at La Turbie because I saw the ruined Roman tower against the pale morning sky. But it was not the hideous bastion on the edge of the cliffs. Below me were ghostly olive trees on their terraces.

"Look!" said Mme. Storey. "When I got clear of my bonds I found this pinned to my sleeve." She held up a piece of paper on which some words had been roughly printed. I read:

"This is just to show you what we can do when we want. We don't like killing women, but if you don't take warning from this, we won't stop next time with giving you a fright."

Then the reaction set in. "We're all right! We're all right!" I screamed, laughing and crying together. Then I was sick.

When I felt better Mme. Storey helped me to my feet, and we climbed over the wall. The road lay on the other side of it. I was still pretty groggy.

"I'm sorry we have a long walk before us," said Mme. Storey. "Fortunately it's downhill. Our abductors were wonderfully considerate. They brought our coats along, and flung them over the wall after us."

I looked down at Monte Carlo, just beginning to show through the mist. "Horrible, horrible place!" I said with a shiver. "The hotel management must have been a party to what happened last night. To be kidnapped out of our own rooms!"

"Not at all!" said Mme. coolly. "You've lost your sense of proportion, Bella. We are up against a gang of clever and adventurous rogues, that's all. No doubt they hired the room over ours, and dropped down to our balcony with ropes. They were perfectly acquainted with the interior of the hotel. They carried us down the service stairs and through the service passages. At that hour of the night they would be deserted. If there was a watchman he was bribed."

"And what are we going to do now?" I asked.

"We are going to act just as our enemies want us to act, like a pair of frightened women. We are going to take the first train out of Monte Carlo. It leaves at quarter to seven."

7

A week later Mme. Storey and I returned to Monte Carlo. It had been seven days filled with busy preparations, and our dearest friends would not have recognised us in our new characters. Philippe Grandet had been brought back to Paris because he was too old for the particular work in hand, but we had a new emissary who had been sent on five days in advance of us. It had come about in this way.

Mme. Storey and I had fled all the way to London. Satisfied, then, that we had left our spies in France, we returned to Paris on an unfashionable train and put up at a small hotel on the left bank. On our first day there we were walking through the Luxembourg gardens when we came upon a handsome young man seated on a bench in an attitude of complete dejection.

"There's our man!" said Mme. Storey instantly.

He was blonde and well built, and there was a special attractiveness about him, compounded of good humour with a spice of the devil. He was an American, God bless him! and he was out of luck. His long legs were stretched in front of him, his hands thrust in his pockets, his chin resting on his breast.

Mme. Storey stopped. "You seem to be in bad, George," she said with a cool and friendly smile.

"In bad!" he cried. Then he got a good look at her and sprang to his feet. "Lady," he said solemnly "I'm so deep in bad it would take a hundred foot ladder to fetch me above ground! ... My name is Charlie if it's just the same to you."

We took to him instantly.

"Well, Charlie," said Mme. Storey, "perhaps I can give you a job. Come along and have lunch with us at the Medici grill and we'll talk it over."

Charlie was the lad for us all right. His other name was Raines, and his story was a simple one. The son of a rich man, he had been sent on a tour of Europe to complete his education, and had liked Paris so well that he had refused to leave it. This had resulted in a break with the old man. Charlie thought that he could make his own way, but he had soon discovered that while Paris is Paradise for a young American with money, it is Hell for him who hath none. So here he was chucked out of his hotel, and too proud to cable home.

Mme. Storey's intuition had not deceived her. Charlie looked on the affair as a big lark. She told him about Raoul, and warned him that if he were found out it would cost him his life. He waved it aside.

"All my life I've longed to have a real adventure!" he said.

He left for Monte Carlo that same night with a replenished wardrobe and a pocket-book stuffed with notes. He travelled under his own name with his own passport. His instructions were:

To put up at the Hôtel de Paris and start playing at the Casino or the Sporting Club. To begin to plunge until he lost or appeared to lose all his money. To get into a row with the hotel over his bill, and to move into a cheap lodging. To continue to wager a few francs daily at the Casino as if the madness had got him. To sell off his belongings and eat at the cheapest estaminets. After that he was to let things take their course. If a crooked proposition was put up to him he was to receive it indulgently.

"The lady in Monte Carlo who picks out the young men for this game is a connoisseur of manly good looks," said Mme. Storey dryly. "I think I have gauged her taste correctly. Blondes are always in demand."

"Spare my blushes, lady," said Charlie grinning.

"When I get to Monte Carlo I shall be known as Lady Wedderminster," Mme. Storey went on. "My arrival will be announced, and you can get in touch with me at the Hôtel de Paris. But don't put anything compromising in a letter. We will arrange a safer means of communicating."

So Charlie had gone, and five days later Mme. Storey and I followed him. During every spare moment of that time and all the way down in the train we rehearsed our new parts. Mme. Storey is a past-mistress of the art of disguise, but she never loses sight of the fact that acting is more important than disguise.

Lady Wedderminster is a real person, and a friend of Mme. Storey's. It is one of the historic names of England, but the present bearer of it is a retiring person who goes very little into society. She had never been down to the French Riviera. English passports had been secured for us through influence in high places.

Mme. Storey was turned out as one of those incredibly dowdy Englishwomen of high position. I don't know where they have their clothes made; perhaps by the village dressmaker. Such women care nothing for the styles of the moment, and they are hung all over with the strangest trimmings. And such hats; such feather boas; such shoes, miles too big, and turning up at the toes; a handbag grasped in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

Her face was in character. She was too wise to make up old. It won't pass muster in the sunlight. But any woman can make herself look like a fright. Mme. Storey's hair was bleached to a sort of mousy colour and she had applied a wash to her complexion that made her look sallow and haggard. Her eyes were hollowed to give her a hungry and discontented look. I ought to say that this make-up was a cruel libel on the gracious lady who had given permission for

her name to be used; but it was typical of hundreds of Englishwomen that you see on the Riviera.

Such a woman nearly always has an unfortunate "companion," just to have somebody to order around, and I was her. My red locks were dyed a nondescript brown; I wore a pair of owlish glasses, and my nose was reddened. As for my clothes and hats—Ye Gods! All I need say is that they were supposed to be Lady Wedderminster's cast-offs and they looked it.

These extraordinary looking women are very often wealthy. We telegraphed from Paris for a suite at the Hôtel de Paris and went down on the Blue Train. In the hotel Mme. Storey was superb; complaining about everything, sending the servants scurrying in a dozen directions. The English are not loved in foreign hotels, but they get service.

As for myself, I am not a very good actress, but my part was a simple one. All I had to do was to look frightened, something I could very well get away with on returning to Monte Carlo.

We played a waiting game at first while Mme. Storey's agent fed items to the *Paris Herald* concerning the arrival of Lady Wedderminster on the Riviera; the great wealth of the family; the part it had played in history, etc. As the *Herald* is the newspaper of the English-speaking contingent we knew that this stuff would be read in the right quarters. Meanwhile Lady Wedderminster was playing heavily at the Casino, and winning for the most part. She was invited to join the Sporting Club.

There had not been a word in the newspapers about the murder of Raoul d'Aymara or the activities of the police. As a matter of fact after Mme. Storey's disappearance, the case gradually petered out. There was never any inquiry for the poor lad. Like a trim yacht at sea he had appeared for a brief space out of the fog, and had been swallowed up in it again.

We were bothered about Charlie Raines. No communication was received from him. If he failed us, our whole elaborate plank collapsed. Moreover, we felt a very human anxiety as to the fate of that engaging young man.

Finally we saw him on the terrace all decked out in his new clothes. He was one of a quartet which included a dark, wicked-looking young man, an admirable foil for the gay Charlie, and two handsome, fashionably-dressed women. All eyes followed them as they strolled along laughing. A charming picture—if you didn't know the dark undercurrents of Monte Carlo!

This suggested that he had got a toe-hold in the gigolo ring, and relieved us of a part of our anxiety.

During the afternoon of that day as Mme. Storey and I were sitting on the terrace listening to the band, the same dark young man dropped in a chair alongside us. There was something vaguely familiar about him. My intuition told me that he was one of those who had entered our room that night, and the skin on the back of my neck crawled. But of course I could not have identified him.

He was a different type from the others; older, harder; with a wicked roll to his dark eyes. Well, many women are thrilled by that sort of thing. He said to Mme. Storey in French:

"What trashy music they play!"

She did not answer him, but at the same time she contrived to look as if she wanted to. A nice piece of acting. The timid woman who is longing for an adventure.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I spoke without thinking."

"That's all right," stammered Mme. Storey. "I ... I don't mind."

He allowed a little more warmth to come into his voice. "If they would only play good music! One gets so tired of the glitter and frivolity here. It doesn't satisfy you!"

"You must excuse me," she murmured. "My French is not very good."

"So! then I will talk English! ... I felt at once that you were musical. One cannot be mistaken. The women one meets are so soulless! It is only once or twice in one's lifetime that one sees a woman with soul. You feel the mysterious currents of sympathy passing back and forth and then, Voila! you forget the conventions. Again, I must ask you to forgive me!"

So that was the line they took with a plain woman!

I realised that my presence was only obstructing the free development of the comedy, so I got up and strolled away along the terrace. When I got back half an hour later he had progressed from sympathy to the subject of dancing.

"I do not dance," Mme. Storey was saying in the awkward, wistful manner she had assumed.

"You *could* dance," he murmured; "a woman full of music like you!"

"I never had a chance," she said, looking down at her hands.

"I understand," he said sympathetically; "and of course you do not like to begin on a public floor.... But you could dance with me," he went on, lowering his voice, "without any of the trouble of learning. Because we are in sympathy!"

Mme. Storey said nothing.

"I have a friend who has a little studio of the dance on Avenue de Joffre," he went on. "Such a charming place! Would you like to come and see it?"

She shook her head.

"I am not a dancing teacher," he said as if his feelings were wounded. "My father allows me a sufficient income. I ask it for my own pleasure."

She was obdurate in her refusal. "I would like to dance," she said, "but I am not at my ease with foreigners. If I could find an English teacher ... or an American...."

The young man appeared to be crushed with disappointment. "I am sorry," he murmured. "Very very sorry that I have not had the happiness to please you."

Mme. Storey was giving an imitation of a woman who had never been made love to before. "I ... I like you," she murmured, "but you are strange to me."

Soon after that he rose to go. "If we meet on the terrace may I have the pleasure of talking with you again?" he asked.

"If you wish," she said looking away. She would have blushed if she could, but that was impossible.

"I shall watch for you every afternoon!" he said eagerly. He placed his heels together and bowed. "Permit me to introduce myself. Marcel Durocher." He handed her his card.

"I am Mrs. Bradford," said Mme. Storey in confusion. "I'm sorry I haven't a card with me."

"And this lady?" he said turning to me.

"Oh, Miss Toller, my companion!" she answered carelessly.

He left us.

When he was out of hearing Mme. Storey murmured: "Well, I planted a seed in his mind. Let us pray that it will sprout."

On the following afternoon we were seated on the terrace when Mme. Storey said suddenly: "It *has* sprouted."

Following the direction of her glance I saw Durocher coming along with Charlie Raines in tow. My heart began to pound against my ribs. Fortunately the scared red-nosed companion was not forced to take any part in the scene that followed.

Charlie had learned his lesson well. He never batted an eye when he was introduced. It was only by a slight subcutaneous flush in his pale cheeks that I knew he had been told that "Mrs. Bradford" was Lady Wedderminster. His manners were perfect.

They talked about all sorts of things. Lady Wedderminster appeared to warm towards the handsome young American. Marcel made believe to be jealous, but his wicked eyes were full of satisfaction. It was not necessary for anybody to steer the talk around to the subject of dancing. After a while it got there itself.

"Charlie is a wonderful dancer," said Marcel jealously.

Lady Wedderminster looked at Charlie eagerly.

"Marcel mentioned that you would like to learn to dance," said Charlie. "I'd be tickled to death to teach you if you'll let me. There's a little dance studio on the Avenue de Joffre where we can practise. But I'll bet you anything you like, that inside an hour you'll be ready to take the floor at the Sporting Club."

"I should like it," murmured Lady Wedderminster, letting a world of meaning appear in her hungry hollow eyes.

"You go with him!" grumbled Marcel jealously. But his pleased eyes were saying: She's hooked! ... It was a good comedy.

"Well, come on, let's go!" said Charlie.

We climbed the steps to the street and Marcel hailed a taxi-cab. Mme. Storey said with the insulting indifference that she assumed towards me:

"Cora, you run off to the "Café de Paris." Buy yourself a drink on the terrace and wait until I come back."

This was about three o'clock. Shortly before five they returned. I was sitting with my drink before me when they got out of a taxi at the pavement. Marcel raised his hat and walked off; Mme. Storey and Charlie came to my table. Charlie was saying: "Thank God! he's left us. I didn't dare come out of my part for a moment at the studio. That guy has eyes like a lynx and ears like nothing human!"

They sat down. "Gee! what wonderful disguises!" Charlie went on. "Both you and Bella. Marvellous! Even now I can't believe that you are really you."

"Restrain your enthusiasm," said Mme. Storey in the dull manner of Lady Wedderminster. "Marcel had gone, but there are other spies. Act towards me as if I was a difficult prospect that you were working on, and you can say what you like."

Charlie passed a hand over his mouth. "I can't help grinning when you and Bella and I are together," he said apologetically.

"Why didn't you let me hear from you?" she asked.

"I couldn't. Until now I've been watched night and day. This is the first time Marcel has left me on my own."

"Good! That means you have passed.... What has happened?"

"Well," said Charlie, "after I had been thrown up on the beach for a couple of days, this guy Marcel picked me up. Offered to share his room with me. Made out it was pure friendship. He has a swell room in a villa on the main street a little way out. We always ride in and out on the bus, though it isn't far.

"I haven't got any of the dope on the gang yet. Marcel admits, of course, that he's a gigolo, but makes out that he's on his own. He's training me as his side partner. He feeds me a line of cynical philosophy that would have corrupted the angel Gabriel when young. I appear to lap it up like milk.... One thing struck me as funny. He had me get my photograph taken in a photomat one day. Just for a joke, he made out."

"He wanted to show it to his bosses," said Mme. Storey. "Go on."

"I haven't been told anything," said Charlie, "but I have put two and two together. There are a lot of these bozos in Monte Carlo. They live around in different places, and do not associate except when they need to help each other out. For an identification badge each one has a little white book to show, but I haven't been given one."

"I know the book," said Mme. Storey dryly. "What about the boss?"

"Haven't heard a whisper about him," said Charlie, "but I know there is a boss because Marcel gets orders from him in writing that he translates with the aid of the little white book. And he makes reports to his boss. But how he gets his orders or sends his reports I don't know."

We sipped our *thè au rhum*, the gypsy orchestra played a *czardas*, and the people went hurrying along the pavement to the casino. They always hurry when they go in.

"Now that you and I have joined up," Mme. Storey said to Charlie, "we must pull off our trick swiftly. If there is any delay we are certain to be found out and then ... good-night! ... Have you any idea of what their intentions are towards Lady Wedderminster?"

Charlie shook his head. "Blackmail I reckon."

"That's what I am afraid of," she said. "Blackmail is too complicated and too slow an operation. We must try to tempt them to rob me outright."

"Robbery! Good God!" muttered Charlie, changing colour.

"When you make your report to Marcel about me," Mme. Storey went on, "tell him that I confided to you that I had brought a large sum in cash to Monte Carlo because I didn't want my husband or my bankers to know that I was going to gamble. Tell him that I have almost doubled it since I came, and that I am carrying half a million francs around with me because I'm afraid to leave it in my room."

"But ... but," stammered Charlie, "they will attack you!"

"You are coming out of your part," she warned. "We will take care of that.... If I figure right," she went on, "as soon as Marcel gets this information he will report it to his boss, and will receive instructions how to act. Ah! if you could get me a copy of Marcel's instructions we would have them dead to rights!"

"I'll do my damndest," said Charlie.

The time that followed was hard on the nerves. Charlie reported to Marcel that Lady Wedderminster was carrying around half a million francs on her person. Marcel transmitted the fact to his boss, and received instructions from him

what to do. But Charlie was unable to find out what his orders were. Charlie said:

"While Marcel was decoding his letter from the boss he caught me looking at it. He didn't say anything, but his face turned ugly. When he had digested the contents he lit a match and burned it up."

"H'm!" said Mme. Storey grimly. "Never allow yourself to look at one of the boss's letters again. Make no attempt to get hold of them. We don't want to lose you. I'll put out another line."

"They write to each other on small pieces of paper," said Charlie, "and enclose their letters in little envelopes about two inches by three in size. There is no address on these envelopes. How they come to Marcel or how he sends them I can't guess. They don't go through the mail, and no messengers come to the house. Marcel goes out by himself about nine o'clock every morning, but I reckon it wouldn't be healthy for me to try to follow him."

"It would not," said Mme. Storey. "But you can bring me one of the envelopes they use if Marcel does not burn them."

Thus we were in the position of expecting to be robbed at any moment without knowing when nor where the blow would fall. Mme. Storey did, as a matter of fact, carry around the half million with her. The bills were marked. What made the strain harder on me was that she took to going out by herself at all hours. That perpendicular line appeared between her brows which always warns me that the situation is serious. She never speaks of her plans in advance.

Marcel's instructions to Charlie were merely to "keep the old girl going." Sometimes when Charlie met us Marcel would be with him; sometimes Charlie came alone.

Meanwhile smart society in Monte Carlo, having been impressed by the social items in the *Paris Herald*, began to take notice of Lady Wedderminster. Amos Rudd sent her one of his characteristic notes asking her to dinner.

She answered it in the third person with that superb nonchalance of which only the English are capable.

"Lady Wedderminster presents her compliments to Mr. Rudd, and begs to thank him for his invitation. Lady Wedderminster never accepts invitations from those whom she has not had the pleasure of meeting."

So much for Amos!

Mr. and Mrs. James Wentworth Hawkins came to call. Their names were pronounced over the telephone with a certain awe.

"Why are they so famous?" I said.

"For no reason," said Mme. Storey, "except that their names appear so often in the *Paris Herald*. That's what they live for."

We went down to the hotel drawing-room to receive them. I didn't like them any better at a second view. Like so many married couples they bore a strong resemblance to each other. Fat and brutalised by rich living they were the most useless cumberers of the earth I have ever encountered.

Mme. Storey, alias Lady Wedderminster, polite and a little bored, forced them to make the running. They stumbled through it somewhat confused, but determined to see the visit to a finish. When they got up to go Mrs. Hawkins said effusively:

"I hope you'll fix a night when we may have the pleasure of having you to dinner."

"So kind of you," drawled Lady Wedderminster playing with her bracelet. "But I've come to Monte Carlo for a rest. I'm not accepting any invitations. I'm sure you'll understand."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Hawkins.

When they had gone Mme. Storey said dryly, "They won't be any the less anxious to have me just because they were turned down once."

One afternoon when Mme. Storey sat down at a roulette table in the Sporting Club, she found herself almost directly opposite Turner Moale. I was standing meekly behind her chair.

Mr. Moale paid no attention to us. The man's distinction was remarkable. He was beautifully dressed and he could gamble without losing his dignity. In his eyes showed that intensely withdrawn look that characterises the born gambler. Well, if you require excitement there is nothing like roulette. I have enough excitement in my job.

The supposed Lady Wedderminster put a thousand francs on number thirty-three and won. An excited murmur went around the table. Turner Moale took notice of her. Presently she won again and refused to play any more for the moment.

"It is so tiresome when everybody follows one's play," she said as we left the table.

We went into the café and ordered aperitifs. By and by Turner Moale came strolling through the rooms, putting on his princely manner whether anybody was watching him or not. He stopped by our table.

"May I introduce myself?" he said with engaging affability. "I am Turner Moale."

Lady Wedderminster could afford to unbend with him because his style was so much better than the other Americans. "I have heard of you," she said. "Won't you sit down. I am Lady Wedderminster."

"I know it," he said, sitting.

"How did you know it?"

"I asked at the roulette table where we were both playing just now. Everybody around the table knew you. Everybody was talking of your luck."

She frowned. "How annoying!"

"Why?" he asked.

"Somebody may carry the news back to England."

"What of it?" he said.

"I do not come of a gambling family," she said dryly.

"Thank God I have no family!" he said with his calm assurance. "And so I can say it openly. I love to gamble! When I gamble I am twenty-one again!"

Lady Wedderminster smiled. "Sometimes one is dull in England," she said, looking down at her hands.

"You like it here?" he asked.

She shrugged in a manner that allowed him to suppose anything he wished.

"How long shall you remain in Monte Carlo?"

"As long as my luck holds."

"Ah, I wish I could catch a little luck from you. Lady Wedderminster. I always lose!" He said it with a wave of his hand that suggested he lost no sleep over it.

"I don't always win," she said.

"But according to the gossip of the tables you are thousands and thousands ahead," he said laughing. "Do you know what they call you? The golden Milady."

Lady Wedderminster smiled.

Charlie came searching for us through the rooms, and she arose like a woman transformed. "Charlie!" she murmured, slipping her hand under his arm. "I was so afraid you weren't coming!"

Charlie was wise. He realised that a show was being put on for somebody, and played up to her. "I am a bit late," he said, patting her hand. "So sorry!"

"Come," she said. "I have so much to tell you. I won a hundred thousand francs to-day." Suddenly she appeared to recollect Mr. Moale, and became the reserved Englishwoman again. "Oh! Pardon! Au revoir, Mr. Moale. I hope we may meet soon again."

She moved away, leaning on Charlie's arm. Mr. Moale returned to the gaming rooms treading like the Prince of a small country, looking about him as if anxious not to miss anybody's bow. I paid the check.

10

On the following night Charlie turned up at the hotel resplendent in evening dress. My heart warmed to the boy, so handsome and droll; so essentially decent. He was very much upset. I could see the faint flush under his pale skin. He came alone and we received him in the parlour of our suite.

"Rosika," he said in a voice that shook a little, "I'm supposed to persuade you to dine with me to-night at a little place up in the mountains."

"Well, I am persuaded," she said smiling.

"But in the mountains!" he cried in distress. "In a place chosen by themselves. I don't know what is going to happen. How can I go through with it?"

"But I wish to be robbed," said Mme. Storey. "I am counting on it!"

"Don't joke about it! Suppose they were to hurt you!"

"They won't hurt me, because I'm going to squawk and give right up."

"I'm to persuade you to leave Bella at home," he said.

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"What, are you so anxious to be robbed?" asked Mme. Storey teasingly.

"No! But it would be worse to be left here alone, and not to know what was happening. I couldn't bear it."

She considered for a moment. "I believe I'll take Bella," she said. "After all, it would be natural for the Englishwoman to have a spasm of propriety at the last moment, and insist on taking her companion."

"I don't even know where the place is," Charlie went on, pacing the room in his agitation. "Only the chauffeur knows. You see, they don't trust me completely. It's supposed to be called Bruno's, and I was told to describe it to you as a very plain little place, but the last word in smartness. Only a few people know of it. All this is just a stall, I reckon."

"It doesn't matter," said Mme. Storey.

"Just as I was leaving," said Charlie, "Marcel caught up my hand to compare my wrist watch with his. He said with a grin, 'Dinner will be served at seven thirty. When you hear the canary sing I suggest that you excuse yourself from the room for a moment. It will help to save your face later.'"

"Good!" said Mme. Storey. "That is exactly what you must do."

"I would feel like a cur if I walked out and left you to the mercy of those scoundrels!" cried poor Charlie.

"Your feelings do you credit," she said, "but you must suppress them and use your head."

"All right," he muttered. "But it's not going to be easy!"

We set off at seven. The car we picked up at the hotel door appeared to be an ordinary taxi, but it had been planted there for Charlie. We climbed rapidly through the narrow twisting streets to the upper town. When we came out on the well-remembered road with the hair-pin curves, I turned a little sick with apprehension. La Turbie again!

However, a mile short of that village we turned sharp to the right and sped around the side of the mountain in the opposite direction. The lights of Monte Carlo sparkled fifteen hundred feet below.

"This is the Grand Corniche road," remarked Mme. Storey. "I have been looking at the map."

After travelling for a mile or two, and putting a shoulder of the mountain between us and the friendly lights of town, we drew up before an ordinary little house on the outside of the road; a narrow one-story house clinging to the steep mountainside like a limpet. The windows were shuttered tight.

"Is this the place?" asked Mme. Storey, loud enough to carry to the chauffeur's ear.

"*Oui, Madame; chez Bruno,*" he answered. "*Un bon restaurant!*"

Charlie whispered, "Do you want to turn back? It would be natural."

"No," she said, "I'm supposed to be an infatuated woman. Such a one would be blind."

Certainly a more suitable place for the commission of a crime could scarcely have been found. The little house crouched alone under the stars, surrounded by dark mountain masses.

We got out, and the chauffeur drove on out of sight. The road was too narrow for him to turn around. He was supposed to return for us at eleven. Charlie rapped at the door.

We were admitted directly into a big kitchen with a white-clad chef presiding over the stove, an assistant and a waiter. They all had a self-conscious look as if they had been listening for us. There were no women visible. But the smell of the cooking was real.

"Anyhow they're going to feed us," murmured Mme. Storey, sniffing.

The men lined up bowing as the custom is. There was a look of animal greed in the chef's little eyes. He expressed surprise at the sight of me. "Dinner was ordered for two persons," he said respectfully.

"I brought my companion," said Mme. Storey in the cold English voice. "Does it matter?"

"*Non, non, Madame!* There is sufficient. Descend if you please."

Owing to the manner of the house's construction, the dining-room was below. We passed through a narrow hall to the stairs. There was a door opposite the kitchen which was standing open just an inch. The room inside it was dark. My skin prickled as I passed it. Instinct told me there were men in there listening.

Downstairs a small plain room with a table set for two, sideboard, sofa. The waiter followed us in and set a third

place. He kept his eyes down the whole time and I could not read his expression. At the end of the room there was a glass door leading to a tiny terrace. From the terrace, steps rose to the kitchen above. The windows of the room looked down into a black abyss.

I cannot remember what we ate. Mme. Storey said it was excellent. I shoved the food down my throat merely because I thought it would look suspicious if I sent it back untouched. Charlie had the hardest part to play, because he was supposed to make a noise as if he was having a good time. He drank a lot of wine.

In the beginning there was a good deal of running about and the sound of voices, as if there were parties dining in other rooms. Just stage business I assumed. It died away and silence filled the house except for what noise we made ourselves.

With the coffee and Cointreau the waiter brought the bill. When Charlie had paid it the man left the room with a furtive look. It was the first time I had seen his eyes. Presently we heard the main door of the house close, and a bar fall across it. Just for an experiment Mme. Storey rang the bell. Nobody came.

"The staff has walked out on us," she murmured.

Charlie had the liqueur glass at his lips when the bird whistle was softly sounded upstairs. One of those lead whistles with a pea in it to imitate a trill. A cold perspiration broke out on me. Charlie turned pale and put his glass down.

"Must I go?" he murmured.

"Go!" said Mme. Storey. "There is no danger if you keep quiet."

"Excuse me a minute," he said, raising his voice, and dragged himself out of the room: started up the stairs.

He had no more than reached the upper floor when all the lights went out. It was so unexpected that a little cry broke from me. Hysteria gripped my throat; I clung to Mme. Storey.

"Steady!" she whispered. "There is no danger!"

That was all very well for a brave person, but my nerves were fluttering like aspen leaves. I almost hate her at such moments.

We heard the door from the terrace open. A flashlight was switched on and cast in our eyes. In its light we clung together like any two frightened women. In the light reflected from the walls I could see that two dim shapes had entered. Their faces were indistinguishable. One was a powerful figure.

"Don't scream," said the smaller man hoarsely.

"What do you want?" asked Mme. Storey, letting a quaver come into her voice.

"The bundle of thousand-franc notes you have on your person," he said. "If you give them up you won't be harmed." The voice was disguised, but I recognised it.

Mme. Storey hesitated.

"Quick!" he said, "or I'll take them from you!"

She hastily unfastened the notes which she carried inside her dress, and threw them on the table. He put the light on them, and gave them a hasty examination.

"All right," he said, thrusting them in his pocket.

Up to that moment everything had gone exactly as Mme. Storey had foreseen. We would have been allowed to go,

and there would have been no trouble, had it not been for one of those accidents that you cannot provide against.

I was wearing a string of common crystals around my neck. They were of no value, but I suppose in the flash of the electric torch they glittered like diamonds. The big man was a common fellow and he yielded to temptation. Slyly moving close to me, he put his two hands around my neck and jerked the string apart.

When his hands touched me I could not help myself; I screamed with all my might. The sound was too much for Charlie. There was the sound of a blow and fall from above, Charlie came leaping down the stairs shouting thickly:

"Keep your hands off them! Keep your hands off them!"

A scene of insane confusion followed. The smaller robber shouted, "Silence that fool!" I had an impression that the big man drew a gun. Mme. Storey leaped forward, and struck the flashlight out of the first man's hand. It went out and rolled away on the floor. We were left in complete darkness.

I heard the man scrabbling on the floor for his torch. The other kept shouting, "Light! Light!" Somebody grabbed my wrist and pulled me violently towards the door at the foot of the stairs. There we met another man cascading down the stairs. There was a brief struggle. Somebody was thrown down with a groan. I was dragged on up the stairs. All this in the dark.

The kitchen was lighted with a candle. Just inside the door stood a fourth man with a chair raised over his head, prepared to smash the first who entered. Somehow we banged through the door across the landing, and got it shut behind us. It had both a bolt and a key. We leaned against it breathing heavily; Mme. Storey, Charlie and I.

"You spoiled everything by your outbreak," said Mme. Storey sternly.

"How could I help it?" groaned Charlie.

"Never mind now. Listen!"

There was a furious pounding at the door, and we backed away from it. Marcel cried out—no longer taking any care to disguise his voice, "Give us that fellow and we won't hurt you. He brought you here, didn't he? He betrayed you into our hands. Now he has betrayed us. Give him up to us and we'll let you go."

No answer from our side of the door.

Marcel flung himself against it, cursing horribly. Luckily it was a heavy door. Several of them put their shoulders against it. It creaked dangerously, but held. Finally Marcel screamed in a voice breaking with rage.

"The axe! The axe!"

There was a pause. I felt like a rat in a trap. Mme. Storey actually lit a cigarette. When the light flared up I saw that her face was calm. Inexplicable woman! Charlie went to a window which opened on the road.

"Don't open the shutters!" she said sharply.

"Can't we do something? something?" I groaned.

"Wait!" she said.

Marcel aimed a blow at the door that split one of the panels but did not shatter it. Before he could strike another there was a crash from the kitchen and a rush of feet. An appalling struggle took place out there. Not a cry was raised; only the sound of blows and stamping feet, and one crash after another as the tables were overthrown, the crockery broken, the cooking utensils flung together.

"Let me get in this!" said Charlie thickly.

"There is no need," said Mme. Storey barring the way.

Suddenly it was over. We heard a low voice issuing commands. Then the voice was raised, calling:

"Lady Wedderminster! Lady Wedderminster!"

"Here!" said Mme. Storey unlocking the door.

We followed her into the kitchen. They had got the lights turned on. It was like a battlefield. Against the far wall stood four sullen, beaten men handcuffed together. Six policemen took off their kepis and wiped their moist foreheads. Our old acquaintance the chief of detectives was in command.

"*Voilà, Madame!*" he said. "You see we have them. You are a brave lady!"

Marcel, frantic with rage, spat out a stream of curses at the sight of Charlie. "Traitor! Traitor! I'll get you yet!"

"Oh, I reckon you'll be put away for quite a spell," drawled Charlie.

Marcel was wearing a brown suit. All the buttons were on it to-night. Mme. Storey walked to him and examined it attentively.

"Chief," she said, turning, "one of the murderers of Raoul d'Aymara wore a suit of this material. You have the button that was pulled off his coat. It was the middle button on this coat. You can see where the hole in the cloth has been stopped. The present button has been sewed on with cotton thread, not silk like the others. This is your man."

The chief's face was a study. "But Madame," he stammered, "how did you ... how did you know about that affair?"

"All will be explained later," she said.

He knew her then. His eyes almost started from his head. "Incredible! Incredible!" he whispered.

And Marcel knew her. A wild terror came into his face. He had no more to say.

"Chief," said Mme. Storey, "I beg that you will take these men into town, and lock them up quietly and secretly. If the news of their arrest should get about, their master will escape us."

"I understand, Madame," he answered, bowing. "It shall be done."

Charlie could no longer hold himself in. "How did the police get here?" he demanded to know.

"I gave them a tip," said Mme. Storey carelessly.

"How did you know where the place was? I didn't know."

"I intercepted Marcel's instructions from his boss this morning."

"Good God!" muttered Charlie. "... You might have let me know," he added in a grumbling voice. "It would have saved me a lot of mental agony."

"Exactly," she said smiling. "That's why I didn't tell you. You were watched every minute. This was your first job, and if you had not appeared to be nervous their suspicions would have been aroused.... But I admit I should not have taken Bella," she added teasingly. "That was an error of judgment."

I hung my head. "If you had felt the man's fingers around your throat ..."

She laughed.

Mme. Storey accompanied the chief of detectives back to town in order to be present when he compared the button and its torn piece of cloth with Marcel's coat. She sent me direct to the hotel with Charlie, and I did not see her again that night.

Next morning when I got up she had already gone out. Shortly before ten she returned wearing an inscrutable smile. "Get your hat, Bella, if you want to be in at the death," she said.

The chief of detectives was waiting for us in the lobby of the hotel. The three of us crossed the street and entered the Casino, which had not yet opened its doors for the day. Our companion concealed himself in the room on the left, where you present your credentials and obtain cards for the gaming rooms, while we took up our position in the middle of the entrance hall. Through the glass we could see the most determined gamblers waiting on the steps for the doors to open.

"What are we waiting for?" I asked.

"The big boss," she said smiling.

"How will we know him?"

"He will come out of the vestiare—if he comes at all, carrying a very swanky overnight bag of brown seal."

At that moment the doors were opened and the waiting people swarmed through. They all made their way first into the cloakroom or vestiare to leave their wraps. With the others there was a large personally conducted party of tourists and it made a lot of confusion. I could not possibly distinguish everybody.

"Never mind their faces," said Mme. Storey. "Watch for the bag. I checked it here myself half an hour ago."

She took pity on the torment of curiosity that my face must have expressed, and in a low voice explained what had happened, without ever ceasing to use her keen busy eyes on the people who passed to and fro in front of us.

"Their method of corresponding was as simple as it was ingenious. It was Marcel's habit of boarding a bus every morning at nine o'clock that gave me the lead. I noticed that he always took the same bus; number sixty-three. And occupied the last seat in the left-hand corner. He would slip his little envelope in the crack of the cushioned seat and leave it there. He always got out at the Casino gardens. Somewhere farther along the route the boss would get on and find his letter or leave one.

"Bus sixty-three was their post office. On its return trip Marcel boarded it to see if anything had been left for him. As soon as I got on to this, I boarded the bus as soon as Marcel got off; copied the note, enclosed it in a fresh envelope, replaced it and got off. If I had continued to the end of the line I might have been able to spot the boss, but the risk was too great. You see, it would have been entirely out of character for Lady Wedderminster to have been found riding in the street buses."

"How could you read their letters?" I asked.

"With the dictionary it was easy. Without the dictionary their code would have baffled the greatest expert of them all. For any word beginning with A they would put down the first word that followed it in the dictionary. For a word beginning with B the second word that followed it, and so on through the alphabet. The language used was English, and to make detection more difficult all the little words such as pronouns, prepositions and articles were written in correctly."

"Where does the brown seal bag come in?"

"In the boss's final instructions to Marcel yesterday, he told him to put the half million francs in the bag, check it at the vestiare of the Casino, and send him the check in the usual manner. I found the bag in Marcel's room and obeyed

instructions."

Time passed. The gamblers hurried past us with their curiously intent expressions as if they were bound on errands of life and death. The tourist party, having been taken for a tour of the rooms, streamed out of the building gaping. A ceaseless procession of motor-cars rolled up to the door, and discharged their aristocratic freight. Beyond, the sunshine was glorious on a bed of pink cyclamens.

The suspense was horrible. I was looking for something I had never seen. Suppose our man had had a warning and never turned up? One of the most difficult things in the world is to keep your attention focused on individuals in a moving crowd. Scores of faces passing one after another have a hypnotic effect. In spite of yourself they begin to blur; they all look alike. I had a dread that I might fail. I couldn't take things in quick enough. People passed with the lower part of their bodies hidden. Stop! Stop! I cried in my mind—but they were already gone.

In the end I was staring at the brown bag for a full second, I suppose, before I realised with a terrific shock that *that* was what I was waiting for. My heart began to pound; my eyes flew to the face of the man who carried it.... It was Turner Moale.

I had a curiously gone feeling, as if the earth had dropped from under me. Turner Moale! walking out of the vestiare as if he owned all Monte Carlo! He was clad in a Springtime symphony of greys; hat, tie, suit, spats; with yellow gloves and a yellow carnation in his buttonhole. Mme. Storey dropped her umbrella on the floor with a clatter, and the chief of detectives appeared from his place of concealment.

"Lady Wedderminster!" cried Moale gaily. "You *are* astir early! And going to play at the Casino too!"

"Chief!" said Mme. Storey a little grimly. "There is your man!"

That unhappy official turned as pale as paper. "But, Madame!" he protested, "Surely there is a mistake. Monsieur Turner Moale is one of our most prominent citizens!"

"Oh, quite!" said Mme. Storey. "But in that bag you will find the half million francs that were stolen from me last night."

The man's aplomb was perfect. He never turned a hair. "Why, Lady Wedderminster, what is the matter?" he asked, laughing. "You appear to be making a charge against me. How odd!"

"Monsieur, this lady is Madame Rosika Storey," said the shaken chief.

This was a facer for Moale. The moment he was told who she was, he recognised her. He took it on the chin. "So it is!" he cried gaily. "But what has it got to do with me, Monsieur?"

"Look in the bag," suggested Mme. Storey to the chief. "Here is a key. I found it in Marcel's room."

"Marcel's room!" repeated Moale sharply. His dark eyes rolled like those of a vicious horse.

"Marcel Durocher and the shock troops were arrested at Bruno's last night," she said dryly.

The chief took a look in the bag, and his hesitation vanished. He placed a hand on Turner Moale's shoulder.

"Remove your hand!" said Moale with an air of outraged dignity. The policeman obeyed. Moale instantly recovered his affability. "Let us not make a public scene," he said. "My car is here. Come to my house and we'll talk it over."

"I suggest the police station," said Mme. Storey.

Driving away in the car Moale suddenly dropped his pretence of innocence. "Lady, I salute you!" he said in his gay manner. "How did you come to pick on me?"

Mme. Storey loves a good loser. "Have a cigarette," she said. "I suspected you because I couldn't figure out where a

retired actor had found the money to entertain on such a princely scale."

"You are marvellous!" he cried—but all the bravado had gone out of him. Suddenly he looked shrunken and old. I couldn't help but feel a kind of regret. It was like witnessing the destruction of a unique work of art.

Meanwhile Charlie had been sent to sit on the terrace, where he was told to read the little white book. It was the agreed signal between the gigolos. One by one they approached the reader. He sent them to Marcel's room on the pretext that they were to receive instructions there. Each one was arrested there as he came. Thus the whole bunch was rounded up in the course of the day. There was no evidence against these handsome good-for-nothings, and they were merely sent out of the principality with a warning not to return.

Mrs. Rudd likewise escaped punishment, though she was certainly an accomplice of Moale's. It seemed that her wealthy husband kept too tight a hand on the purse strings. She presently ran away with a more open-handed man, and old Amos married again.

When the trial came on, Marcel Durocher gave evidence against his associates. The three men who were arrested with him at Bruno's were the same three who had assisted at the murder of Raoul d'Aymara. Marcel related his dealings with Turner Moale in detail. He swore that, until the moment that he was brought face to face with Moale in court, he had never laid eyes on him, and didn't know who he was.

Moale was sent to prison for life—not a long term in his case; Marcel got twenty years, and the three others lesser sentences.

As for Charlie Raines, having had the adventure of his life, he was perfectly content to sail for home and take a job in the old man's stove factory. From Cherbourg he sent me a post-card with a spirited sketch of himself balancing a kitchen stove on the tip of his nose. Underneath he had written: "Ex-gigolo juggling junk!"

THE SCENT OF ALMONDS

1

General Southam, the President of the Alleghany System, was waiting for Madame Storey and me on the wharf at Stockmar, Georgia. Tall, grey and distinguished, he looked the part of the great tycoon as few of them do. Such a man doesn't give much away in his face, but I could see a look of strain and anxiety there that suggested we had difficult work ahead of us.

He and my employer were old friends and at the sight of her his grim face lighted up. "Rosika, you take a man's breath away!" he said. "How can I talk seriously to you?"

Mme. Storey filled her lungs with the balmy breath of the sea. "It is actually Spring down here," she said smiling. "Must you be serious?"

The shadow came back into his face. "I must," he said.

He had a super-super-motor-boat lying alongside the wharf that was good for sixty miles an hour or something preposterous, and we set off in it with a shattering roar. General Southam jumped up and waved his arms at the operator.

"I told you I wanted to go back slowly," he said when he could make himself heard. "I'll let you know when to open her up."

The man throttled down his engine with rather a sulky air, because naturally he wanted to show off his boat to the beautiful lady. Then we could hear ourselves talk. We were seated side by side in the stern; Mme. Storey in the middle.

"This will be our only chance to talk together privately," said General Southam. "The clubhouse is like a goldfish bowl. And of course none of them must suspect that you are here for any but purely social reasons. Miss Brickley must be introduced not as your secretary but your friend."

Mme. Storey lit a cigarette. "Well, what *am* I here for?" she asked smiling.

"It has nothing to do with crime."

"Good!" she exclaimed. "Ever since I hung out my shingle as a practising psychologist I've been waiting for somebody to engage me to straighten out the human tangles that result in crimes. But they always call me in after the crime has been committed." She smiled in my direction. "Bella and I are sick of crime."

General Southam looked at her startled. "Oh, not crime," he said quickly. "But you'll find your tangle waiting for you over yonder," he grimly added, waving his hand to indicate Mickle Island lying like a cloud on the sea outside.

After a silence he suddenly asked, "Do you know Win Bucknall?"

"I've heard of him," said Mme. Storey.

"A very remarkable fellow. Already at thirty-two he's vice-president in charge of operations on the Alleghany, and everybody regards him as my eventual successor. And he's more than a mere railway executive. He has everything. Like most men of capacity he's extraordinarily attractive to women."

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey dryly.

"In New York I often have him at my house," the General went on, "so that we can discuss the affairs of the road in quiet. I never thought of the danger, but ... well it has happened." He spread out his hands rather piteously. "My girl ... my Elsie ... nobody would ever guess it but I know. A reticent child—she's only eighteen, you know, and, I am afraid, one of the desperate quiet natures that only ... only once you know. Once and for all time...."

The General stopped and blew his nose as a cover for his feelings. Presently he went on more firmly, "In New York Win, with his crowding engagements and with all the lovely ladies setting their caps at him, scarcely noticed my girl. So I laid my harmless little plot. I asked him to join us here at the Island on the pretext that it was necessary for us to formulate a programme of economy for the road. I trusted to the influences of Spring in these lovely surroundings...." He stopped again.

"Didn't it work out?" asked Mme. Storey.

"It started off all right. It was late in the season and the other members drifted north to Pinehurst and White Sulphur, leaving us alone at the club. Win was struck and struck hard. It was delightful to see him suddenly becoming aware of my girl, and paying his court. And to see the shine in her eyes that she concealed so well. After having planned it all you can understand how happy it made me. And then that damned woman turned up!"

"What woman?"

"Laila Deane."

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey, but in a different tone from before.

"A week ago she came with her father," the General resumed; "you know, he's Leavitt O'Malley, the celebrated criminal lawyer. He's a member of the Mickle Island Club, and of course they have as much right here as I have. She is obviously in pursuit of Win Bucknall. I don't know what there may have been between them, but everything for us is spoiled now. Win is a changed man. And when I see my little girl's bleak face and her determination to show the World that she doesn't care, I ... I ... well I can't tell you!" He turned away his head.

"There's something about that woman," he went on in a low savage voice, "something that appeals to what is base in us. I've told you how it is with Win. He seems to be enslaved. I feel it myself. I am attracted and repelled. By God! I can understand how a man might..." He suddenly became ashamed of his violence and tried to pass it off. "Well, never mind." But it broke out again. "Even Hal, my boy," he cried in a shaking voice, "sixteen years old. I have caught him looking at her in a way that made me shiver."

"I know the woman," said Mme. Storey quietly.

He put his hand gratefully over hers. "I knew you'd understand. What could I do by myself? I have no wife to back me up. I was helpless in such a situation, yet I couldn't stand by and see my child's happiness wrecked. So I sent for you."

"But what can I do?" she said, smiling.

"Get rid of this woman! Get her away from here!"

"But how?"

"The only thing I can suggest is money. Both Mrs. Deane and her father are recklessly extravagant. She gets nothing from either of her former husbands. O'Malley makes great sums, but spends it faster than it comes in. He can't give her anything. Buy her off. I put no limit on the figure."

"Have you considered the difficulties?" she asked gravely.

"I know the difficulties," he answered, "but I know you too."

"I'll do my best," she said simply, "but I must warn you that success or failure depends on a factor that is entirely out of my control."

"What's that?"

"How deeply is Laila Deane in love with Win Bucknall."

"Love! Pah!" cried the General disgustedly. "That woman has wrecked the lives of two good men that I know of. Such a harpy is incapable of love!"

"My dear man," said Mme. Storey, "no living woman is incapable of it."

2

The Mickle Island Club provided a sub-tropical paradise for its millionaire members. All the most expensive amusements known to mankind were to be had there. The clubhouse was built in the style of an old plantation house with wide verandas and spreading wings. It stood in the middle of clipped lawns shaded by venerable live oaks hung with moss. Farther off was the near jungle, lavishly stocked with game.

Inside, the clubhouse was a dream of casual luxury—roughing it in luxury, if you get the idea. Mme. Storey and I

were given chintz-upholstered bedrooms and sitting-rooms at the end of one wing. Carpets as springy as turf under foot; corpulent overstuffed chairs filled with cushions; beds that received you with a benediction. All this must have had a double charm after a strenuous day's hunting in the jungle, or tussles with big fish at sea.

But there was little happiness or ease amongst the members then stopping at the club. Nor did they take advantage of the hunting and fishing—too busy watching each other apparently. You could feel the strain in every one of them.

While I was changing into sports clothes in my room I heard somebody moving about on the other side of the wall. Suddenly the door from the hall into the next room was opened and a young voice exclaimed in a tone of horror, "Elsie!" There was a sharp low-voiced exchange of speech of which I could make out nothing; then the sound of a slight struggle followed by a soft burst of weeping very painful to hear. Somebody ran away down the hall. I looked out of my door and saw the back of a girlish figure that I knew must be that of Elsie Southam. There were no further sounds from the next room.

A moment or two later Mme. Storey joined me, and I told her what I had overheard. She listened without comment. When we started down the hall the door of the room next to mine was open and we saw the pale and agitated figure of a young boy standing inside. A handsome blonde boy just on the threshold of manhood. There was a look of agonised indecision about him. His effort to conceal it at the sight of us was pathetic. He knew Mme. Storey as his father's friend, and attempted to welcome her cordially, but his tongue stumbled over the words, and the hand that he put out to her was shaking.

She made believe not to see anything amiss. "Well, Hal," she said, "it's a pleasant surprise to find you here."

"Yes ... yes..." he stuttered. "I had a touch of flu after the Christmas holidays, and Dad took me out of school. But I shall have to work like the dickens to make up for it later." He laughed nervously.

"Mickle Island ought to be a paradise for you," said Mme. Storey looking around the room. There was a long table on each side set out with shallow, glass-topped boxes containing butterflies, beetles, and other insects all impaled on pins and neatly labelled.

"Yes," he said with his nervous laugh. "There's plenty to keep me busy here."

"Hal is an entomologist," my employer went on, turning to me. "Oh, by the way, I must introduce you two." She brought me forward. "This is my friend, Bella Brickley, Hal. This is Hal Southam."

The touch of the boy's cold moist hand gave me the shivers.

Mme. Storey bent over a case of exquisite shimmering blue butterflies. Next to it were some lustrous coppery ones. "How lovely!" she murmured.

"Oh, the *Lycænidæ*, they're common enough ... common enough," he said. He pointed to a striped beauty in another case. "But here's a real find. One of the *Urania* moths. Nobody has ever reported it farther north than Cuba before."

"Its parents must have been mighty flyers," said Mme. Storey.

She went around from case to case asking questions. If her object was to put the boy at his ease it was not very successful. He talked glibly enough about the things that were so familiar to him, but the gone look in his blue eyes had no part in what he was saying. Such a sensitive and manly looking lad, you couldn't help but feel drawn to him.

Mme. Storey finally turned from the cases. "Well, I must go pay my devoirs to the others," she said lightly. "I'm so anxious to meet Mrs. Deane. I've heard such a lot about her."

The boy lowered his eyes with the instinctive secretiveness of the young. "Yes ... Mrs. Deane...." he said with a twisted smile.

"Is she as beautiful as they say?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Oh ... very beautiful," he answered in a smothered voice.

"And your sister," Mme. Storey went on. "I haven't seen her since her sub-deb days. I expect she is a good deal changed."

He turned his back on us and made believe to busy himself with one of the butterfly cases. The glass lid rattled when he raised it. He made no answer.

"We used to be such pals," said Mme. Storey.

"I hope you will be pals with her again," he said in a low voice without turning around. "She's at a disadvantage amongst us men. She needs a woman friend. Older, than herself."

"Doesn't she hit it off with Mrs. Deane?" asked Mme. Storey lightly. It seemed cruel to probe the boy like this, but it was obviously necessary.

"Not really," he muttered; "though she makes believe to."

"It's a shame they had to butt in here," said Mme. Storey.

The boy did not answer her directly, but I saw him pick up one of the long pins that he used for fixing his insects, and press it so hard into the wooden top of the table that it doubled under his fingers. In his mind he had somebody that he hated under that pin. Presently he said without turning around:

"You mustn't mind if Elsie seems to act rather strangely. Girls are funny. They seem to get all tied up with themselves. Fight with their best friends. It's such a rotten shame that people can't be natural and open when things go wrong."

"Oh, I shan't be put off with her highy-tighty ways," said Mme. Storey smiling. "It isn't so long since I was a girl like that myself. I know them."

Hal flashed a look of eager gratitude at her. "I think it's a darn good thing that you came," he muttered.

There was a slight sound at the door and, turning, I saw Elsie Southam standing there, a blonde and graceful girl, pathetically young and gallant in her white sports suit. She had got the better of her tears, and was glancing suspiciously from one to another of us as if she guessed that we were talking about her. When she found herself under observation her eyes became bright and glassy, and an artificial smile fixed itself on her face. She ran effusively to Mme. Storey.

"Darling Rosika!" she cried, embracing her. "How perfectly ripping to have you here!" She rattled on desperately, as if determined to prevent one simple natural word from being spoken. "What a good time we shall have! There's so much to do here. Tennis, golf, swimming, riding. And do you hunt, Rosika? My dear, I've become a really good shot. Isn't it thrilling?"

My employer was not deceived by all this. Her look was tender as she flung an arm around the unhappy girl, and pressed her close. "I'm afraid I'm not much of a sportswoman," she said, laughing. "What I like is to sit down in the sun and invite my soul."

Elsie petulantly drew herself away. "Oh, talk!" she said with a toss of her blonde head. "That gets you nowhere."

"But you and I have got such a lot of lost time to make up," Mme. Storey protested good-humouredly. "Two whole years. We'll have to start and make friends all over again."

A look of fear came into the girl's eyes very painful to see. She felt that if she let herself go she would break down altogether. She rattled away like a savage beating the tom-tom to scare off evil spirits.

"We'll go fishing right after lunch. The guides say that conditions will be exactly right this afternoon. Supper on the

beach when we come back. The negro servants have got up a quartette. They sing divinely. Or we'll dance if you'd rather..."

"Elsie...!" said Mme. Storey softly.

The girl whirled away. "Come on! The men are waiting for us in the lounge."

3

We walked down the corridor together. The lounge was an immense low-ceilinged room in the centre of the building finished in a make-believe rough style and decorated in brown and burnt orange. There was a row of French windows open to the sea breeze, and a wide shallow stairway starting up at the back and dividing to the right and left half-way up.

When we reached the two men Elsie was clinging to Mme. Storey's arm, and chattering away. General Southam's face cleared when he saw it. Being only a man he could not see that the girl's false friendliness would be harder for my employer to break down than open hostility. The boy Hal hung on the outskirts of the group with a harassed, downcast face.

I looked with interest at the famous Win Bucknall. He was quite as good-looking as people said, but there was nothing of the male beauty about him. A fine hard, masculine type, with strength and capacity in every line of him. He looked older than his years. His flannels and sport shirt open at the throat set off his fine physique to advantage. But things were clearly all askew with him too. He looked savage.

Elsie made the introductions in a gay and slightly too-high-pitched voice. "This is our old friend Rosika Storey. Everybody knows her, so you had better be careful how you behave now. Nothing escapes her. And this is Miss Brickley. Allow me to present Win Bucknall the nonpareil."

The man was polite and no more. However, Mme. Storey was quite undisturbed. "So this is what you're like!" she said. "A sort of myth has grown up around you, you know, and I was anxious to see for myself."

"A perfect paragon!" cried Elsie with a brittle laugh. "So handsome and clever and all that. Take it from me, he far exceeds all the stories that are told about him."

We all laughed, but the girl's fleeing words made us feel uncomfortable. I saw Win's dark face flush. He started to make a sharp retort, but held it in. His shoulders rose slightly as much as to say: Oh, what the hell! or: I reckon it's coming to me. He looked stony, but if I am any judge of human nature he was as sore and hurt inside as the girl. A bad business all around.

General Southam endeavoured to pour a little oil on the troubled waters by suggesting that we walk about the grounds until lunch time. "The azaleas are at the top of their form," he said.

The perverse girl hung back. Flinging herself in a chair before the empty fireplace, she said: "You go along. I'm tired."

Hal looked at her with rising fear in his eyes. "I ... I won't go," he stammered in embarrassed boy fashion. "I have some specimens to fix."

Brother and sister exchanged a look that startled me. Almost hatred you would have said, yet Mme. Storey had told me they were devoted to each other. It was a kind of silent duel that they were fighting. Hal, boy though he was, got the upper hand, and it was the girl's eyes that trailed away while her fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the arm of the chair.

The other four of us started rather awkwardly for the door. Nobody wanted to go and look at flowers. Elsie, still

with the object of wounding, called out:

"You'd better wait for Laila. She'll be down directly. I'm sure poor Win doesn't want to be dragged away."

Win turned paler than before, and his jaw muscles stood out as he clenched his teeth in helpless anger. He said nothing. The forms of politeness were too strong for us. We couldn't very well say: Damn Laila! so we stood around waiting for her, and making banal conversation.

In a little while a drawling voice with a hint of mockery floated down: "Hallo everybody!"

I looked up and there she stood on the landing of the stairs, dark, slender and perfect in a dress of pale amber. The first sight of her took my breath away rather. She was so beautiful that your first impulse was simply to adore. Later you perceived that this perfect shell was entirely soulless, but it was too late then; she had you with her beauty.

That woman was bad right through, and she didn't care whether you knew it or not. She trusted to her beauty to get by. In the minds of very simple people there is a touching belief that beauty must be good, and Laila Deane never lacked for friends. Throughout her most disreputable adventures she always found defenders—but she ruined everybody with whom she came in contact.

She came down the rest of the stairs very slowly a step at a time in order to give us plenty of time to admire her. Her dark hair had red lights in it, and her brown eyes seemed to be flecked with fire also. Her skin—I have never seen such a skin!—had the lovely half-translucent quality of alabaster. Such a woman doesn't need make-up, and all she used—or I should say all that *showed* was her scarlet lip-stick.

Elsie was nearest the foot of the stairs. She did not get up from her chair. Laila leaned over the back of it, and drew her hand caressingly over the blonde curls. "Morning, darling," she murmured with hateful sweetness.

From the depths of the chair Elsie answered her: "Morning darling." What else could she do? I was glad that I could not see the girl's face at that moment.

Hal stood near. Laila passed him with an infinitely seductive sidelong glance and murmured: "Morning, handsome boy."

The boy turned red and then very pale again, and I saw the look in his eyes that had so scared his father. He could have killed the woman with voluptuous pleasure. He didn't understand his own feelings.

Laila floated in our direction. She did not look at Win, nor speak to him. She slipped her arm under General Southam's, and pressing it, turned up her smiling seductive face. "How is my dear General this morning?"

He changed colour, but I could see that he returned the pressure of her arm. He retained it under his own. She had put her spell on him too. He answered, conscious that he must appear a fool under Mme. Storey's cool and smiling gaze:

"I don't need to ask how you are."

He introduced us to the beauty. The moment she and Mme. Storey came together the delicate sparks began to fly. It was pretty to watch. In my employer the all-conquering Laila met just a little more than her match.

"Madame Storey!" she gushed. "This is a pleasure! I have heard so much about you."

"And I about you!" returned my employer with the frank smile that is such a dangerous trap for fools.

Laila shrugged delicately. "Ah, I am afraid people say horrid things about me," she murmured.

"Oh, quite!" said Mme. Storey blandly.

This was not what Laila expected. She looked blank.

"You don't care, do you?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Oh, certainly not!" said Laila. "Gossip only reflects on the gossipers."

"Quite!" said Mme. Storey. "What I have always admired in you was the frank and fearless way in which you set out to live your own life, regardless of other people."

Laila smiled thinly. She who liked to pose as the misunderstood, did not relish being cast in the role of the hearty sinner. "You mustn't believe all you hear about me," she murmured.

"Don't tell me I am mistaken in you," protested Mme. Storey with pretended concern. "Why, you are one of my heroines. I do so admire the way you get by with it. I never can."

"Get by with what?" asked Laila a little waspishly.

"Sin," said Mme. Storey with a delightful smile.

"What do you mean by sin?" demanded Laila.

"Oh, all the things that timid people would like to do, and don't dare," answered Mme. Storey with a wave of the hand.

"You are so witty!" murmured Laila with the over-sweet smile. "I am too stupid to match you."

Mme. Storey's clear gaze dwelt on her levelly. "You are not stupid at all," she said. "You know exactly what you are doing."

Laila did not answer her. Instead she pressed the General's arm and smiled up at him. "What's the programme for this morning?" she asked.

"We were just starting out to see the azaleas," he said. "Will you come?"

"Delighted!"

When Elsie heard that she jumped up with perfect inconsistency, saying: "I'll come too." She came towards us with an unhappy, half-childlike self-conscious air that made my heart ache.

"Good!" said her father.

At that the devil came into Laila. I could see it in the corners of her eyes. "Oh, I'm sorry!" she said. "I forgot that I had a date with Win to go walking before lunch."

Win started. I am certain that that was the first time he had heard of any such date. Indeed the protest was on his lips when Laila shut him off by saying:

"You know, we fixed it up while we were dancing last night."

"We can all go together," he said sullenly.

"No," said Laila with slight emphasis. "There is something particular that I want to tell you. We can join the others later."

There was a pause, and I had a sort of breathless sense that the whole situation depended on the outcome. Laila was looking at Win with a peculiar smile—testing out her power over him. Elsie's eyes were lowered. I wondered why Mme. Storey didn't take a hand in the matter, but she had her own notions as to how it should be handled. There was a struggle going on in Win; he was no weakling; but the woman's hooks were sunk in him.

"Oh, all right," he said with a sullen shrug.

The two of them went off together through the rear door of the lounge.

Elsie, without a word, turned and walked away towards the corridor, holding her head high, game to the end. But I guessed that as soon as she was out of sight there would be a piteous breakdown. Hal followed her down the corridor.

The other three of us turned out through the front door. The azaleas had become poisonous to us.

"Oh, damn him!" muttered General Southam savagely. "He isn't worth it!"

"Can you blame him—honestly?" asked Mme. Storey quietly.

"No!" he said miserably. "I suppose if she had crooked her finger to me I would have gone, old as I am! That woman is a devil!"

"She hasn't got him yet," said Mme. Storey cheerfully. "Over-confidence will destroy her in the end."

4

We did not linger long over the azaleas. Mme. Storey pleaded that the long railway journey had given her a headache, and we returned to our rooms. But I had no headache, and I couldn't rest quiet there. It was too painful to have to sit by and watch young lives being wrecked without doing something about it. But what could you do? In such matters any interference from the outside only hastens the catastrophe.

My room had a French window opening on the encircling porch, and I went out that way and dropped over the rail to the grass without anybody seeing me. Notwithstanding the general cussedness of the human situation I couldn't help but take pleasure in the beautiful surroundings. April on the Georgia island was like June in the North. There were flowers everywhere.

I struck back between the great oaks to the golf course, and climbed the grassy slopes to a point where I could obtain a wide view of the sea on three sides of the island. It was indescribably lovely; a sky of turquoise with clouds around the horizon like big spoonfuls of charlotte russe; the green island with its wide beach of yellow sand, and the sea, dark as sapphire with a few motor-boats to give the scale of its immensity.

Behind me the view was cut off by dark woods running right across the island. This was the shooting preserve. I still had more than an hour before lunch, and I continued my walk in that direction. It proved to be a virgin forest untouched by axe or fire, and the greenish twilight under the tall trees was very pleasant after the brilliant sunshine. I had never seen such a forest. Great trees of many varieties that I could not name all linked together with creepers and thorns. The palmettoes which crowded every interstice gave it a tropical character. I believe that these dense tracts are called hammocks in the South.

I was following a wide and well-beaten path in the brown earth, one of the bridle paths, I assumed. It twisted so much I could never see more than a few yards ahead. Occasionally I saw birds flitting silently across the openings; no song-birds. The silence was different from any silence that I had ever known before; thrilling.

It can be imagined then what a start I got when I suddenly heard human voices in the hammock. And what is more, voices charged with passionate emotion. The sound set my own heart beating fast. I stopped short in the path, of two minds whether to turn home, or go forward. The voices died away. I went on, and soon I could hear them again. Suddenly I recognised them as the voices of Win Bucknall and Laila Deane, and I pulled up again blushing all over.

I was in a difficult position. Every natural instinct in me revolted against playing the eavesdropper, but on the other hand it was clearly my duty to learn everything I could about the situation and report it to Mme. Storey. After a struggle

with myself, I went on.

For awhile I did not come closer to the voices, and I judged that they must be walking along ahead of me in the same direction. I could not make out what they said. To my surprise, the man's voice was angry, the woman's pleading. This seemed to put a new aspect on the situation. It sounded as if Laila was crying. I could scarcely believe it.

Occasionally a word or two reached me. Win cried out harshly: "That's not love!" Evidently she had asked him a question and he answered hopelessly: "God knows!" Then I got a suggestion of the man's low, savage cursing and Laila's sobs. They were a little *too* heart-breaking; I suspected that it was all put on. Later he said desperately: "What good would it do?" And Laila replied: "You are throwing me to the wolves!" How I wanted to warn him that she was fooling him!

In the end I heard him say in reserved tones: "All right, I will, I will; but ..." He lowered his voice and the rest was lost. But Laila said—and her voice was purring with satisfaction now: "I'll win you yet!"

I increased my pace in order to get a little closer. At the same moment they must have turned around and started back, for we came face to face at a bend in the path. It was an awkward moment. The man passed me with sullen indifference. His dark face was drawn and streaked, all white around the lips, a terrible sight. Laila was smiling until she saw me. She stopped and demanded in a shrill voice:

"What are you doing here?"

"The same as you," I retorted, "taking a walk."

Her face worked with rage like a child's. "You lie!" she cried. "You're trying to spy on me! A dirty little hired spy, that's what you are! Yes, and your high-toned mistress, that goes for her, too! Spies! Snoopers! How dare you put yourselves on an equality with decent people. Go back amongst your own kind. Yes, and you can tell her I said so, too!"

"What are you afraid of?" I asked quietly.

"Afraid!" She gathered herself up for a fresh torrent of abuse, but Win shut it off by saying contemptuously:

"Come on, Laila! You're making a fool of yourself."

I waited to let them get out of the way. When I came out of the woods they were nowhere to be seen. I hurried back to the club-house, and returning to my room in the same manner that I left it, immediately went to my employer and told her what I had heard.

She listened with an inscrutable smile. "Times have changed, my Bella," she said coolly. "She will find it rather more difficult to get away with that sort of thing nowadays."

That was all I could get out of her.

A few minutes later we were all gathered in the lounge again, waiting for the luncheon gong. That is to say, all except Laila. Wonderful are the usages of good form. Everybody had ironed out his face, and there was an exchange of laughing informal talk back and forth. A stranger could never have guessed the existence of the dark and painful passions that distracted our little company.

I now saw Leavitt O'Malley for the first time. A tall, well-turned-out man, he was very vain in his youthful appearance, and over-played it somewhat. He was much too sure of himself for my taste; I disliked him at sight. Even in social conversation he fixed you with the overbearing eye of a cross-examiner. He did most of the talking.

"Eloquence alone is not sufficient to win a man success at the bar," he said. "You have to study your judges. When I throw a party I always make a point of asking a judge or two—you never know when you may have a case before them; and I take care to put the prettiest women beside them. That's how I throw my bread on the waters." He laughed and looked around for applause. Such was O'Malley's style.

Win Bucknall was seated on the other side of the lounge making believe to read a newspaper with a hard blank look. In front of the fireplace Elsie and Hal were each perched on an arm of the same chair. Both looking spent and done, they bore an extraordinary resemblance to each other, almost as if they had been twins. I judged from their attitude that they had made up after their quarrel. Elsie was now wearing a more formal dress of crisp green organdie. It was fastened at the breast with an old-fashioned enamel brooch; white violets on a black ground.

In a little while Laila came running down the stairs all life and gaiety. Like most of her actions it was a carefully worked up stage effect. She had changed to a smart tweed travelling suit with a rakish little brown hat and a green lizard skin handbag under her arm. She went direct to Win and leaned over him caressingly.

"Put up your paper, stupid," she said, and then in a tone of surprise: "Why, you haven't changed yet."

Her proprietary air was something new, and nobody in the room missed it. Win lowered the paper, and smiled stiffly. He had the look of a man who had steeled himself for the end. "Won't take me ten minutes to get ready," he said.

The room became tense. I think everybody knew what was coming. My heart sunk like a stone.

"Have you told them?" she asked.

"No," said Win doggedly.

She faced us with a pretty air of confusion. "I ... we ... that is, Win and I have an announcement to make," she said, and hesitated, tracing the pattern of the rug with her pump. "We have decided to get married."

Nobody said anything.

"I hope you won't think us rude if we run away from you directly after lunch," Laila went on. "We want to get in a few days honeymoon before Win has to go back to the office."

The ghastly silence persisted. At such a moment one's eye is always caught by some perfectly insignificant thing. All I was aware of was that the stair runner was pulled up on the fourth step from the bottom. Somebody will trip over it, I kept saying idiotically to myself; somebody will trip over it.

It was Mme. Storey who broke the silence. She was afraid of an explosion from General Southam whose face was livid with rage. "Congratulations, both of you!" she sang out. "May you live long and prosper!"

In the first moment I could not bear to look at Elsie. But I heard her cross the room, and my eyes were dragged after her. It was the bravest thing I ever saw. She was as pale as paper, but her chin was up; eyes and lips smiling. She offered her hand to Laila and Win in turn.

"I wish you the greatest happiness, both of you," she said without a tremor.

Laila took her hand with a hateful smile; Win like a wooden man. The scene was too much for young Hal. He slunk out through the corridor. The gong sounded for lunch.

5

The meal that followed was the worst thing I ever had to sit through. The forms of friendly talk were kept up. I got so nervous I scarcely knew what I was saying. Even Laila could not really have enjoyed her triumph. Win kept his face all right, but once or twice I caught him glancing at his bride with a pure cold hatred that made me feel a little sick with apprehension.

The dining-room was a pleasant apartment back of the lounge, semicircular in shape, with a porch outside overlooking the golf course. All the tables had been cleared out except the one round one for eight which was pushed up

close to the windows in the middle. We were waited on by two perfectly-trained coloured men. What we ate I never could tell you. It seemed to go on for ever.

The seating arrangement, which was accidental, could not have been worse. Mme. Storey was facing the windows, with Win, Laila, and Leavitt O'Malley on her right; General Southam, Elsie and Hal on her left. I was seated opposite my employer. This left the two parties to the quarrel as you might say, lined up and facing each other.

Laila was full of her plans. "We'll hire a car in Stockmar"; she said. "It will be quicker than the train. If Win drives, we can catch the 'Royal Palm' at Middlebridge to-night. Win will have it flagged. On Wednesday morning we will go down to the Municipal Building, get our licence and be married by an Alderman on the spot just like any runaway pair."

"How romantic!" said Mme. Storey dryly.

"I'm afraid you're cynical," said Laila sweetly.

"About some things I am."

"About getting married, for instance?"

"I would never set up my opinion against yours," said Mme. Storey.

"Perhaps you consider marriage an unnecessary formula," said Laila.

"Oh, no," returned my employer blandly; "marriage is a woman's guaranty of alimony."

As was natural, the men did not play up to the situation as well as the women. Excepting Leavitt O'Malley, who had no particular stake in it, they were silent and surly throughout the meal. General Southam kept his eyes down. When he raised them they blazed with anger at Win. Hal looked in his plate too, only occasionally glancing at his sister as if in fear that she would break down.

Elsie was wonderful. She kept her head up, smiling; watched to see that every one was well served, and joined in the talk with perfect naturalness. God knows what it cost her. Her smile was the most tragic thing I have ever seen on a young face. However, most people do not look below the surface of things. The fact that she smiled was enough for them.

Laila had a horrible fascination for me. She was like a great actress glowing with emotion, and yet mistress of herself all the time. It was not love which lifted her out of herself, but hatred. I suppose women had always hated Laila, and she returned the feeling with interest. She hated us all three. It was for the benefit of us women that she paraded her triumph.

It is difficult for me to write of the frightful conclusion of that meal. As I approach it, my heart begins to beat suffocatingly again. When the waiters brought in the dessert and the coffee machine Elsie dismissed them. "We'll ring if we want anything," she said. They went out and we did not see them again.

Dessert consisted of some sort of iced cup, and a silver basket of little cakes covered with a thick icing of marzipan. There was some talk about the cakes, I remember.

"These are perfectly delicious," said Laila, as her beautiful white teeth met through one of them.

"Yes, aren't they?" said Elsie. "Since the chef learned that we liked them, he's been sending them every day."

"I never could get too much marzipan," said Laila. "I love almonds in every form."

"It's wonderful what a woman's stomach will stand!" said Mr. O'Malley jocosely. "Almond paste on top of a full meal! The cakes alone would be sufficient to keep a strong man going!"

"Oh, dry up, Father!" said Laila, finishing her cake.

I am fond of marzipan myself (or I was until that day) and I nibbled at one of the cakes, but it seemed to choke me.

At this moment Elsie happened to glance out of the window. "Look!" she said. "What sort of birds are those?"

"Woodcock, by Jove!" said Mr. O'Malley.

One by one we rose and went out through the French windows to the porch. A covey of woodcock on their way North, attracted by the solitude and the silence surrounding the club house, had lighted in the grass, where they were busily looking for worms. One rarely sees this plump and handsome little bird, and we were all interested. Only Laila I remember seemed bored. She was the last to come out on the porch, and instead of looking at the birds she applied fresh lip-stick.

While we watched Elsie looked back into the dining-room. "Oh, the coffee is boiling over!" she exclaimed, and ran in.

Her cry alarmed the birds and they took to flight. We watched them out of sight, and then straggled back into the dining-room. Some of us sat down again; some remained standing. You can picture the scene. Lunch was over; the napkins thrown down anyhow; chairs pushed back. Elsie was busy with the coffee machine. There was a cake on her plate. I remembered having seen it there when we went out. Mr. O'Malley was standing back of his place. He took out his cigar case, and moved around offering it to the other men. General Southam accepted one, the other two declined. Mme. Storey offered her cigarette case to Laila.

Laila shook her head smiling. "Not yet," she said. "I'm going to eat another though I die for it!" She indicated the cake which was on her plate.

And then it happened ... with the awful suddenness of a hammer-stroke. Still smiling, she picked up the cake daintily between thumb and forefinger and conveyed it to her mouth. A little cube two inches long, covered with green icing. Her white teeth met through the middle and she crunched it once with just the expression of a child who pops a sweet into its mouth.

And then an awful look came over her face. She clutched her throat; she had no time to spit the stuff out, no time even for a cry. She went dead just as quick as that. Dead without a sound. Toppled over sideways in her chair and crashed to the floor. Already when the men reached her side that beautiful quick flesh was clay. Dead! Dead! Dead! The suddenness and the silence of it was awful!

I must pass quickly over the next few minutes. Most of us were reduced to a state of complete hysteria, even some of the men. Such scenes are not pleasant to remember.

Mme. Storey, with a face as white and set as marble, took command of the situation. No man challenged her right. When the servants ran in, attracted by the cries, she sent the first to the one telephone to summon a doctor (though we all knew that it was too late for a doctor) and the second man to the landing stage to send off the speedboat to fetch him back; since the club boat could make the round trip in less time than anything else could go one way.

Mr. O'Malley, quite beside himself with rage and grief, insisted that the police should be sent for also.

"Better wait," said Mme. Storey quietly. "The speedboat can go right back for the police if it is necessary."

She then ordered the French windows closed, and forbade any of us to leave the room. The servants were kept out.

We sat and stood about the room, blind with horror. Mme. Storey went down on her knees beside the dead woman and smelt her lips. The half of the cake that Laila had not eaten lay on the floor. Mme. Storey smelt that also, and put it

aside on a plate. She smelt the cakes remaining in the basket.

"She was poisoned with hydrocyanic acid," my employer said gravely, "or prussic acid as most people call it. It smells like almonds, consequently Laila could not detect it on the icing of the cake. The other cakes have not been poisoned."

"Poison! Poison!" cried O'Malley, his voice rising almost to a scream. He whirled on the Southams. "One of you did this!" he shouted. "You all hated her! By God! you shall burn for this however high-placed you are!"

General Southam's face turned dark with anger. "Speak to me!" he cried. "Leave my children out of it!"

O'Malley was incapable of listening to him. "Prussic acid!" he cried. "It couldn't have been got here on the island. It was brought here for this purpose."

"You fool!" returned Southam, "when we came we didn't know you were going to follow us!"

"No, but you've been to the mainland since we got here!" snarled O'Malley.

They seemed to be ready to fly at each other's throats. Mme. Storey stepped between them with her cold, self-possessed air. "Gentlemen, if you please!" she said in a voice that compelled them to listen. "If this comes to a brawl, the evidence will be destroyed, and the murderer will go free."

Both men quieted down. Mme. Storey addressed herself to O'Malley. "Your feelings are excusable," she said, "but you must know that you are not in a fit state to investigate this matter. Will you leave it to me?"

"You hated her too," he muttered.

"You shall see for yourself whether I can be fair or not," she said coolly.

He turned away with a gesture signifying acquiescence.

Meanwhile the body was still lying huddled on the floor just as it had fallen. The table had been pushed a foot or so to one side and all could see what lay there. To all of us there seemed to be a kind of desecration in leaving the poor body exposed and untended. O'Malley groaned when his eyes fell on it.

"Couldn't we pick her up and carry her to her room?" he asked.

Mme. Storey shook her head gravely. "Not until the police have viewed her.... But we could put some of the chairs together, and lay her upon them," she added.

This was done. The girl's face was shockingly distorted. "Oh, how awful she looks! How awful!" groaned her father.

Mme. Storey covered the face with her handkerchief. "That will pass," she said quietly. "Death is kind."

"Now as to the poison!" cried O'Malley turning to the Southams.

"Please," said Mme. Storey. "You agreed to leave this to me.... I already know where the poison came from," she added gravely.

Several voices cried: "Where? ... Where?"

Mme. Storey looked with infinite sadness at the boy, Hal. "You tell them," she said.

The boy's endurance snapped. He clapped his hands over his face and dropped on a chair choking and sobbing. "Yes, I had it—I had it!" he stammered. "Oh God, this is too awful! I can't bear it!"

It was an ugly shock to the poor father. "Hal had it!" he said hoarsely. "*Hal!* You!" He turned in confusion to Mme. Storey. "How did you know Hal had it?"

"I saw the bottle of hydrocyanic acid on his table when I was looking at the butterflies this morning."

"What did you want it for?" General Southam demanded of Hal.

"To kill my specimens," faltered the boy. "It's the best thing. Everybody uses it."

"How did you get it?" cried the General. "Who helped you? Why didn't you come to me?"

"I thought you'd object."

"Who helped you to get it?"

"What does it matter?" stammered Hal. "It's all so long ago. It has nothing to do with this."

"Who helped you to get it?" persisted the General.

"I won't tell you."

Win spoke up unexpectedly. Win like the rest of us had been shocked almost into a stupor, but he evinced no grief at what had happened. He kept away from the dead body. He said now: "I helped him to get it, sir. I saw no harm in it. Hal has a genuinely scientific attitude towards his work."

"Anyhow Hal had it," put in O'Malley with cruel satisfaction. "And Hal was perfectly familiar with the properties of prussic acid. He knows how it paralyses the respiratory centres. As to the motive for the crime, that is obvious to all of us." He turned to my employer. "Need we look any further, Madame?"

She put him off with a gesture. "Bella, go fetch the bottle from Hal's room," she said to me.

The boy had managed to get control of himself again. "There's no use," he muttered. "It's not there now."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know. Somebody ... somebody carried it away."

O'Malley laughed hatefully. "That somebody was himself," he said. "Just before lunch when Laila made her announcement, I saw him go to his room. He got it then!"

"No! No!" stammered Hal. "It was already gone then."

"Stand up!" commanded Mme. Storey. "Hold your hands above your head."

My employer and I searched him thoroughly. The bottle was not upon him, nor anything else that could have carried part of the poison.

"Who took it from your room?" asked Mme. Storey.

"I don't know," he said with a ghastly face.

"You are lying," she said quietly. "Anybody could see it. Don't you see that you are making matters worse?"

"Do you think I did it?" he cried wildly.

"Well, did you?" asked Mme. Storey.

"No! No!" he cried. "I swear it!"

"Then who got the poison?"

"I don't know."

Win was sitting back from the table bowed over in his chair with his arms on his thighs. He raised his stony white face and said: "The kid is just trying to shield me. He brought me the bottle of poison himself shortly before lunch and asked me to put it in a safe place. It was too dangerous to be lying around, he said."

"Oh Win, why did you say anything?" the boy burst out.

"Easy!" warned the older man.

But Hal could not hold it in. "Win didn't do it!" he cried desperately. "He *couldn't* have done it! Win isn't afraid to face anything. Only a coward would kill by poison!"

A grim smile twisted the man's lips. "You're not helping me any, old fellow," he said.

"Nobody has accused Win of the crime," said Mme. Storey.

"Accuse Win!" cried O'Malley, staring in astonishment. "Why should anybody accuse Win? Win was in love with my girl. They were..." He suddenly pulled up. Something in Win's awful stillness raised a doubt in his mind. "You were in love with her, weren't you?" he cried.

Win made no answer. His dark eyes stared straight ahead of him, unseeing, haunted. It was answer enough.

"If you weren't in love with her what were you marrying her for?" demanded O'Malley.

No answer from Win. "For her sake," murmured Mme. Storey with a nod towards the body extended on the chairs, "you had better not push that line of questioning."

O'Malley passed a hand over his face. His debonair quality had gone. He suddenly looked his age. "Oh, my God!" he muttered. "Oh, my God!" Then he flushed with renewed rage. "You, too," he cried at Win. "All, all of you!" He swept out his arm. "All against her! You have betrayed her and killed her amongst you!"

When his violence had spent itself Mme. Storey resumed her questioning at the exact point where she had dropped it. "When Hal brought you the bottle of poison what did you do?" she asked Win.

"I did what he asked me to," Win replied woodenly. "I pressed in the cork as far as it would go and dropped the bottle in my bureau drawer. I hid it under the ties and socks."

"And it is there now?"

"So far as I know it is."

"Is your door locked?"

"No. I have never locked it."

"Where is your room?"

"It is number fourteen. First door on the right at the top of the stairs."

Mme. Storey looked at me. "Go and see, Bella."

I left the room. In the lounge the manager of the club and several of the upper servants were hanging about in a bad

state of nerves. Their eyes begged me for information as to what had happened, but of course I had to keep my mouth shut. I ran upstairs.

I may as well say at once that the bottle of poison was not where Win said he had put it. There were not so very many possible hiding-places in his room—nothing was locked up, and I searched them all. Nothing.

When I returned to the dining-room they were all sitting about unnaturally still like waxworks. The dead body extended on the chairs was no stiller. The last disclosures had brought a ghastly look into General Southam's handsome face. However, I was glad to see that he was sticking by his son. His hand rested on the boy's shoulder. The only movement in the room was the smoke rising from Mme. Storey's cigarette.

I made my report. Nobody appeared to be surprised.

Mme. Storey said to Win politely: "Will you permit us?"

He immediately stood up and raised his arms, and we searched him. We found nothing to the purpose. He sat down as woodenly as he had risen.

My employer then with a whispered word to me to watch that nobody moved from his place, set about searching the room. She had reduced the act of searching to a science. In her mind's eye she laid off the room into small squares, and finished with one before proceeding to the next. She did not find the bottle, nor any receptacle however small that might have conveyed a drop or two of the poison. She went out on the porch and searched there; and searched in the grass below the porch.

She returned to the room with empty hands, and lighting a fresh cigarette, paced back and forth. Her face gave nothing away, but I know her pretty well, and I could see that she was stumped at that moment. The cake must have been poisoned after it was brought in, of course, and the baffling question was, how had the poison been conveyed into the dining-room?

7

Mme. Storey and I searched the remaining members of the company, including the dead woman's father. He could have had no reason for poisoning his daughter so far as we knew, but there was a possibility that amidst the confusion at first the murderer might have slipped the poison receptacle into his pocket. However, we found nothing on any of them that could have been used for such a purpose.

We even searched the dead body and went through the contents of the odd, pretty little lizard skin bag that she carried. Nothing but what you would expect to find; handkerchief, purse, lip-stick, powder, etc. Nevertheless, from a slight change in Mme. Storey's expression afterwards, I judged that she now had at least a theory to work on.

She resumed her questioning of Win Bucknall. "What time was it when Hal brought the bottle of poison?"

"I cannot tell you exactly," he answered coolly. "It was after I got back from walking with..." He lost his self-possession for a moment, and his eyes bolted. "...with her," he added very low. "Hal was waiting in my room when I got back."

"Waiting in your room?"

"Nothing out of the way in that," said Win. "He often came to my room."

"Did you have any talk with him beyond what you have told me?"

"No." It was impossible to tell from Win's wooden face whether or not he was lying.

"After he had given you the bottle did he go right back to his room?"

"He left me. I don't know where he went."

"Did he appear to be upset about anything?"

"No."

"I happen to know from another source that he was very much upset," said Mme. Storey quietly.

Win shrugged unconcernedly. "I didn't notice anything," he said.

My employer tried another line. "Where was Laila's room in respect to yours?" she asked.

"Immediately across the hall."

"Have you been into her room any time to-day?"

"No," answered Win stolidly.

"Did she come into your room at any time to-day?"

"No."

"What did you do after Hal left you?"

"Tidied up and went down to the lounge."

"Was anybody there?"

"Yes. General Southam and Mr. O'Malley. Mr. O'Malley gave us a drink. His room is on the ground floor."

"Then who came?"

"After we had returned to the lounge Hal came in. Then a moment or two later Elsie; then you and Miss Brickley."

"Quite," said Mme. Storey. "And Laila was the last to join the party." She studied Win through slightly narrowed lids. "If you and Hal were on confidential terms," she said, "you must know what was upsetting the boy. Will you tell me?"

Win met her glance with eyes as stubborn and blank as agate. "I know nothing about it," he said.

Mme. Storey shrugged and turned towards Hal. Instantly the boy began to tremble. However, the question that he dreaded was not immediately forthcoming. "It was a four-ounce bottle as I remember," Mme. Storey said in an ordinary voice.

"No, three-ounce," he answered low.

"With a rubber cork?"

"Yes. The cork had a little glass rod which stuck down into the bottle."

"Quite. The label was turned towards the wall and I couldn't read it. What was on it?"

"The word 'Poison' in red letters, and the name of the acid."

"How long have you had it?"

"I got it before Christmas when I came home for the holidays."

"Had much of it been used?"

"Oh no. You couldn't tell that any had been used. The merest touch of the glass rod on the head of an insect was sufficient to kill it."

Mme. Storey's voice became gentle as she asked the next question. "Hal, if you'd had the bottle for four months why did you suddenly make up your mind this morning that it was too dangerous to be left lying around?"

A frantic terror appeared in the boy's eyes. He struggled to overcome it. "No ... no particular reason," he stammered. "I ... I was just afraid that the servants might be curious about it. You know if anybody sniffed at the bottle it would kill them."

"I know it," said Mme. Storey. "But why didn't you hide it yourself? Lock it up somewhere?"

"I don't know," faltered the boy. "I just thought it would be safer with Win."

"Ah, safer!" said Mme. Storey.

General Southam had been listening to this with growing mystification and horror. He could stand no more. "Rosika, what are you getting at?" he demanded angrily. "Are you trying to prove that my boy did it? Are you working for or against me?"

"Neither," she said. "We didn't foresee this. I am working for justice."

"Ah, you're just playing to the gallery!" he cried, angrily flinging away from the table. "No woman could resist it!"

Her eyes followed him, full of compassion. "I'm sorry," she said gently. But she turned back to the boy without relenting. "Hal," she said gravely, "I put it to you that the reason you had to get the bottle out of your room was because somebody had tried to get it there."

"No! No! No!" cried the boy desperately. "You are quite mistaken."

"I put it to you," Mme. Storey went on sternly, "that you came into your room this morning and found somebody with the bottle, and you only recovered it after a struggle."

"No! No!" he cried, hysterically pounding on the table. "It is not true!"

"It was your sister," said Mme. Storey.

"Oh, my God!" cried General Southam from the far side of the room. He clapped his hands to his head. The boy dropped his head to the table, weeping uncontrollably. "No! No! No!" he sobbed.

All the rest of us looked at Elsie. I cannot say that her expression changed at all. Well, she must have seen it coming for some time back. Her head was up; her white face betrayed no confusion—she had gone beyond that. She looked proud and indifferent like one who has passed beyond all human feeling. It was tragic to see in one so young.

"You had better tell the truth, Hal," she said quietly. "Everything has got to come out now."

"No! No!" he sobbed.

"If you won't, I must," said Elsie. She looked at Mme. Storey. "It is true that I tried to get the bottle of poison out of Hal's room this morning. He came in and took it away from me."

Leavitt O'Malley's face lighted up with savage triumph. "She did it!" he cried. "Laila won the man she wanted and she poisoned my girl! I knew it!"

"No!" cried the boy, raising his streaming face. "Elsie is incapable of such a thing! She couldn't even bear to see the insects killed with it!"

"I dare say!" said O'Malley with a harsh laugh. "You never know what these smooth young faces may hide!"

General Southam came forward scarcely able to speak. "Oh Elsie, this is awful ... awful," he groaned, letting his hand fall on her shoulder.

She put her hand over his. "Hush, Dad," she said evenly, "it is not what you think." She looked at Mme. Storey. "Since you have found out so much," she said, "I must tell you the rest. It was not for Laila that I wanted the poison. Such a thought never entered my head."

"What did you want it for?" asked Mme. Storey.

"For myself," said Elsie with her look of almost scornful indifference. "I'd had enough of the rotten show."

O'Malley laughed mockingly. "A likely story!" he said. "If you wanted it for yourself why didn't you swallow it when you had the bottle in your hand."

"I didn't want to be found there in Hal's room," said Elsie. "I wanted everybody to think that it was an accident. Hal had told me about this poison when he first got it, and I knew what it would do. I had it all planned out. I was going to get a horse and ride down to the bridge over the head of the inlet. I intended to pour some of the stuff into my hand and throw the bottle and the stopper into the water. Then I meant to snuff it up. I knew I would fall instantly, and that it would frighten the horse and he would drag me, and every one would think it was an accident."

"Hal would have known," said Mme. Storey softly.

"Yes, I suppose Hal would have guessed," the girl answered with a catch in her breath; "but he wouldn't have told.... I didn't mind Hal's knowing, because we have always shared everything."

There was a silence in the room. Except for the boy's sobbing. General Southam had already taken so much he could only hang his head and pat his daughter's shoulder helplessly. Win Bucknall jerked his head up and looked across the table at Elsie with the most awful expression of pain that I have ever seen in a man's eyes. Only the strong can suffer like that.

8

"She's lying!" said O'Malley brutally.

The bright flags of anger were run up in Mme. Storey's cheeks. "Hold your tongue!" she said. "These people have enough to bear without your insults!"

"Fine talk!" said O'Malley violently. "What are we gathered here for anyhow? To applaud a piece of emotional acting or to investigate a murder? What have this girl's suicidal impulses got to do with the poisoning of my daughter? It's clear to me what happened."

Mme. Storey controlled her anger. "Then tell us," she said quietly.

"Suppose that this girl's first impulse was towards suicide," he thundered in his overbearing courtroom manner. "So far I am willing to concede that her story may be true. But I assert that it was followed by the impulse to murder. Somebody poisoned my girl. Nobody could have done it but her!" The accusing forefinger shot out.

Anger inspired the stricken General Southam with new strength. "By God!" he said furiously, "if you don't choose your words, O'Malley, there will be another killing here!"

O'Malley continued more quietly; "She must have known that Hal had brought the poison to Win's room. Her own room is close by. When Win came downstairs she went in and got it. We know that the door was not locked, and that the bottle was lying in an unlocked drawer."

"Elsie," asked Mme. Storey, "did you know that Hal had brought the poison to Win's room?"

"I heard him come," the girl admitted proudly, "and I suspected that that was what he had come for."

"What did you do after Win had gone down to the lounge?"

"I also went downstairs."

"But about five minutes later," O'Malley put in. "Plenty of time! Plenty of time!"

"Did you go into Win's room?"

"I did not," said the girl coolly. "I had given up the idea of ... of using the poison. I had promised Hal that I would face the thing through."

"Excellent!" cried O'Malley with his fleering laugh. "But let me point out to all of you here that when we all went out on the porch after lunch, Elsie on some excuse or another was the first to return to this room. She was in here alone for a minute and a half, two minutes perhaps. It was then that she did the trick."

"In that case," said Mme. Storey, "the little cake must have been on Laila's plate before we went out on the porch. Do you know that it was?"

"Certainly it was!" he cried aggressively.

"Will you swear that it was?" asked Mme. Storey quietly.

"It must have been!"

"Ah, then you cannot swear to it!"

Mme. Storey questioned each one of us in turn, but nobody remembered having seen Laila help herself to the second cake. Nobody could say whether or not it lay on her plate before we went out on the porch.

"Elsie's room must be searched," said O'Malley truculently.

"Certainly," said Mme. Storey calmly. "I will do it myself."

A suspicious sneer fixed itself in his face.

"Come with me if you wish," she added dryly.

They left the room together, Mme. Storey warning me with a glance to keep the others under observation while she was gone.

It was not necessary for me to do anything. There we sat, the five of us, neither moving nor speaking. Stretched on four chairs by the wall lay the graceful figure of Laila Deane in her trim tweed suit, her daintily shod feet sticking up, a handkerchief over her face. Nobody could look at her and nobody could forget her. The consciousness of death in the room could be read in the stiff pose of every living head.

Elsie, who had the most at stake, appeared to be the least concerned. She had the look of one who had withdrawn deep into herself. The pale cold mask of her face expressed no human feeling except perhaps a faint scorn for the whole business. Her father had drawn up a chair behind, and resting his arms on the back of Elsie's chair, had dropped his head upon them. Hal's tears had dried up. He sat listening with a painful intentness for the sound of returning footsteps. Across

the table sat Win with his chin on his breast. His face was invisible to me.

When they came back I gathered the worst from O'Malley's cruel triumphant smile. Mme. Storey's face was grave and inscrutable. She carried a little book in one hand and something hidden in the other. Advancing to the table she placed the bottle of poison on it. We caught our breaths sharply. The bottle was now sealed with an ordinary cork. The little glass rod was broken off inside it.

She said, "We found this in a small drawer of the desk in Elsie's room. The drawer was locked and we had to force it."

"I never locked any of the drawers," said Elsie tonelessly.

"Well, it was locked," said Mme. Storey mildly. "Win jammed in the rubber cork so hard that the person who opened it had to dig it out with the point of a nail file...."

"Elsie's nail file," put in O'Malley.

"The cork broke, you see," Mme. Storey continued, "and part of it is still in the bottle. We found the remaining bits of rubber in Elsie's waste basket. The bottle was afterwards stopped with a cork taken from a Listerine bottle in Elsie's bathroom."

There was a silence.

"Is that sufficient evidence?" demanded O'Malley, looking from one to another of us with a sneer.

"Oh, Elsie!" cried Hal in a heartbreaking voice.

"If I was clever enough to do that," said Elsie with a half-smile of contempt, "surely I wouldn't be fool enough to leave that evidence to convict me!"

"They always make some fatal mistake," said O'Malley.

Elsie ignored him. "What do you think, Rosika?" she asked.

"I have no opinion yet," she answered impassively. She turned to O'Malley. "If it was Elsie," she asked, "how did she convey the poison to this room?"

There was another strained silence. O'Malley's hard keen eyes were fixed on the girl as if he would drag the secret from her by the sheer force of his will. Elsie looked straight ahead of her, faintly scornful.

"Ha! I've got it!" he cried, and the forefinger shot out. "That old-fashioned brooch at her breast. Those brooches often have a secret receptacle to hold a lock of hair or the portrait of the donor."

He put out his hand towards the brooch, and the girl shivered. Mme. Storey intervened between them. With a murmured apology she took the brooch out of the girl's dress, examined it attentively, found the hidden spring, and opened the back. We all saw the shallow cup that might have held a drop or two of poison.

"Is that evidence enough for you?" shouted O'Malley.

Mme. Storey smelled of the brooch. "No trace of prussic acid now," she said.

O'Malley put his head down to it. "You are right," he said, "but that's no evidence in her favour; the stuff evaporates quickly."

"Oh, quite!" said Mme. Storey.

"There's my case!" cried O'Malley dramatically. "Send for the police."

A very painful scene followed. The distress of the girl's father and brother was terribly affecting. Win probably suffered more than either of them, but he did not move. The girl herself seemed to be turned into stone.

9

Mme. Storey stood at the foot of the table in what appeared to be an attitude of irresolution. In reality she was thinking hard. O'Malley cried out impatiently:

"Are you going to send for the police?"

"Just a moment," she said with her deceitful mild smile. I was greatly lifted up for I saw hope in that smile. "I don't think we've quite got to the bottom of this," she said.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I want you to look at the pin holes in the front of Elsie's dress," said Mme. Storey.

O'Malley bent his head to do so while the girl stiffened with repulsion.

"I take it," Mme. Storey went on, "that it is the first time this dress has been worn since being done up."

Elsie nodded. "It just came from the cleaners," she said.

"Notice how clearly the pin holes show up in the crisp thin material," Mme. Storey said to O'Malley.

"What of it?" he growled.

"You do not contend, I suppose, that Elsie could have opened the brooch and poured the poison on the cake without removing it from her dress?"

He made no answer.

"There are only two pin holes," said Mme. Storey softly. "Consequently your case falls to the ground."

I felt like cheering.

O'Malley flushed darkly. "But Laila lies dead there!" he said with a violent gesture. "You can't get away from that!"

"Another theory to explain that has gradually been shaping in my mind," said Mme. Storey. From inside her belt she took a little crumpled piece of paper with printing on it, and smoothed it out. "It is a page torn from a book of poems; page thirty-three, to be exact." She then opened the little book she had brought downstairs with her. "This book was lying on Elsie's dressing table," she said. "Page thirty-three is missing."

"Another link in the chain!" cried O'Malley.

"I wouldn't call it that," said Mme. Storey in almost a gentle voice. "Notice these red smears on the torn page."

O'Malley looked close, and touched the red marks with his finger. "What is it?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Lip-stick," said Mme. Storey. "Lip-stick of rather an unusual shade." She opened Laila's lizard skin bag which was lying on the table, and taking out her lip-stick, opened the top, and made another mark on the paper. It matched the existing marks exactly. "Laila's lip-stick," said Mme. Storey.

"I don't follow you," said O'Malley, scowling.

Mme. Storey removed the stick of lip-stick from the little gold tube in which it was held, and put the tube to her nose. "You can still distinguish the odour of prussic acid," she said, "though it is faint. The poison was brought into the room in this!" She offered it to O'Malley.

He became pale as he smelled of it. "Good God! ... Good God! ..." he stammered. He tried to carry off his confusion with a loud laugh. "Are you trying to make out that Laila killed herself?"

"Not exactly," said Mme. Storey softly. "I should call it an act of Providence."

"How could Laila have got hold of the poison?" cried O'Malley.

"Oh, very easily." Mme. Storey turned to Win whose face was raised now, wild with hope and anxiety. "Where did you and Laila part when you returned from your walk?" she asked him.

"At the doors of our rooms," he said hoarsely.

"Was the door of your room open?"

"Yes."

"Then Laila could see Hal waiting for you?"

"Yes, she saw him."

"Did you shut your door when you went in?"

"No."

"Then she could have overheard what took place between you and Hal?"

"She could have heard, yes."

"What, exactly, did take place between you?"

"Hal handed me the bottle of poison," said Win, "and asked me to keep it for him. He said he was afraid to have it lying around his room. So I took it and dropped it in my drawer. That's all."

"Didn't it strike you that this was an odd request?"

"I didn't think anything about it. I had something else on my mind at the time."

"And then Hal came downstairs," said Mme. Storey. "Shortly afterwards Win followed him, and a minute or two later Elsie went downstairs. I suggest that when Laila was left alone upstairs she went into Win's room and got the poison. She carried it into Elsie's room where she opened it and filled the little gold tube...."

"You have no proof of this!" cried O'Malley furiously.

"There is the leaf torn from Elsie's book with the marks of Laila's lip-stick on it," said Mme. Storey relentlessly. "Laila used the paper to keep the lip-stick from staining her bag. After she had emptied the poison out of the little tube, she put the lip-stick back in its place."

"Laila had no reason to kill herself!" cried O'Malley. "That's preposterous."

"I have no notion that she killed herself," said Mme. Storey quietly. "The poison was intended for another purpose." She paused. Everybody in the room waited for her next words in agonised suspense. "You will remember that when we went out on the porch Laila remained in the room for a moment or two. Our backs were turned. It was then that she leaned across the table and poured the poison on the cake which was on Elsie's plate. When she came out on the porch

she was still adjusting the lip-stick in its case."

A breathless murmur of horror went around the table. "It's a lie!" cried O'Malley in a high strained voice.

"Elsie," said Mme. Storey, "tell me exactly what happened when you came back into the room."

A spot of colour had come into each of the girl's cheeks. "I saw the cover of the percolator beginning to rise," she said breathlessly, "and I ran back and turned off the current. While I was waiting for the coffee to strain through I picked up the cake on my plate. I wasn't thinking what I was doing. It had a white centre and I don't like those so well as the black ones. So I put it back in the basket, and searched until I found one that was black on the bottom. But I didn't eat that either. I don't know why. It's still on my plate."

"And a moment later," put in Mme. Storey, "Laila came back into the room and helped herself to the cake that Elsie had returned to the basket. That was what I meant by an act of Providence."

We looked at each other in awe and horror. "Oh God!" somebody whispered shakily.

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" cried O'Malley.

"Why," said Elsie simply. "It never occurred to me that that had anything to do with what happened."

"It's a lie!" cried O'Malley desperately. "Laila had no reason to harm Elsie. Laila had beaten her out. Laila had won the man they both wanted!

"But *had* she?" Mme. Storey put in succinctly. She turned to Win. "Please tell Mr. O'Malley the circumstances of your offer to Laila," she said.

Win jumped up as if he was electrified. "Oh God, not that!" he cried... "What do you know about it?" he demanded.

"Part of what you said was overheard," said Mme. Storey.

"Oh, I forgot," he said with a gesture. "Miss Brickley." After a moment of painful hesitation, he went on stiffly, "I will only say this: as a result of something that Laila told me, I agreed to marry her; but I stipulated that I would never live with her."

"So you see," said Mme. Storey quietly to O'Malley, "Laila had not won him." After a moment she added, "Do you think it necessary to send for the police?"

He threw up his hands and let them fall limply. He walked away from the table a broken man. He stood by the chairs against the wall looking down at the body. God knows what his thoughts must have been. None of us liked the man but we respected his grief. Not a word was spoken until he had left the room.

I need not go into the scene that followed. The three Southams became almost hysterical. Somehow or other Win and Elsie came together, but they could not speak, only look their feelings. They could not bear to have others watching them at such a moment, and they instinctively turned away through the French window, across the porch and down the steps. General Southam and Hal went in another direction.

When we were left alone Mme. Storey took a fresh cigarette and inhaled it gracefully. I was still a little dazed by what had happened, and I suppose it showed in my face, for she said smilingly, "What's troubling you, Bella?"

"You must have suspected the truth as soon as you found the lip-stick holder," I said. "Then why did you try to make out that you thought Elsie was guilty?"

She looked out through the French window. We could see the lovers walking away pressed close together, heads down, talking earnestly. "Well, it worked, didn't it?" said Mme. Storey.

PINK-EYE

I

Mme. Storey was summoned to an obscure hotel in East Orange to consult with Mr. Elmer Durdan, the president of the Weldon National Bank of Newark. She took me with her. Mr. Durdan apologised for putting her to the trouble of this secret meeting. It was necessary for the moment, he said, to keep anybody from suspecting that he was starting an investigation into his brother's death.

My employer heard him out politely, but I could see that she did not fancy much our prospective client. He was a pompous, thin-lipped man with an unwholesome flush, and a slightly indirect glance. Typical bank president, old style; the sort that you suspect of secret sins. Verging on fifty years old I should say, but still vigorous.

"But my dear Mr. Durdan," she protested, when he had come to the end of his tale, "this murder—if it is a murder—is six weeks old. How do you expect me to blow any warmth into the cold clues after all this time? Why didn't you start an investigation at once?"

"I never suspected foul play," he said. "Nobody did. It was considered just a distressing accident."

"What has led you to suspect that it was not an accident?"

An instinctive spasm of hatred made the man look uglier than ever. "The actions of this young man Ewan Santley, who has so much to gain from my poor brother's death!" he said.

"The case is hardly in my line," said Mme. Storey. "Such an unspeakably brutal crime!—if it is a crime. Why don't you go to the police?"

"I want to know where I stand first," he said. "I don't want to make a fool of myself. To tell you the truth, Madam, my poor brother's life was not all that it should have been. He was rather wild. He was only my half-brother really, and nearly twenty years younger than myself. I don't want to spread an ugly scandal in the newspapers for nothing. It would react against my bank. But if Clifford was murdered, naturally I want to know it."

"Even if Ewan Santley is guilty," said Mme. Storey, "after what you have told me, I doubt if he could be convicted."

"Never mind about a conviction," said Mr. Durdan eagerly. "I should be glad to keep it all out of the newspapers. It will be sufficient if we can show Santley that his crime is known. It would prevent him from reaping the fruits of his dastardly act."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It would stop him from marrying his victim's widow," he said bitterly. "He has bedevilled the unfortunate girl with his good looks and his cheap smartness. She seems to have fallen completely under his influence."

"I see," said Mme. Storey somewhat dryly.

Durdan leaned towards her in his eagerness. His breath was coming fast, and the knuckles that gripped his chair

were white. "A hundred thousand dollars if you can hang the murder on Ewan Santley!"

Mme. Storey looked at him as from far off. "I do not accept commissions of that sort," she said coldly. "I do not set out to hang anything on anybody. If you want the truth wherever it may lead us, that's another matter."

He saw that he had made a bad break, and made haste to cover it. "Surely! Surely!" he blustered. "The truth. What else am I paying for?"

Just the same from that moment his enthusiasm for Mme. Storey as an investigator visibly waned. I am sure he would have called the thing off then and there, if he had not been too much afraid of losing face.

"I shall have to question Santley about his movements on the night of your brother's death," said Mme. Storey. "He will know by that that an investigation has been started, and if he's guilty he may run for it."

"Let him run!" said Durdan with an ugly grin. "It will be a proof of his guilt, and that's all I want." He leaned forward in his eagerness. "Give it to him straight! He knows who you are. It will put the fear of God into him to find that you are on his trail!"

"Well, let's leave God out of it," said Mme. Storey dryly.

The terms were settled, both sides reserving the right to terminate the agreement at any time. Mr. Durdan arose saying:

"If you don't mind, please wait here two or three minutes until I can get out of the way. We ought not to be seen together. Your photograph has been so widely published everybody knows who you are."

Mme. Storey smiled at what appeared to be his excessive caution. "We will give you three minutes," she said.

When he had gone she handed me a newspaper clipping she had got from him. It set forth the facts of the case. I read:

BURNED TO DEATH IN HIS CAR

Clifford E. Durdan, thirty-one, a teller employed by the Weldon National Bank of Newark, residing in the village of Charleswood, Northern New Jersey, was the victim of a horrible accident last night. Shortly before one o'clock he was seen driving home in his car by William Daly, a patrolman on point duty at the Charleswood cross-roads. A few minutes later the car was discovered in flames in the Durdan garage with the owner still sitting in it. It is supposed that Mr. Durdan fell asleep as he turned off the ignition, and that a lighted cigarette, dropping from his hand, set fire to leaking gasoline.

The car was a coupé, and he was trapped in it. Owing to the position of the garage, which is a built-in affair in the basement of the Durdan cottage, the fire was not discovered until the interior of the garage was a roaring furnace. The village fire department was powerless to aid the unfortunate young man. When they got the flames extinguished the car was a mass of twisted metal, and Mr. Durdan's body was burned to a crisp. Several of the onlookers fainted at the sight.

Mr. Durdan was the youngest brother of Elmer A. Durdan, president of the Weldon National. The family is well known and highly respected throughout the State. Surviving is the widow, who was Miss Rita Cuppage of Englishtown. They had been married less than a year. Mrs. Durdan was prostrated by the accident. Interment will take place on Thursday in Linden Grove Cemetery, Charleswood.

"Not a pretty case," suggested Mme. Storey dryly.

"Horrible!" I said with a shudder. I seemed to smell the very odour of burning flesh.

"Elmer Durdan's theory is, that Ewan Santley, a former lover of Mrs. Clifford Durdan's, lay in wait for her husband at the garage, hit him over the head, and then set the place afire."

"Maybe so," I said. "But there's something fishy about Elmer Durdan."

"Oh quite!" she agreed. "He is evidently in love with the young widow himself."

"The whole business has an ugly look," I said. "Perhaps it was Elmer who killed his brother. Perhaps he has engaged you in this secret way in order to find out if there is any evidence that can be turned up against himself."

"It is quite possible," she said coolly.

"I wish to Heaven you'd let it alone!" I cried.

She smiled enigmatically. "My curiosity is aroused, Bella."

Then I knew it was useless to protest.

2

When we left the hotel Mme. Storey suggested that we walk to the railway station. I was a little surprised because she is not as a rule enamoured of these suburban towns. Presently she explained in a low voice.

"There's a man following us. I want to make it as easy as possible for him, so we can find out what he's up to. Be careful not to let him suspect that we are on to him."

Always the knowledge that you are being followed makes the prickles run up and down your spine. You are instinctively aware of what a good mark you are making for a blow or a bullet and you long for cover. It was terribly hard not to be able to look back.

"Do you suppose Elmer Durdan has set a watch on us?" I said as coolly as I could.

"If he has, he has chosen a very odd tracker," she said dryly.

I would have given something to look behind me.

I got a fleeting glimpse of him when we boarded the train, and it gave me a shock. I don't know what I expected. He was a ragged, dirty, rough-looking character such as you rarely see in town nowadays when the crooks are all young dandies. Cheeks and chin were covered by a week's growth of beard, and to render his aspect still more hideous he had lost an eye. The empty socket was covered with a pink celluloid patch.

He took the seat behind us, and I knew he was leaning forward to hear what we said because I could hear his breathing. Mme. Storey would never be one to disappoint an eavesdropper. She began at once:

"Old Durdan's a darn good prospect, Bella. I had him looked up by Bradstreet's. They told me he was worth over five million. There ought to be rich pickings in this."

I had to say something quickly. "What do you think of his case?" I asked.

"I don't think anything of it. What does it matter? As long as we are getting paid by the hour all we've got to do is string him along. We'll give him plenty of reports. We'll snow him under with reports!"

The train started about that time and the noise that it made swallowed up our talk. The listener sat back in his seat.

It is only a short run to the terminal at Hoboken. When we got up to leave the car, our man was just behind us. Mme. Storey said, loud enough for him to hear:

"Let us take the ferry instead of the tube, Bella. It will be nice to see the town from the river."

He followed us out on the forward deck of the Twenty-Third Street ferry. Here I had a chance to look him over without appearing to. I have rarely seen a more unlovely specimen. He was wearing a pair of ragged, stained black pants that looked as if they might once have belonged to a waiter, and an old olive drab tunic pinned together at the neck to hide the absence of a shirt underneath. On his head a dirty checked cap. Beneath it, his dark hair straggled over his forehead, long a stranger to the comb. Several of his teeth were missing.

The better dressed people on the ferry glanced at him with distaste and drew away a little. The tramp didn't seem to mind. On the contrary, he was well pleased with himself. The patch over his eye-socket had the effect of making the other eye twice as bright and wicked as ordinary. His expression was almost inhuman in its complete shamelessness.

He wasn't as good a sleuth as he thought he was, because he was unable to mask his sharp, mean glances in our direction. Turning her back on him for a moment, Mme. Storey murmured, "He must think we're a pair of downy birds not to catch on to him."

With the object of leading him on, she turned and looked at him with pitying eyes, and said to me:

"Isn't it a shame, Bella, that the country should allow its ex-service men to suffer want like that."

I don't know if he could hear what she said, but anyhow her expression emboldened him to slouch up and speak to her. "Lady," he whined, "I just spent my last penny to cross on the ferry. Could you help an ex-soldier with something towards a bite and a flop?"

"I certainly am sorry for you," said Mme. Storey. "What's your story?"

He used up the balance of the trip in telling it to her. I needn't put it down here, for it was all lies. He enjoyed telling it. He thought he was fooling her nicely.

When he had brought it to an end, she sympathised with him profusely. "I have made it a rule never to give money," she said. "But I can provide you with a bed and with a job maybe, if you're the right man."

"Only just try me, lady!" he said with false humility.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked.

"No, ma'am!" he said with an innocent-seeming stare.

"I am Madame Storey the criminologist."

"Oh Gee!" he said wonderingly. "Now I know you!"

"Of course you're badly down on your luck," she said, "but you have the look of an intelligent man. It has occurred to me that I might use you for a piece of sleuthing that I have in mind."

"Just let me get cleaned up," he said, "and get some decent clothes on me, and I'll show you!"

"No," she said, "if you were cleaned up you'd be useless for my purpose. I want you just as you are. No one would ever take you for a sleuth like that."

"Just as you say, lady." He lowered his head to hide the wicked shine of gratification in his one eye.

"What's your name?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Dick Davis, ma'am."

When we got off the boat he objected to entering a taxicab with us on the score of his dirt, but Mme. Storey insisted. "You don't have to mind if I don't," she said. "I have all kinds of friends. Nobody who knows me will think it at all strange."

For myself, I thought it foolhardy to take him into the cab. I distrusted that eye of his. However, Mme. Storey is always armed. As we travelled through the streets I studied him without seeming to, and decided that he was not wearing a disguise. His whole expression was that of the man who has chucked the decencies of life. That was real and ancient dirt on his clothes, and real grime ingrained in his skin. His finger nails were horrible.

Win Secord, one of our younger operatives, who sometimes served Mme. Storey as a clerk, had been left in charge of the office while we went to East Orange. Win, a well-slicked youth, fussy about his clothes, was not exactly pleased by the new comrade Mme. Storey presented to him, but he had to hide his feelings.

"It occurred to me that I could use Davis in connection with the Durdan case," Mme. Storey said carelessly. "Elmer Durdan believes that his brother was murdered by Ewan Santley, and has hired me to dig up evidence against Santley."

She did not appear to look at Davis when she spoke, but I knew that her keen eyes missed nothing. Davis, with his cringing air, looked down, but I could see him become tense with eagerness when these names were mentioned.

"This sleuthing business will be something new to me," he said with his ugly grin. "But I reckon I can make a stab at it. Old Elmer Durdan thinks he's a pretty foxy guy, but I'm foxy myself."

"Oh, do you know him?" said Mme. Storey casually.

Davis quickly repaired his break. "I come from Newark," he said. "Everybody in Newark knows Elmer Durdan."

"Take Davis down to Third Avenue and get him something to eat," said Mme. Storey to Win. "Take him in downstairs when you come back. You and he can sleep here to-night, and to-morrow I'll put him to work."

We have a room in the basement of our offices for the operatives to use. Young Win's face turned grim at the thought of having to share it with the dilapidated tramp for the night, but of course our men have to be prepared for anything.

When they had gone out Mme. Storey called up George Stephens and Ralph Crider, two of our smartest operatives. These men come around the office as little as possible, but are always within call. Stephens was despatched out to Charleswood, the scene of Clifford Durdan's death, to turn up what he could, and report, while the quiet and efficient Crider's job was to shadow Davis.

"Win will look after him for to-night," she said. "To-morrow I'll send him out on some fake assignment. You must keep him in view every moment and find out what he is up to. The point is that this man must not be allowed to slip through our fingers. If he should take alarm and try to get away from us, he must be fetched back, understand? That room in the basement with its barred windows will have to serve as a prison if we are forced to it."

"Yes, ma'am," said Crider in his dry way. "I get you."

3

As soon as she got down to the office next morning, Mme. Storey sent for Davis to come upstairs. He entered with his evil grin, unwashed, uncombed, repulsive, just as on the day before.

"I didn't fix up none," he began, "because you said..."

"That's all right," said Mme. Storey, cutting him short. "Your job to-day is to go over to Newark and run down a man called Andrew Ross."

"What's he got to do with the case?" asked Davis with sharp curiosity.

"Well!" said Mme. Storey with a cool stare.

Davis hung his head. "Excuse me, ma'am," he mumbled. "But I can't help taking an interest if it's my job."

"I am not accustomed to having my operatives question me," said Mme. Storey mildly. "However, I don't mind telling you that it was a tip furnished me by Elmer Durdan yesterday. At the time of Clifford's death this Ross was working as a gardener for J. B. Maxon in Charleswood." (Mme. Storey had procured the name out of the Blue Book.) "He was heard to boast around the village that he could tell a lot about the fire if he wanted to."

A look of anxiety appeared in Davis' piercing eye. He glanced down.

"Before anything could be done about it," Mme. Storey went on, "Ross was discharged for drunkenness, and he disappeared. The only clue we have to his whereabouts is, that he had been heard to speak of Elder Street, Newark, as if it was his home."

"I know the street," said Davis. "It's a crummy neighbourhood."

"All right," she said, "there's your job. Spend the day in Elder Street, and try to run this man down. He has no reason to change his name; you ought to find somebody who knows him. If you run into him, square yourself with him, and find out what he knows. Come back at five this afternoon and report."

"Okay!" said Davis, and set off with his sly, triumphant grin. When he had gone Mme. Storey smiled in her turn, knowing that the indefatigable Crider was on his trail.

Later in the day we received George Stephens' first report on his activities in Charleswood.

"I took my case of sample brushes," he wrote, "and went out to Charleswood to canvass from door to door. It was no trouble to get people to talk, because the death of Clifford Durdan was the biggest sensation they ever had out here. When night came I engaged a furnished room from Wat Bunting, who runs a small stationery store and paper route, hence knows everybody. The facts as I have gathered them from this person and that are as follows:

"Cliff Durdan lived in one of a row of smart new English-style cottages in Aboukir Road. These houses are on a slope which permitted a garage to be built in at the cellar level in the rear. The garages are approached from an alley or driveway running along back of the houses. Thus Durdan drove into his garage without showing himself to the front windows of his house.

"He was seen driving home by a policeman at the cross-roads not more than three minutes from his house. This man fixed the time at twelve-forty. He was well acquainted with Durdan and said he looked the same as usual. He wasn't driving like an intoxicated man. He was alone in the coupé.

"The fire was discovered by Tom Walsh, a young man living next door. Walsh said he was awakened by the roaring of the flames, and when he looked out of his window which faced rear, he could see the reflected light from the Durdan garage. Walsh said it was then one-five, and this is confirmed by the firemen who registered the alarm at one-eight. After allowing time for Durdan to get home, this leaves a good twenty minutes unaccounted for.

"Walsh, after waking his mother and telling her to telephone the alarm, ran out of the house. He described the garage as a churning mass of flame inside. He managed to get the door open, but burned his hand in doing so, and a burst of flame shot out that drove him back. He could see Durdan sitting in the car. Made him sick he said.

"Walsh said he never saw a fire rage with such fury. The source of it seemed to be inside the car. At that time the gasoline tank had not yet exploded. Unable to help the man single-handed, and fearing that the house might burn down,

Walsh ran around to the front door and aroused Mrs. Durdan. She was sleeping alone in the house. Walsh then ran from house to house rousing the neighbours. He heard the tank let go with a roar like a big gun.

"By the time the volunteer fire department got their apparatus on the scene, the car was reduced to a heap of junk, and the body was burned to a char. Everybody says the fire didn't last but a few minutes, but it was so hot inside that some time passed before anybody could go in. The garage was built inside a solid concrete shell, and the rest of the house was undamaged.

"When I asked Walsh if it didn't strike him as funny that the garage door was closed, he said that it wasn't tightly closed, and he supposed it had blown to, while Durdan sat in the car sleeping. But when I examined the doors I saw that this would have been impossible. They were patent doors of the kind that open out in a groove and fold up. Walsh just wasn't thinking what he said. He doesn't own a car.

"Bunting, in whose house I am lodging, is one of the firemen. They don't often have a fire out here, and this was the biggest event in his life. On the following day it seems, the firemen towed the wreck of the car quarter of a mile up the road and dumped it in a gully. Wat and I walked up and took a look at it last night.

"I saw what looked like the remains of a galvanised pail beside the car. Wat said the pail was under the car when they found it. He thought nothing of it—that's the way with these hicks, but it is clear to me there must have been some inflammable stuff, probably gasoline, in that pail to make the fire rage so. A pail has no business *under* a car. Why, the car wouldn't clear it. My idea is, the pail was inside the car, and when the floor-boards burned through it dropped down.

"Several people have admitted to me that they heard a rumour somebody had been seen running away from the Durdan house about the time of the fire, or hanging around there, but they all make light of it. Wat says with a laugh, 'There's always somebody seen running from the scene of the crime! It's pure imagination!' I haven't succeeded in tracing this rumour to its source. I'm keeping after it.

"Taking the closed door of the garage, the time that elapsed, and the evidence of the pail, to my mind it's a certainty that the death of Cliff Durdan was no accident. But nobody in the village will have it otherwise. The popular theory is that Durdan's horrible death was a kind of retribution that was coming to him. Any evidence to the contrary rolls off the villagers without wetting them. Sam Stinnett the postmaster, who is quite a character, says:

"I reckon that lad was so thoroughly alcoholised he'd burn like a torch anyhow."

4

An extraordinarily vigorous and healthy young man. His black hair seemed to crisp with energy all over his well-shaped head, and he had the candid blue eyes that are so unexpected and attractive when they shine out under a black poll. But what made his face really notable was its expression of incandescent happiness. It broke right through the mask of politeness that a man assumes with strangers. That look was unforgettable.

Such was my first impression of Ewan Santley when he came to our offices that afternoon in response to Mme. Storey's telephone request. He was well dressed. He had the look in every way of a young man who had found himself. Nothing could have been more unlike the cold-blooded murderer.

"Madame Storey asked to see me," he said, with the question looming big in his eyes: What on earth does she want with *me*?

I showed him into her office. They took to each other at sight. You know how it is sometimes; started to talk like old friends without any preliminaries. The young man's eyes passed wonderingly from my employer's face to the beautiful objects that filled her room, and back to her face again. It was more flattering than words.

"This is a great occasion for me," he said with a kind of solemnity.

She laughed. "Have a cigarette." She pushed the big silver box towards him.

He helped himself. "I have followed all your cases," he said. "I have a scrap-book with the clippings. I never expected to be talking to you face to face."

"You mustn't believe all you read," she said. "I've been lucky."

Naturally he was consumed with curiosity to learn what had drawn her attention to his humble self. She held off telling him for a while because she wanted to win his confidence first. She chaffed him about the beaming look of happiness in his face, and he answered simply:

"Well, I'm going to be married soon. I've been through hell to get the girl, and I suppose it sticks out all over me."

I was on his side from the moment he had entered the room, and I wished that he wouldn't be so frank. It was dangerous.

In the end Mme. Storey was obliged to tell him why she had sent for him. "I have been engaged to investigate the death of Clifford Durdan," she said.

Instantly all his candour and happiness froze. His face became mask-like, with the blue eyes like two points of ice. It forced me to rearrange my ideas about him. I saw that the attractive young man could be dangerous as well.

"What's that got to do with me?" he demanded.

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey mildly.

"I could have killed him!" he said bluntly. "And not lost an hour's sleep over it. But as it turned out, I didn't have to."

"I assume that it is his widow you are going to marry?" suggested Mme. Storey.

"Why shouldn't I marry her? I knew her before he did. And if I can make up to her something of what that brute made her suffer, it will justify my existence.... Who engaged you for this job?"

"Elmer Durdan."

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "I knew it before I asked.... Well, you're a psychologist, you ought to be able to see through him. Elmer is worse than Cliff really, because he suppresses his deviltry, and it festers in him! He's only jealous of me. He had the gall to think that Rita would take him after Cliff's death. As if she hadn't had her fill of the Durdan tribe! This charge against me is only an afterthought!"

"Possibly," said Mme. Storey. "I can't discuss my client with you."

He jumped up angrily. "Sure!" he said. "No more do I have to answer the questions of Elmer Durdan's representative!" A hurt look like a boy's came into his eyes. "I always thought you were on the square!" he said reproachfully.

"Maybe I am," she said smiling.... "Sit down!" she added in the soft voice that must be obeyed. "I am neither for Elmer Durdan nor against you. My sole object is to discover the truth. If you are innocent you have nothing to fear."

"I'm not afraid," he said quickly, "but I can't help getting excited. Elmer Durdan is a rich man. How can one have any confidence in justice after reading the newspapers? He may well ruin me."

"Not with my help," said Mme. Storey.

He gave her a grateful look.

"Tell me something about the past," she said. "You knew Rita Cuppage first, you said."

He dropped back in his chair and took a fresh cigarette. But he forgot to light it. His gaze was lost in the past. "I fell in love with her when I came out of college," he began. "Not the usual sort of thing as I saw it amongst my friends. This was terrific. I was good for nothing. She ... but I mustn't get started about her. There is nobody like her.

"There was never any exact understanding between us but I thought she felt—not the same as I did, but anyhow, kindly towards me. I couldn't ask her to marry me because I hadn't a sou. But after a while I got a chance to go to South America for a coffee firm, with the offer of a partnership if I made good.

"From the day I sailed away I never heard a word from her. No answer to any of my letters and telegrams. After a while I heard she was going with Cliff Durdan. He was as poor as I was, but he had great prospects from his brother. Then I heard they were married."

"And that was hell," murmured Mme. Storey.

"Sure!" he said darkly, "hell long drawn out! But there was worse to come. When I got back to New York I found out that the man she married was a brute. He was a crook too. After he was dead they found a big shortage at the bank. Rita told me that. Elmer Durdan told her. He hushed it up.

"I told myself I was cured, and that it was no concern of mine. But I found I couldn't keep off it. I looked her up. I saw that her life was hell too. And with almost the first word we discovered that we had both been tricked. Her letters to me and mine to her had been intercepted. You see, she worked in the bank with Cliff Durdan, and at that time he was in charge of the mail.

"That was the deepest hell of all," he murmured. "Because she was straight as a string. She wouldn't leave him."

"Well, you had plenty of reason for killing Cliff Durdan," said Mme. Storey coolly.

"Just the same I didn't do it," he said doggedly.

"All you have to do is to produce an alibi. Where were you, and what were you doing the night that Cliff Durdan died?"

He hesitated, scowling. "You seem to think a man ought to be able to give an account of himself for any given time. If I were guilty I'd have my alibi all pat."

"Surely on this night, when something happened that meant so much to you, you must remember what you were doing."

"I remember all right, but it doesn't sound so good."

"Let's hear it anyway."

"I went to the fancy dress ball of the Alliance Circle in Newark."

"Good! Were you in costume?"

"No. It was optional."

"But people who knew you must have seen you there."

"No. I didn't know anybody there. It was a subscription affair and I bought a ticket. Rita and Cliff were members and I thought they would be there.... I thought maybe I'd get a dance with Rita. That's what I was reduced to. But they didn't come, and I left at eleven o'clock."

Mme. Storey was disappointed.

"I went outside and telephoned to Rita," Ewan went on. "She said they had expected to go to the dance, but her

husband had not come home." Ewan's vigorous black head was lowered for a moment. "The sound of her voice over the wire gave me such a frightful yen to see her that I couldn't hold myself. I begged her to let me come out—I was in my car—but she refused."

"And then?" prompted Mme. Storey.

"I went anyhow," he muttered. "That night marked absolute low-water mark for me. I didn't go in. I parked my car a little way off and walked up and down in front of the house.... There was a dim light in an upstairs window and I pictured her lying in bed and reading.... Oh God!" He jerked his head up defiantly. "I thought of killing him then if you want to know it. I planned ways of doing it.... But all the time I knew it was no good. Rita would have found me out. She can read my soul!"

"Then what did you do?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Drove home like a whipped cur."

"What time did you get home?"

"One o'clock."

"You are certain?"

"Absolutely. Passed several clocks."

"Where do you live?"

"In a little flat on Eighth Street."

"Anybody see you come in?"

"No, I live alone. It's a walk-up flat."

"Did you put your car in a garage?"

"No. Ran it in an alley around the corner. Washington Mews."

"Then that's no alibi at all!" said Mme. Storey.

"Well, it doesn't make me out a murderer!" he said doggedly.

"No. But it will make it awkward for you to prove your innocence."

He glanced at her wistfully. "I wish you were on my side."

Mme. Storey shrugged in her inscrutable fashion. "It doesn't make any difference," she said.

He searched her face for the inner meaning of this. "I'm not afraid of you," he said brusquely.

"So much the better," she calmly answered. "Here's a word of advice. Whatever may come, don't run away."

"Not likely," he said. "Not my line at all."

After he had gone, Mme Storey paced up and down her office, smoking and considering.

"He couldn't have done it!" I said. "He couldn't have!"

"Bella, you're like a parrot that has only learned one phrase," she said good-naturedly. "Certainly he could have

done it. I could have done it. And if I had, I should act precisely as he is acting. The blunt and honest line. Admitting everything but the one main fact."

"But he likes you, he trusts you," I protested.

"Trusts me my hat!" she retorted, pulling a droll face. "It is just as likely that he is trying to charm me with his beautiful blue eyes.... And they are beautiful," she added slyly. "Aren't they, Bella?"

"I can't make a joke of it," I said.

5

At five o'clock the door of my office opened, and the one-eyed man sidled around it, grinning. "Well, Bella!" he said with his disgusting familiarity. "Howsagirl? What's happened to-day?"

I had a struggle to control the repulsion that filled me. I didn't want to make him suspicious. "Nothing important," I said.

"What's new in the Durdan case?" he asked with sharp curiosity. "Have they hung it on Ewan Santley?"

He went off into a fit of noiseless laughter that was horrible to see. I made no reply.

"What other guys are working on the case besides me?" he persisted.

"I don't know," I said. "And if I did I couldn't tell you. I'm not supposed to answer questions."

"Ah! we're all working together, ain't we?" he said cajolingly. "You and me ought to be friends. I know I ain't much to look at now, but just wait till I get fixed up. I know how to treat a girl right!"

The man filled me with such a disgust that I was helpless. I just sat there staring at my desk.

"Oh, well, if you want to crab, to hell with it!" he said ill-temperedly. He was like a child in his sudden changes of temper. "Let me see her ladyship. Orders was to report at five."

Mme. Storey had no one with her at the moment and I took him in. He had the grace to take off his filthy cap in her room. She received him with the cool smile that conceals everything.

"Well, Davis, what luck?" she asked.

Naturally his mission had not been successful, because the man he had been sent to find was only a product of Mme. Storey's imagination. However, he launched forth into a long tale of his doings during the day, who he had seen, where he had gone, with much irrelevant detail.

Mme. Storey heard him out patiently, and afterwards rang for Win Secord to take him downstairs.

"To-morrow we'll strike out on a new line," she said.

"What did the other guys find out?" asked Davis eagerly.

Young Win's face was a study at such effrontery in an operative. He looked to see Mme. Storey shrivel him up. However, she took it coolly. "Nothing of any account," she said. "We must lay some new pipes."

Win and Davis went downstairs. When Ralph Crider called up to report we found that Davis' long story was true. Crider checked it in every particular. Davis, following out his instructions, had spent the day in Elder Street, Newark,

talking to this person and that. Crider said that he had never lost sight of him, and that outside his assignment Davis had done nothing and had seen nobody. Thus we were no wiser concerning him than before.

"First honours seem to be with the one-eyed wonder," remarked my employer dryly.

Just at this time a registered, special delivery letter was brought in by the mail van. "H'm! somebody is taking no chances," said Mme. Storey.

The communication inside was brief. She read it and tossed it over with a short laugh. I read.

"DEAR MADAME STOREY:

"Let this be your notification that our agreement is at an end. You will remember that each of us reserved the right to terminate it at will. It is not of course that I have any doubt of your abilities, which I may say without exaggeration are world-famous, but simply that I have decided not to go any further with the matter that we discussed together.

"Allow me to say that it was a great pleasure to me to be associated with you even for so brief a period. If you will be good enough to send me a memo of the time you have spent on my business, I will send a cheque by return mail.

"Believe me,

"Ever sincerely yours,

"ELMER A. DURDAN."

"I knew it! I knew it!" I cried. "Just as soon as he found out that you would not perjure yourself for a hundred thousand dollars he had no further use for you! He's a liar and a hypocrite! He has no intention of dropping this matter."

"Why all the heat?" said Mme. Storey, laughing. "If he is what you say he is, surely we are well out of the case."

"I'm thinking of Ewan Santley," I said.

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey teasingly. "The fine eyes have done their work!"

All the operatives who are out on assignments make a practice of telephoning in to the office at the close of business. Among them a man called John Mattison, who was doing some work on the interminable Lear Caybourn case, said, after making his usual report:

"By the way, I happened to meet a guy who works for the Val Oman agency this afternoon. He tried to put it all over me by saying that a client of Mme. Storey's named Durdan had fired her off the job, and hired Val Oman in her place."

"Thanks," said Mme. Storey dryly. "Interesting piece of news."

When she had hung up she said: "Val Oman! So he's the nigger in the woodpile. For a hundred thousand dollars he would dig up enough evidence to send five men to the chair."

"You can't let this go on!" I cried. "Oh, you can't!"

"My dear Bella, we are not philanthropists," she said.

"Think of what that poor fellow has been through!" I urged. "Think of his happiness now. And the girl who loves him!"

She wouldn't give me any satisfaction. However, I presently saw that she had no intention of giving up the case.

George Stephens called up from Charleswood to report. While Mme. Storey talked to him I switched in on the wire according to our custom, and took notes. Stephens said:

"The situation out here is changed. This afternoon the tip went around that Clifford Durdan was murdered, and that an investigation is in progress. The village is buzzing with it. These hicks would as lief believe one thing as another, if it is sensationally presented to them.

"I traced the source of the tip to Colonel Emslie, who owns the biggest estate in Charleswood, and takes the first place in all local affairs. He's the magistrate. He told Sam Stinnett the postmaster, and in an hour it was all over the place. Now they're all talking about the closed door of the garage and the gasoline pail which nobody noticed before.

"I have found out that Colonel Emslie and Elmer Durdan are intimate friends. The colonel is a large borrower from Durdan's bank. He had lunch in Newark with Durdan to-day, so it's not hard to deduce where he got *his* tip from.

"Next, as to the rumour that a man had been seen running from the Cliff Durdan garage just before the fire, I traced that this morning to two men named Jim Loeser and Mike Bosi, who work as helpers and car-washers in the local garage. They now deny that they started the story, claiming that it was told them by a stranger who stopped for gas.

"That won't hold water of course. At first I thought maybe the two car-washers had made up the story to attract attention to themselves, but after the rumour had been circulated that Cliff Durdan was murdered, these two looked so funny I began to think they had seen something. So far I can't get them to talk."

Madame Storey said: "Stephens, what lies on the other side of that lane or alley that serves Cliff Durdan's garage?"

"Just a long brick wall, Madam, about six feet high. That's the back of Colonel Emslie's estate. His farm buildings, chicken yards and so on, are on the other side of the brick wall."

"Maybe the two car-washers were stealing the magistrate's chickens that night," suggested Mme. Storey, "and that's why they won't talk.... Bring them to my office to-night so that I can question them."

"I'll do my darnedest, Madame. Those guys are so dumb you can't tell what they'll do."

Mme. Storey does not allow her operatives to make excuses, and her voice stiffened. "Play on their vanity," she said. "Tell them what big guys they'll be as the leading witnesses in a sensational case. Pictures in the papers and all. Invite them to a big feed in town. Offer them a couple of five dollar notes. *But bring them!* I'll wait here at my desk until you call again."

Within half an hour Stephens called back. He said in a scared voice: "I'm sorry, the two car-washers are gone, Madame."

"Gone?" said Mme. Storey. "Where?"

"Nobody out here knows, but the story is that the police have taken them into town to be questioned. About four-thirty a big car with two men and a chauffeur drove up to the garage. The chief guy called the two men out and talked to them. Then they took their coats and got in with him. When the garage proprietor objected, the guy in the car talked him down. Said he had business with the two car-washers and would bring them back in a couple of hours."

Mme. Storey was angry. "Find out where they have been taken to," she said, "and keep in touch with me." She hung up. Immediately afterwards she got John Mattison on the wire. She ordered him to do a little scouting around Val Oman's offices and to find out if two men answering to the description of the car-washers had been brought there.

to take home, and I accompanied her. While we were finishing dinner at her place, Ewan Santley called up and asked if he could see her. His voice betrayed agitation. She told him to come round.

We received him in her inviting 1850 living-room upstairs. It was obvious that something serious had happened. His handsome face had grown haggard within the last few hours, his eyes blank and hard with pain.

"I suppose you think it's funny my coming to you," he said in a hangdog fashion, "when you're working against me. But you're the wisest person I know, and I think you're on the square. I believe you'll tell me the truth."

"Sit down," said Mme. Storey cheerfully, "and smoke up. Let's not give up the ship yet. I can put your mind at ease on one point anyhow. I've been fired out of my job."

"What for?" he demanded, all agog.

"Well, I reckon it was because I wasn't spry enough in digging up evidence against you."

"Thank God for that!" he exclaimed. "Now I can talk freely! ... Elmer Durdan has laid information against me in New Jersey. A warrant has been issued for me on a charge of murder."

"The deuce you say!" said Mme. Storey. "Somebody has been spry! ... How did you learn this?"

"From Rita," he answered in a low, bitter voice. "Some kind friend in Charleswood telephoned her the news."

"You were at your office until closing time and then you went home?"

He nodded miserably.

"I fancy Durdan has had this warrant issued as a threat," she said. "On a charge of this sort the New York police would arrest you instantly at the request of the New Jersey authorities."

"What should I do?" muttered Ewan, spreading out his hands.

"How did Rita take it?"

He hung his head. "Badly," he muttered. "I have just come from her. We had a hellish scene. I lost my temper. It was fatal ... fatal with her! ... Oh God! I wish I'd never been born!"

He suddenly raised his head. "You can't blame her," he burst out defiantly, though neither of us had offered a word. "You see, she heard me threaten to kill Cliff. It was that first day after I had learned the truth, the only time I have seen her alone." His head went down again. "I reckon it's all up with me now whatever happens," he muttered. "Even if I was acquitted with cheers, she couldn't forget that she had heard me threaten him."

Mme. Storey looked at him gravely. Anything you might say to a man in so deep a trouble would sound impertinent.

"What's the use of it all?" he muttered. "It's too much to expect a man to go through hell a second time. The first experience saps his strength."

"But there's nothing to do except fight it," she said quietly.

"I suppose you're right," he said heavily. "I'll put up the best fight I can. Without hope."

"There are three courses open to you," said Mme. Storey briskly. "The first is to run away as Elmer Durdan wants you to...."

"That's out," he said curtly.

"Good! The second course is to do nothing until Durdan proceeds to your arrest. He'll have to arrest you if the threat

of it doesn't make you run away."

"What's the third course?" he asked.

"To anticipate Durdan by going over to New Jersey and giving yourself up to the police."

Ewan raised his head. "That appeals to me," he said.

"It is the only answer to make to Rita."

"Right!" he said. "I'll do it."

"First I want you to come with me," said Mme. Storey. "There's a man down at my office that I'd like you to look at, and tell me if you have ever seen him before."

We called a taxi and put on our things. On the way down Mme. Storey described the one-eyed man, and told Ewan how we had picked him up. But the story suggested nothing to Ewan.

"Maybe he's one of Cliff Durdan's underworld friends," he said contemptuously. "Cliff favoured low company. Such people flattered him and made him feel like a little king amongst them. He used to boast to Rita about his friends amongst gunmen and such. Night after night he would drive into Newark. Sometimes he would go direct from the bank, and Rita wouldn't see him for days together."

"After his death there must have been a lot of clues to his associates found amongst his effects," suggested Mme. Storey.

"I reckon so," said Ewan carelessly. "Filthy stuff! Rita burned it all."

"That's what happens to evidence!" said Mme. Storey ruefully.

"Wait a minute," said Ewan, "she told me about a postcard that she had found in the pocket of one of his suits. It struck her as funny because it was addressed to Bill Stickney, care General Delivery Newark."

"That's something," said Mme. Storey. "Stickney must have been the name under which Cliff passed in those circles. He wouldn't use his own name. It's too well known. Did she tell you what was on the card?"

"Yes," he said. "It was typical. It began: 'Dear Stinger'" ...

"Better and better!" said Mme. Storey. "His nickname, his moniker amongst his friends: Stinger Stickney."

"The writer warned Cliff to keep away from a place he called 'the old woman's,'" Ewan went on. "Said they were laying for him there. Told Cliff to meet him at the usual time at 'Brindle's.' It was signed by initials only: P.E."

"First-rate," said Mme. Storey.

When we arrived at our offices on Gramercy Park we could see lights in the windows of the basement room. Everything looked all right. But upon entering the house and knocking, there was no answer. Mme. Storey tried the door; it opened; the room was empty. I was chilled by a vague presentiment of evil.

Back of this room which had been the dining-room of the original mansion, there is an inside room, the former pantry, which Mme. Storey has transformed into a bathroom and dressing-room. She has built in a little circular iron stairway in the corner for convenience in reaching the offices above. This stairway leads to the room in the rear of her private office, a room we use for all manner of purposes.

The bathroom door was standing open now, and when we looked at it closely, we saw that it had been forced in, tearing the bolt away from the wall. Then we knew that something was very wrong.

We ran up the iron stairway. The room above was dark. When we got the lights turned on, we saw that nothing had been disturbed. But when we opened the door into Mme. Storey's office, the body of Win Secord was lying almost at our feet. There was no sign of the one-eyed man, of course.

We cried out, for Win, the youngest member of our outfit, was dear to all of us. Such a simple, plucky lad! I ran across the room to turn on the lights, and Mme. Storey dropped to her knees beside him. His slender limbs were sprawling, his face white as paper. There was no visible wound on him. Mme. Storey put her ear to his breast.

"He's alive," she said. "Knocked out by a blow on the head. Call Dr. Torrance."

The Doctor lives on Gramercy Park, only three doors away, and I was lucky enough to find him at home. He was on the spot within a couple of minutes. Meanwhile, by Mme. Storey's order I had called up Inspector Rumsey, our old-time friend, and asked him to come.

Win was lifted up and laid on the sofa. While the doctor was working over him his senses returned. The poor kid was in a pitiable state of distress. He kept muttering:

"I fell down on my job! ... I fell down on my job! He's gone!"

"Don't you worry about that," murmured Mme. Storey. "We all fall down occasionally."

"When Davis went into the bathroom I thought nothing of it," mourned Win. "I forgot about the circular stairway. But he stayed in there so long I got suspicious. I pounded on the door and then I burst it in. When I ran upstairs the lights in Mme. Storey's office were on, but I couldn't see him. I ran through the door ... and then I can't remember anything more."

"He was laying for you just inside the door," said Mme. Storey.

"And now he has read Mme. Storey's papers!" cried Win in distress. "That's what he was after!"

"That's all right," she said soothingly. "There was nothing left out that would do him any good."

Meanwhile, the doctor was tenderly feeling Win's skull. "No serious damage," he said. "I'll take him home in a taxi."

The doctor and Ewan helped young Win downstairs.

In the meantime Inspector Rumsey had come. Our little roly-poly friend with his matter-of-fact air is a tower of strength in times of stress. Mme. Storey explained what had happened, and asked him to have a general alarm broadcasted for one-eyed Davis. With their resources the police had a better chance of finding him than we had.

Davis was to be charged with the attack on Win since there was no evidence to connect him with the Durdan matter. The inspector agreed that the ends of justice would best be served by not giving anything out to the newspapers for the moment.

Rumsey went, and Ewan Santley left us, still bent on proceeding to Charleswood to give himself up. Mme. Storey was thoughtful. She said:

"If Davis, or whatever his name may be, has a pre-arranged hide-out the police are helpless. They will never find him. I rather think it is up to us, Bella."

My spirits were low. I had a horrible feeling that we were going to fail in this case. Elmer Durdan, Val Oman, and the one-eyed man seemed to be able to play with us as they chose.

"What can we do?" I said helplessly.

She glanced at her watch. "Eight-thirty." She reached for the telephone and called Ralph Crider.

Crider fixed himself up a roughneck disguise out of clothes that Mme. Storey keeps for the purpose in the back room, and set off for Newark to see if he could locate the resort known as "Brindle's." Crider is our best man, and so confident was Mme. Storey in his ability, that she immediately set about disguising herself so that she could follow him. My heart sunk.

"How do you feel about going, Bella?" she said. "I must have another woman with me to keep me in face, but if you don't feel up to it I'll telephone to Madge Carswell."

There was only one answer possible. "I'll go," I said grimly.

"Good!" she said, "you are the only woman I know who can keep her mouth shut in any situation. I'll get busy on your make-up directly."

Sure enough, before ten o'clock, Crider called up to say that he had found Brindle's. A beer cellar in the poorest part of the town, he said. Apparently a hangout for petty criminals. He would meet us in front of the five-and-ten-cent store on Broad Street at eleven o'clock, and would have a man with him who would procure us an entrée to the place. So we must appear to let them pick us up on the street.

"We'll be there," said Mme. Storey.

Crider hesitated. "It's a hell of a tough joint, ma'am. You never can tell what may start in such a place. It's a big responsibility for me, taking two women."

Mme. Storey laughed. "You don't need to worry about me," she said. "If there's any trouble you look after Bella."

We set off for Newark via the Hudson Tunnels. Mme. Storey faced the brightly lighted car with complete confidence in the perfection of her disguise. As for me, I got a slight shock whenever I happened to pass a mirror that night. It makes you feel queer when you glance in a mirror unthinkingly, and fail to recognise your own mother's daughter.

All the way over my companion regaled me with conversation loud enough for others to hear. This was pure virtuosity on her part. Like an artist, she delights to get inside the very skin of the part she is playing.

"That big fresh on the floor at Webster Hall, Lil, you know him. They like to make out he's one of the guests but he's the bouncer, really. I seen him get his, too. I seen a guy lay him out cold with a paste in the smush, and they had to give him the air instead of the guy.

"Is he fresh? I'll say! Last night I was talking perfectly ladylike to a big stiff who stepped on my dress and tore it half off at the waist. 'Feet!' I says, 'You ain't got feet, you got caterpillar tractors!' When up comes Fresh and says: 'A little less noise, Sister, or the Avenue for yours.' 'Oh yeah?' I says. 'Yeah!' he says. 'Is zat so?' I says. 'You must think you're something.' 'Want me to prove it?' he says. I just give him one look, Lil..."

It was perfectly in character with the cheap, flashy clothes she was wearing, and the American flag make-up on her face; red, white and blue. She was wearing a kind of skull cap that completely concealed her own hair. All around the edge of the cap stuck brassy blonde curls that were sewn inside. I was divided between my admiration of her cleverness, and fear of where it would land us before the night was out.

The pick-up in front of the five-and-ten-cent store was effected in a perfectly natural manner. The young man with Crider had the look of a prize-fighter long out of an engagement. He answered to the name of Red, and had the over-friendly air that a man puts on when another man is buying. Mme. Storey (or "Rosy" for the time being) attached herself to him so that I would have the easier part to play. All Crider and I had to do was to put in an appropriate remark now and then.

Red was delighted with his partner's wit. "Say, she's a gabby doll, ain't she?" he confided to Crider. "Always there with a come-back."

Brindle's was in a quiet—much too quiet—street near the abandoned Morris Canal. It was in the basement of what

appeared to be a closed-up warehouse. Not a glimmer of light showed to the street. The entrance was guarded by an evil-looking old man who posed as the watchman of the warehouse. Red said: "Friends of mine, Joe," and we were passed in.

It was a dance-hall of sorts; low-ceilinged, smoky, foul. I don't see how anybody could persuade themselves they were having a good time in such a joint, but nearly every table was taken. There was a mechanical organ with some of the notes missing. It played when anybody dropped a nickel in one of the slots fixed around the walls. Crider won a general popularity by being prompt with his nickels.

Mme. Storey warned me with a glance not to drink too much of the beer. The warning was scarcely necessary. Awful stuff. Judging from the poisoned expressions on many of the faces surrounding us it was needled with ether or worse.

When we had been in the place for about half an hour, and Mme. Storey felt that we had established ourselves, she said to Red:

"Introduce me to some of the guys that hang out here. I like a little variety in my dancing."

Red objected, but since he was not paying he was in no position to make a positive stand. After some argument he brought up a seedy individual whom he introduced as "Mr. Jones." Socially, Mr. Jones considered himself a cut above the other men present. Back of his thinning blonde hair and thickening waistline, one could catch a glimpse of the slick youth of twenty years before.

He gallantly leaned over Mme. Storey's chair, and pulled down his cuffs. "First time you been here?" he asked affably.

"Yeah. First time I been," she answered. "There was a boy friend of mine said he'd bring me here, but I ain't seen him lately."

"Who was that?" asked Mr. Jones. "Maybe I met him here."

"Stinger Stickney."

"Stinger Stickney!" cried Mr. Jones. "I know him like my own brother. A great guy, Stinger! But I ain't seen him myself in weeks."

A drunken man at the next table took it upon himself to resent this conversation. "Stinger Stickney nothing!" he muttered, glaring at Mme. Storey. "Stinger is a high-toned guy and a gentleman! Likely he would take up with a cheap skirt like you!"

I felt sick, for I knew what this would start. Red, the ex-prizefighter, rose up and, without saying a word, struck the drunken man a blow on the jaw that sent him sprawling, chair and all, out on the dance floor. Instantly all hell broke loose in the basement. From all around the room men rushed to get into it. They neither knew nor cared what it was all about.

They formed a close mass that swayed this way and that, stamping and cursing. Red was lost in the middle of it. One table then another went over with a crash. Half the fighters were on the floor. Couples would roll out of the central mass, pummelling each other, banging their adversaries' heads on the floor. I remember one man who stood off a little and punched one head after another as it came within reach.

Mme. Storey and I drew back against the wall, and Crider placed himself in front of us. Mr. Jones, who was no scrapper, strolled away as if he didn't know us, whistling carelessly. I was half dead with fear and disgust, but I swear Mme. Storey's eyes were shining. She enjoyed it. The other women in the place were screeching continuously. The organ with the missing notes played insanely through it all.

The proprietor, who manned the beer pumps, and his three waiters drew together with bored expressions as if it

were an old story. They knew what to do. Forming a wedge with linked arms, they suddenly charged into the knot of fighters and scattered it. The drunken man and Red were seized by their collars and rushed out of the door without a pause. It ended as quickly as it had begun.

Mr. Jones came back. He coolly took Red's chair, and the conversation was resumed at the exact point where it had been dropped. No reference was made to the ejected one. This was rather unfair, since Red had started the fracas out of an impulse of gallantry, but we had other things beside Red to think about. Mr. Jones said:

"Yeah. Stinger Stickney, he's a great boy all right, and a free spender. Stickney's not his right name, I reckon. I heard his old man was a railway president, but the boy has just naturally got to see life. There isn't nothing high-hat about Stinger. Mixed with the crowd here just like one of them. Funny, he ain't been here for weeks now. Neither him nor his side-kick Pink-Eye."

I pricked up my ears at the sound of this new name. It fitted the initials on the postcard.

"Who's Pink-Eye?" asked Mme. Storey indifferently.

"Pink-Eye is Stinger's particular pal. Pink-Eye's just a bum, a tramp, a traveller on the blind Pullman's. A funny pair they made. Pink-Eye is popular kind of, because he can tell a good story. He and Stinger was always together. It was Pink-Eye brought Stinger to this joint first-off."

"Pink-Eye?" said Mme. Storey. "What a hell of a name to hang on a guy. How did he earn it?"

"Lost an eye in the war," said Mr. Jones, "and wears a pink patch over the socket, like. Celluloid, I reckon."

This was brought out so casually that for one second I didn't grasp its significance. Then my heart began to thump with excitement. A case began to shape itself at last.

"What night was it when you last seen Stinger?" asked Mme. Storey in her idle way.

"Cheese, I can't remember the night," said Mr. Jones. He spotted another friend of Stinger's two tables away. "Hey, Mose! How long is it since Stinger Stickney was here?"

"You can search me," answered Mose. "More than a month."

The proprietor came strolling over to our table. A slate-eyed man in a white apron, stained with beer. "I heard youse talking about Stinger Stickney," he said. "Any of youse guys or dolls seen him lately?"

There was a general denial.

"I wouldn't mind getting aholt of that guy," he went on. "'Cause why? He run up an account over five smackers for beer. And after he went home the last time the fellows told me was showing a roll as big as my fist. That made me sore."

A voice said: "Yeah, I seen his roll."

Another voice spoke up, evidently not one of the regular frequenters: "I ain't seen Stinger Stickney, but there's a guy wears a pink patch over his eye hangs out at Barney's."

"Hell! I ain't interested in Pink-Eye," said the proprietor; "he's only a sponge."

"Bud," asked Mr. Jones, "do you remember what night it was Stinger was last in here?"

"Sure!" said the proprietor, "I put it down. It was October 10th."

This was the night of the murder.

Mme. Storey appeared to be bored. She let the discussion run itself out without any interference from her.

Somebody said:

"The last night Stinger was in here he said he was going to take Pink-Eye down to Florida in his car. Hence the big roll. I thought he was just joshing because I couldn't see him and that bum travelling together. But maybe he did."

"Maybe he did," they agreed. "Soft for Pink-Eye, eh?"

When the talk had passed on to other subjects, and Stinger Stickney was forgotten, Mme Storey yawned and said: "Gee! this joint is slow. Let's move on somewheres."

"Where'll we go?" said Crider.

Mme. Storey was half sprawling across the table. "Stinger used to tell me about a place called Barney's," she said listlessly. "According to him it was a hot dugout all right. Do you know it, Jonesy?"

"Sure, I know it," he said in some embarrassment. "Trouble is, I'm a little short of cash to-night."

"Oh, that's all right," said Crider, "I'll stand to the crowd."

"Maybe we could get a real drink there," said Mme. Storey. "This beer is rotten. Can you get us in, Jonesy?"

"I'm known in every speak' in Newark," said Mr. Jones proudly.

"Okay, let's go."

8

Barney's was a smaller and more select place than Brindle's; i.e. more secret. You entered from the street through a harmless looking delicatessen shop. You sat down at a table in the back and ordered a Bremen sandwich. This was the password. They looked you over, Jonesy explained, and if suspicious merely said: "We're out of Bremen." If you were approved, the waiter would slip you a green ticket. We got the ticket.

You went through a curtained doorway into what appeared to be the shopkeeper's living-room in the rear. In the bedroom there was a blind doorway. You dropped your ticket in a slot and the door was opened by an unseen hand. At the end of a narrow, dimly-lighted corridor you found what Jonesy described as the hangout of some of the most famous young guys in Jersey. Rising stars. He meant rising in the sky of the underworld.

It was a biggish room without any windows, ventilated by a skylight in the ceiling. Unpleasantly suggestive of a trap. There was no music here, but only whispering across the tables and steady drinking. All the customers were young men, some flashily dressed, and some gotten up with deliberate toughness like our Crider.

Mme. Storey's unerring eye spotted the man we were in search of before I did. He was standing at the serving bar with his back turned to us. There were others between. From half-way across the room she saw the elastic that bound the patch around his head. An instant later somebody stepped aside and I saw the old olive drab tunic. My heart began to beat so violently I thought it would suffocate me.

Jonesy had fallen behind to speak to a friend, and Mme. Storey whispered to Crider: "Our man is here. Slip out and fetch the police."

For the first time in his life Crider questioned one of her orders. "And leave you in this den?" he said.

"Go!" said Mme. Storey.

He slipped away. When Jonesy came up he said: "Where's the other guy?"

"He made a sneak," said Mme. Storey coolly. "He seen a guy who's his enemy, and he didn't want trouble here."

Jonesy was disturbed, because Crider had agreed to pay. He said nothing, and Mme Storey made no offer to help him out.

We could see that one of the chief attractions of the place was the girl who waited on the tables, and joshed the customers. She was young, and she was really handsome in a dark, coarse fashion. Even her crude make-up couldn't hide it. The eyes of more than one of the boys followed her around dangerously. Besides ourselves, she was the only woman in the place.

Amongst others Pink-Eye was smitten with her. He was leaning on the counter talking to her. When she came to take our order he turned around and gave us the once-over. My heart stood still for the moment. However, he did not recognise us in our tough disguises. He had been drinking heavily.

The girl went back to him and he forgot us. Meanwhile Jonesy was getting more and more uneasy. Suddenly he gave a pretended start of recognition.

"There's a guy over there I got to see," he said. "Back in half a moment."

Out of the tail of my eye I watched him circle around the room, stopping to speak to this man and that. He slipped through the door, and we never saw him again.

"He's gone!" I murmured, with a terrible sinking sensation.

"So much the better," said Mme. Storey calmly. The sense of danger made her eyes sparkle. "He's more of a liability than an asset.... Look around and catch yourself a fellow, Lil."

Forcing back my fears, I allowed my eyes to rove around, and immediately one of the young men came swaggering over to our table. A handsome lad, lithe as a panther and no doubt as savage. It was too exciting for me. I had to keep my hands under the table to conceal their trembling.

"Hello, Carrots," the young man said casually. "What's become of your boy friend?"

"Reckon he run out of jack," I said with a contemptuous air. "He's nothing to me anyway."

The young man sat down. "Well, how about having a little drink with me? I'm gold-plated." He showed me a big roll of bills under the table.

"I bet that was never earned on the railway," I said.

He laughed uproariously. "You're dead right, Baby!" He caught my hand and squeezed it hard. I would as lief have toyed with a wild animal. "What do they call you?" he asked.

"Lil."

"You're all right, Lil! Me, I'm One-man Jake. I run my own show."

Meanwhile Mme. Storey was watching Pink-Eye. There was a tense little drama going on at the counter. Pink-Eye was leaning across it, pleading with the girl sullenly, forgetful of everybody else in the room.

"That poor fish is bugs on Lulu," Jake said scornfully. "Night after night he's after her. In the end he'll knife her."

The girl was listening to Pink-Eye half charmed, half resentful. Suddenly they began to quarrel. Pink-Eye put his hands on her. She jerked away and slapped his face. She flamed with anger. "Let me be!" she cried. "I'm satisfied the way I am!" She left him.

The room fell silent. The other men, with faces like masks, were glancing at Pink-Eye out of the corners of their

eyes. Pink-Eye turned away from the counter making out that he didn't care. His eye fell on Mme. Storey, and he came straight to our table with a backward glance at Lulu as much as to say he'd show her. To Mme. Storey he said:

"You look good to me, girl."

"Oh yeah?" she drawled. "Say, you ought to cork yourself up for six months yet, fellow. You ain't ready to drink."

He laughed. "Too fresh, eh? The girls like 'em that way. I'll show you." He sat down with us. Jake was indifferent.

With the blank pink patch over his eye-socket, the evil leer in his single eye, the coarse beard, he was unspeakably repulsive. I could scarcely control myself. But I had to keep up my character with Jake every moment. Out of one ear I could hear Mme. Storey jollying Pink-Eye in her lazy fashion. I prayed for the coming of the police. Suddenly things began to happen.

Lulu, true to the character that men give women, became furiously jealous the moment her admirer sat down at our table. Like an animal, her passions were close to the surface. In a minute or two she approached us, white around the lips with rage, the pupils of her eyes distended until they crowded out the whole iris.

"Who is this woman?" she cried shrilly, "What's she doing here? I never seen her before."

"Aah! go sit on a tack, Lulu," growled Pink-Eye.

"Who brought her in here?" cried Lulu. "I got a right to know that, ain't I? Who brought her in here?"

A voice answered: "Baldy Jones brought her."

"Well, where is Jonesy?" screamed Lulu. "Is he willing to okay her? Jonesy has made a sneak for some good reason."

Mme. Storey sat coolly smoking and looking at the girl with that peculiar blankness she is capable of assuming. This was out of character with the part she was playing, but she couldn't help it. She can't act fear. I glanced around at the faces of the men. So far they were merely grinning at Lulu's outburst.

Mme. Storey's cool gaze spurred the girl to an increased fury. "Look at her! Look at her!" she screamed. "Look at the fine lady! She ain't one of us. Look at her eyes. Look at her pretty hands. She's disguised! Stool pigeon, that's what she is! Spy of the police!"

At the sound of that word the men began to rise with muttered curses that made me feel weak with fear.

"Police spy! Police spy!" shrieked Lulu. Before we could divine her intention, her hand shot out and snatched off the little cap, bringing the yellow curls with it. Mme. Storey's own dark hair fell about her neck. "Ha! I told you so!" cried Lulu.

Pink-Eye knew us then. A panic terror showed in his single eye. He backed away from the table gasping.

Mme. Storey and I rose. My arms were suddenly seized from behind, and pressed back until I thought the shoulders would be forced out of joint. A scream rose in my throat, but I forced it back. It would only have drawn a blow. And what was the use of screaming, buried in that hole? We had not a friend there. Mme. Storey was seized at the same time. She coolly dropped her cigarette on the floor, and rubbed out the light with her foot.

Pink-Eye, beside himself with terror, dragged Lulu back from the table. I saw him whisper to her: "Get me out of here!" She answered: "Wait!"

Lulu approached Mme. Storey with her fingers crooked like the talons of a bird. "God! I'd like to mark your smooth skin!" she snarled.

Some of the men protested. "Keep your hands off her while we're holding her," one growled.

Another voice said, "Throw them out in the street!"

"Yeah!" cried Lulu. "And have them bring the cops back!"

"Lulu's right!" cried several voices. Somebody asked, "What'll we do with them then? If she's a police spy they know where she is."

"She's not a police spy," stammered Pink-Eye. "She's a private 'tec."

"You do what I tell you!" commanded Lulu. "Tie them up and stop their mouths. Carry them up to my room, and throw them on the bed. I'll take care of them."

A thin rope was produced from somewhere. Our arms were bound behind us, and our ankles tied together. Hard fingers clamped my jaws together, while strips of adhesive were pasted across my lips. We were then picked up and carried—not out through the corridor by which we had entered, but through another blind door, up a stairway into a room. We were flung on a bed, and our captors left us, locking the door behind them.

I lay there in a stupor of terror. But almost immediately I found Mme. Storey peeling the strips of tape from my lips. "How did you free yourself?" I whispered.

"A trick," she answered coolly. "If you stiffen your arms in a certain position while they are tying them, when you relax, the rope will be loose. I must teach it to you."

"Oh, where are the police?" I groaned.

"I don't know," she said. "We've got to depend on ourselves."

When she had freed me, we went to the window and softly raised it. We looked down into a back yard surrounded by a huddle of other back yards with outbuildings, and the backs of houses. Not a light showed anywhere.

"We must get out of here!" muttered Mme. Storey.

Working in the dark, we pulled the covers off the bed, and knotted them together. "We must carry the bed to the window," she whispered. "Don't let it scrape along the floor." It was a small iron bed, not too heavy for us, though we staggered under it. When the foot-piece was planted across the window frame it made a firm brace. We tied our rope to it, and let ourselves down into the yard.

Here we seemed little better off than in the bedroom, because there was no way out except a door that led back into the building we had just quitted. However, over the top of the fence at one side appeared the sloping roof of a lean-to. Mme. Storey boosted me up to the top of the fence, from which I gained the roof of the lean-to, and stretching out flat, reached down and helped her up beside me.

At the top of the sloping roof there was an open window. I looked at it in mingled hope and terror.

"We must risk the window," whispered Mme. Storey. "The chances are that law-abiding people live inside. At any rate all they can do is to hand us over to the police."

Just how we managed to claw our way up those slippery shingles I can't tell you. Necessity nerved us. We finally got our fingers on the window sill. Mme. Storey let herself over the sill into the dark room beyond and I followed her. It was an inhabited room; there was a carpet on the floor. Coming in from the outside, a solid wall of blackness faced us. My heart beat so hard I thought it must arouse the house.

An inch at a time we felt our way around the wall to a door. Mme. Storey turned the handle with infinite caution. While I waited behind her I could hear somebody breathing in sleep within reach of my arm. I held my own breath. We passed out into a hall leaving the door open. We felt our way on all fours to the stairs and crept down.

Near the foot of the stairs we found the front door, fastened with a bolt, also a chain. When we got it open, we found ourselves looking into a shabby side street under the blessed stars. Nobody in sight. As we passed through the door, somebody from above called in a scared voice, "Who's there?" But we were out then. In the street I had to lean against a lamp-post to let the beating of my heart ease down.

When we got to the corner we discovered that the police were raiding the delicatessen shop. Crider was not amongst them. We joined the crowd and watched. They lost a lot of time finding the masked door, and breaking it down. When they got into the crooks' hangout it was empty. There is always a back way out. All they could do was to arrest the innocent-seeming people who kept the shop in front. No sign of Crider anywhere.

We followed the police back to the station house. Mme. Storey made herself known to the Captain of the precinct. He told her that Crider had notified the nearest patrolman he could find, and had then gone back into the speakeasy. The patrolman had called up the station house and thus precious minutes had been lost. Mme. Storey in her polite way told the Captain a few plain truths. He was sore but he was too much overawed by her reputation to say anything.

Then we went home. Mme. Storey said, "The rest is up to Crider. I hope to God the little fellow is all right!"

9

I stayed with Mme. Storey during the balance of the night. No word came from Crider. There was no news of him at the office in the morning.

"He is either dead," said Mme. Storey grimly, "or he is still on the trail. If Pink-Eye had escaped him, he would report."

Ewan Santley was to be arraigned before the magistrate in Charleswood at ten o'clock, we learned, and we started over there, leaving word where we were going so that any message could be relayed.

The morning newspapers had carried a story about the arrest of Ewan Santley the night before, and so many people were attracted to the hearing that the magistrate was obliged to borrow the main courtroom of the county courthouse for the occasion. The room was typical of a hundred such places with its tall, unwashed windows, varnished furniture, hissing radiators and its smell of dust and damp humanity. Reporters from New York, scenting an unusual case, were there in force.

It must have been the biggest case that had ever come before Colonel Emslie, and he was feeling his importance. Evidently he enjoyed the title of magistrate, for he was rich and had no need of the stipend attached to the office. He was the typical country gentleman, old style, seemingly compounded of beef and beer. When we entered he was standing below the judges' bench chatting informally with the thin-lipped Elmer Durdan. This public association of magistrate and complaining witness did not promise well for the prisoner.

Elmer Durdan gave Mme. Storey a poisonous look when she entered, as much as to say, What the hell are you doing here? She bowed to him sweetly.

Many of the reporters knew Mme. Storey, and they cheerfully moved up to give us room on the front bench. Across the aisle was the gross figure of Val Oman, the head of the detective agency that bears his name. Like all the crooks in the business he hated Mme. Storey. He grinned when he saw her as if he expected to triumph over her, but there was a certain uneasiness in it too. Beyond him sat four or five persons that I supposed were his witnesses, from the way he was keeping watch over them.

In the row behind Oman sat a slender woman in black that we guessed must be Rita Durdan. She was heavily veiled. She had a woman friend with her. When he left the magistrate Elmer Durdan sat down beside her, addressing himself to her in a sympathetic and fatherly manner. This was to persuade the crowd that he and the young widow stood together. Rita's veil concealed her expression.

The room was too hot, and after a while Rita threw her veil back as if for air. It was my first sight of her. She was lovely. Her pallor and distress only increased her delicate loveliness. It made your heart ache; the black veil, the soft, fine blonde hair, and the unforgettable eyes. Big and blue they were, with a suggestion of changing hues like the sea.

"Beautiful enough to tempt a man to murder," murmured Mme. Storey.

Colonel Emslie mounted the bench, and rapped for order. Ewan Santley entered, accompanied by a warder. His face was white and stony. His eyes flew to Rita's face, but she would not look at him. He lowered his head, and dropped into a chair beside his counsel.

This was Archer Greenfield, junior member of a famous firm, a man no older than Ewan, but keen and able. Mme. Storey scribbled a note, and one of the reporters passed it. She advised Greenfield to insist on a hearing, but to delay the proceedings as much as he could.

Greenfield arose. "Your Honour," he said, "such a short time has elapsed since the prisoner was arrested that I have not had time to consult with him adequately. I ask for an adjournment."

"What difference does it make?" said Colonel Emslie. "This is only a preliminary examination. You will have ample time before the trial to prepare a defence."

"I was hoping that I might be able to save the state the expense of a trial," said Greenfield.

"You know as well as I do," said the magistrate irritably, "after the stories that have been set in circulation that there must be a trial. The prisoner's proper course is to waive examination, and then nothing derogatory to him will be brought out until you are prepared to meet it. Does the prisoner waive examination?"

"No, Your Honour," said Greenfield firmly. "If we may not have an adjournment, he insists on his right to an examination."

"Very well," said Colonel Emslie, shrugging. He made a sign to Val Oman.

Val arose and made a little speech to the court in an oily voice, with ugly side glances at Mme. Storey. Mr. Elmer Durdan, having heard certain stories to the effect that his brother's death was not accidental, Val said, had asked him to make an investigation. He had therefore gone to work, and had uncovered certain evidence that he was now prepared to put before the magistrate.

The first witness was a girl called Mabel Tawney, a blunt, plainspoken creature who appeared to be telling the truth. She testified that she had worked for Mrs. Clifford Durdan as a general servant from her marriage up to the time of her husband's death.

"Do you know Ewan Santley?" asked Oman, pointing to the accused.

"Yes, sir. He called at our house about a month before the fire."

"Please tell the magistrate what happened on that occasion."

"Well, Your Honour, Mr. Santley gave me his name and I showed him into the living-room. When I told my mistress who it was, she went as pale as a ghost, and ran downstairs. I saw them as I passed the door, and I could see he was gone on her, but I couldn't see her face...."

The magistrate rapped sharply. "Never mind your impressions," he said. "Stick to the facts."

"Yes, Your Honour. I went out to my kitchen, and I couldn't hear anything they said until he raised his voice. He had been there about half an hour then. He begun to swear awful, and I sneaked back into the dining-room thinking he might do her some hurt. There was only curtains between the two rooms. But it was against Cliff Durdan that he was swearing.... Must I repeat his curse words?"

"It is not necessary," said Colonel Emslie stiffly.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Santley was crying out, 'I'll kill him! I'll kill him!' And then he run out of the house like a man blind."

Archer Greenfield arose. "May I ask the witness a question, Your Honour?"

"Certainly."

"What was Clifford Durdan's character in his home?"

Bang went the gavel! "Don't answer the question!" snapped the magistrate. "Clifford Durdan is not on trial here!"

Greenfield smiled, and took his seat.

The next witness to be called was Joe Loeser. This was one of the car-washers in the Charleswood garage. He was a meagre little fellow with a seamed face and lank blond hair; odd-jobs man was stamped on him, one of the fag-ends of industry. His story was undoubtedly true. He was too dumb to have invented it.

"Tell His Honour where you were and what you saw on the night of October 10th," said Val Oman.

Joe, who had been given a new suit for his appearance in court, was delighted with the attention he was receiving. "Mike Bosi and me was behind the wall on Colonel Emslie's place the night of the fire."

"Ha! Stealing chickens!" exploded His Honour.

"No, sir, Your Honour," said Joe with a virtuous air, "just walking."

"Go on."

"We was just going to jump over the wall into the alley," continued Joe, "when I seen a light in Durdan's garage, and pulled Mike back. We laid a log under the wall so's we could stand on it and look over."

"Were the lights of the car on?" asked the magistrate.

"No, sir. The lights was off and the door pulled to, but we could see a dim light moving about inside, like."

"Go on."

"The fellow inside, he opened the door a little way. He was carrying a bucket. He splashes a little on the cement, and goes back inside. Then he comes out, closes the door, and puts a match to what he had spilled. The fire blazes up, and runs inside. Right away it was roaring."

"What did the man do then?"

"He jumps across the road, and pulls himself over the wall. Mike and me dropped down inside. He didn't see us. He sets off running inside the wall towards the main road."

"What did you and Mike do?"

"We was scared. We run the other way up by back streets to the village. We didn't know there was anybody in the car. We thought Cliff Durdan had hired some guy to burn it for the insurance. When the fire engine come out we followed it back with the crowd."

"Then you found out there was a man in it. And you never said anything."

"Yes, I did," whined Joe. "I told my boss. I says, 'Fellow told me he seen a guy running from the fire.' And Mike, he told a couple of fellows the same. They didn't believe us. We was afraid to speak plain. We're only poor fellows. There

wasn't anybody else seen him, and maybe they would try to hang it on us. So Mike and me fixed it up to keep our mouths shut until they found the guy. Then we could tell."

"Did you get a good look at the man?"

This was the vital question, and the whole courtroom hung in suspense on the answer.

"Yes, sir, Your Honour," said Joe with emphasis. "When the fire first blazed up we saw him good. He was a rough-looking guy. Had on ragged pants, an old tunic like a soldier's, no collar or tie, a dirty checked cap. There was hair all over his face like he hadn't shaved for weeks past, and he only had one eye. The other was covered with a pink patch, celluloid, like."

I was making notes of the testimony. My pencil stopped when I heard this, and a great feeling of relief filled me. I thought Ewan was safe. I looked at Mme. Storey.

"Wait!" she said gravely. "Val Oman is not done with him yet."

Young Greenfield was on his feet. "Your Honour, what has this man's testimony got to do with my client?" he asked.

Val Oman spoke up. "I am prepared to show that, Your Honour. First do you want me to put this man's partner on the stand to corroborate his story?"

"No," said the magistrate. "Go on with your other witnesses."

Sol Abrams was called to the stand. He was a tall, respectable looking man with a face like a yellow waxen mask, only the eyes alive. I waited in the sharpest anxiety to hear what he was going to say. He testified that he was a dealer in second-hand clothes on lower Sixth Avenue, New York.

"Have you ever seen the accused before?" asked Val Oman.

The witness turned his wary eyes on Ewan Santley, and stroked his chin. He had a grave air that was quite impressive. "Yes, sir," he said. "I know him as a young man who occupies a flat on West Eighth Street. I have bought his old clothes."

"Tell His Honour about the last time you saw him."

"On the morning of October 10th," said Abrams, "he come into my place of business. Said he was going to a fancy dress ball in Newark that night, and wanted a tramp outfit. I sold him a pair of old black pants, an olive drab tunic and a check cap. I showed him how to paste hair on his face and clip the ends to make it look like a week's growth of beard. And for a last touch I gave him a pink celluloid patch to wear over one eye."

Ewan Santley sprang up crying, "He lies! He lies! I never saw the man before!" The magistrate banged his gavel. Greenfield was trying to drag his client back into his chair. Ewan's outburst only damaged his case, of course. The witness looked at Ewan coolly, and shifted his wad of gum to the other side of his jaw.

"My son was in the store at the time," he said. "He can identify him too."

I felt sick at heart. My head was whirling. For a moment I wondered if Ewan Santley and Pink-Eye could be one and the same. They were about the same size, and both had the same bright blue eyes. But it seemed preposterous.

There was great confusion in the courtroom. Ewan was angrily expostulating with his lawyer. A buzz of talk came from the spectators. Colonel Emslie's gavel was useless. Val Oman was trying to tell him that he had other testimony to offer. I heard him say:

"Ewan Santley's car was seen parked in a lonely spot near Charleswood that night, and the number was taken down."

"That can all come out later," said the magistrate. "I've heard sufficient now." He banged his gavel anew.

Before he could get out the fateful words, "Held for trial," a fresh commotion arose at the back of the room. Two husky State's troopers pushed their way in, shoving before them the ragged, individual that we knew as Dick Davis or Pink-Eye. Behind them was Ralph Crider. Crider's clothes were almost torn off him and one of his eyes was blacked, but he was beaming. His glance sought Mme. Storey's face for her approval. I felt like cheering.

At sight of the one-eyed tramp, loud cries of astonishment broke from the crowd. The courtroom was thrown into complete confusion. The magistrate banged his gavel until it broke in his hand.

"What is this?" he cried. "What do you mean by bursting into my court in this fashion?"

"Please, Your Honour," said the first trooper, "we got a call for help from this man"—indicating Crider. "We found him in a tough resort on the Greenwood Lake road, with this bum in his custody, standing off half a dozen of his friends who were trying to rescue him. He showed us credentials from Mme. Storey, the famous criminologist, and asked us to help him bring the man to your court. So we did."

For the moment Colonel Emslie did not take in the significance of what had happened. He could only think of his ruffled dignity. "You have no business to create such a commotion when I am trying a case. Who is the man?"

Nobody answered him. All order and decorum were lost in the pushing, craning throng, struggling to get a good look at the man with the pink patch over his eye.... He cowered behind the troopers as if he expected the crowd to tear him to pieces. Finally the troopers got him behind the attorney's table, which served as a barrier to the crowd.

"Clear the court!" shouted the magistrate in a passion.

This sobered the crowd, and they began to drop quietly into their seats. They were afraid of missing something. "Who is he?" everybody was asking. The magistrate's order was not carried out.

Suddenly little Joe Loeser, the car-washer, cried out in a voice cracking with excitement, "That's the guy! That's the guy that set Cliff Durdan's garage on fire! I would know him amongst a thousand!"

"That's him!" echoed Mike Bosi.

Mme. Storey said clearly, "Take the patch from his eye!"

One of the troopers snapped it over the man's head, and everybody saw that the tramp had two perfectly good eyes, one as bright and savage as the other. They darted this way and that like the eyes of a trapped animal.

Suddenly Rita Durdan screamed aloud. Coming from that self-contained girl it had a terrible sound. At the same moment Elmer Durdan dropped back, clutching his heart. His face had become livid. The magistrate on the bench goggled and stared.

"Who is it? Who is it?" he demanded helplessly.

A score of voices answered him from the body of the room. "It's Cliff Durdan!"

Mme. Storey smiled dryly.

When a little order could be restored, Archer Greenfield said with ironical politeness, "Your Honour, the prisoner awaits his discharge."

"Discharged," muttered the shaken magistrate.

There was a burst of applause. The young lawyer shook hands with his young client. There was little gladness in Ewan's face. He looked at the cowering Cliff Durdan as if he would gladly commit the crime of which he had been falsely accused. Nobody could see Rita's face. She clung to her friend.

Mme. Storey said, "There is something else that remains to be done, Your Honour."

"What's that?" asked Colonel Emslie, passing a hand over his confused face.

"To order the arrest of Clifford Durdan."

"His ... his arrest?"

"For the murder of a tramp known as Pink-Eye last seen in his company. It was the tramp who was burned in the car. Durdan had previously changed clothes with him."

"But why should he have done such a thing?"

"He was tired of leading a respectable life," said Mme. Storey dryly. "He had become infatuated with a waitress in a speakeasy in Newark. He stole a large sum of money from the Weldon National Bank, and planned the murder as a cover for that crime."

"Stole from the bank?" echoed Colonel Emslie. He turned to Elmer Durdan. "Is this true?"

Durdan moistened his dry lips. "There was a shortage," he muttered.

"I order his arrest," said the magistrate.

"This man is obviously guilty of perjury," said Mme. Storey, pointing to Sol Abrams.

The old clothes dealer went to pieces and began to scream accusations against Val Oman. "He bribed me! He bribed me! He paid me a thousand dollars to come here to-day."

"Your Honour," cried Oman in virtuous indignation. "I'm a well-known man. My record is clean. This fellow deceived me, that's all."

"Let them both be committed," said Colonel Emslie.

When we went home that day I felt as sore all over as if I had been beaten with a club. It was simply nervous exhaustion following too much excitement. In the car I said to Mme. Storey:

"You knew all the time that it was Clifford Durdan!"

"Well, I suspected it," she said smiling. "And many little things tended to confirm it. But it was principally the eye-patch. I could see there was an eye under it."

"How?" I cried.

"The eye-ball kept the patch from fitting close to the socket. And the patch used to move a little."

The trials that followed are now newspaper history. There was plenty of evidence forthcoming against Clifford Durdan. The girl Lulu, who was as inconstant as she was violent, testified against him. He must have hit Pink-Eye over the head with a blackjack soon after they left the speakeasy, and had shoved his body down in the bottom of the car. That was how he had appeared to be driving home alone. It was shown that he had stopped at one place earlier in the day to buy a galvanised pail, and at another place to purchase two gallons of gasoline in tins. He was convicted and in due course executed, and I doubt if there was a soul on earth who regretted his passing. Long before that Lulu had consoled herself.

Both Sol Abrams and Val Oman received prison sentences. In the case of the latter individual, it was certainly a public service to drive him out of business. When he saw that he was lost he accused Elmer Durdan of having bribed *him*. Durdan had sufficient prestige to evade trial, but the scandal forced him to resign the presidency of his bank, so he did not escape punishment altogether.

For a while it looked as if the miserable business had parted Ewan and Rita forever. Both had suffered so much they could not bear to see each other. Ewan went off to South America alone.

However, time heals such wounds. They both remained our friends. And when Ewan came back to the States for a holiday, Mme. Storey asked them both to her house one night without knowledge of each other.

She took care to be out when they came. In fact she and I dined together in a restaurant that night. When we returned to the little house on East Sixty-Third Street we found Rita and Ewan seated side by side on a sofa in the 1850 parlour. They were somewhat shaky emotionally, but ecstatically happy.

"Well, it's all right," said Ewan. "Rita and I have decided to ring down on the past."

Shortly afterwards they were married without any publicity, and sailed back together to Brazil. There they were able to start afresh in a place far from all reminders of their unhappiness.



THE KIDNAPPING OF MADAME STOREY

1

At a time when the crime of kidnapping was sweeping the country like a plague, my employer Madame Storey and I attended the first night of a Paul Vallorbe play at the Bijou Theatre. Lately the kidnapers had been soaring to unprecedented heights of boldness. Nearly every week the son or the daughter of some prominent family was discovered to be missing, and enormous sums of money had been collected in ransoms. At the moment there seemed to be no effective way of dealing with the outrages.

The Paul Vallorbe first night was *the* first night of the season and the whole town was there. Mme. Storey, who knows everybody and is intimate with none, takes me with her on such occasions as a kind of buffer. When she has a companion it is more difficult for people to fasten themselves on her.

The play was perfectly produced and beautifully acted. It seemed very modern and brilliant to me. But as we sauntered up the aisle after the second act Bruce McComb of the *Star* said to Mme. Storey, "It's like a dry Martini, isn't it?" And she said in her off-hand way, "Oh, I should say loganberry juice." After that I didn't think so much of it.

It was a mild night in the Fall and the audience bulged out on the pavement under the glass marquise. The great and the near-great formed a compact mass in the middle, while the nobodies hung around on the edges gaping at the eminences and nudging each other.

Pencils Mary came barging through the crowd. She's as inveterate a first-nighter as any in town, though she never gets inside a theatre. They say that superstitious producers bribe her to appear after the second act. They also say that she owns a row of tenement houses on the East Side. She wears black glasses but she can see as well as anybody. She greets

her friends by name, and if any other beggar attempts to panhandle a first night crowd, she charges at the intruder with her stick.

Mme. Storey was talking to several friends when Pencils Mary came pushing through in her cool way. "Ah, darlin! you are more beautiful than ever to-night," she whined. "I suppose that's worth a quarter," laughed Mme. Storey, dropping the coin in the outstretched paw. Mary made all the surrounding men give up, and then moved on. I always wonder what would happen if anybody took a pencil off her.

I was standing a little behind my employer, and of course nobody was looking at me. As Mary passed me she whispered out of the corner of her mouth, "Get her to stop behind a little when they go in."

I was startled, half prepared to be angry at the old creature's impudence, but my employer has taught me never to disregard a tip. So I passed it to Mme. Storey when I got the chance, and after the buzzer had sounded and everybody was moving into the theatre, she hung back without appearing to until there was nobody left in the lobby but herself and the men she was talking to.

These were men who had just approached and it seemed natural to them when Pencils Mary came hobbling up saying, "Ah! the beautiful Madame Storey! Ain't you going to buy a pencil to-night, darlin'?"

My employer laughed, and dropping another coin in her palm, said, "You haven't sold a pencil in years!"

The men had passed ahead a little, and the beggar whispered swiftly, "There's a plan to kidnap you to-night. Watch out!" Then immediately she began calling down blessings on Mme. Storey's head, and moved out of the lobby, and out of sight down the street.

My employer was for laughing off the warning, but it knocked me breathless. The kidnappers had evinced such a craze for publicity in their recent operations that it seemed exactly in line for them to hit on somebody like Mme. Storey for their next victim.

The curtain was up when we got inside, and there was nobody at the back of the house but the manager. We had aisle seats. Mme. Storey made believe that she was keen about hearing the last act, but I held her back pleading in a whisper for her to do something about this warning. She, who never lets the least thing pass where a client's interests are concerned, is incorrigibly careless about her own safety.

"But *Bella mia*, it is obviously just somebody's idea of a joke," she objected.

"Pencils Mary isn't wasting her time on practical jokes," I said. "She's a realist."

"Then somebody is pulling the old woman's leg."

"Well, anyhow, call up Inspector Rumsey at Police Headquarters and see what he thinks about it."

"My dear, it would be a rum go if the police were called on to protect *me*!"

"Then call up Crider, Benny Abell or our other operatives, and fetch them here while the last act is going on."

"Why should anybody kidnap me? I'm the Cat that Walks by Itself. There is nobody belonging to me who could be scared into paying a ransom."

"They would make you find the money yourself before letting you go!"

"If I paid attention to all the threats that are made against me I'd never have time for anything else!"

"If you won't telephone to Inspector Rumsey, I will!" I said desperately.

She shrugged, and asked the house manager for permission to use the phone in his private office.

Rumsey, when he was told of the warning, believed just as I did that there was something in it. He said he would send a motor-cycle squad to escort us home, and asked Mme. Storey to wait inside the theatre until the street was clear.

When they came out after the final curtain, everybody saw the motor cops waiting, but nobody, not even the house manager, knew why they had been summoned. Mme. Storey simply lingered in the back of the theatre talking to friends until everybody had gone and the street was clear. When we issued out it was to be greeted with grins by four of the handsomest policemen I ever hope to see. My employer has a powerful drag with the boys in blue.

We got in her car and started home at about forty miles an hour amidst the screaming sirens of our escort. To Eighth Avenue, up to Columbus Circle, back to the East side of the Park, everything in the streets ducking for cover. Mme. Storey said she felt like Queen Marie of Rumania, or Gabriel sounding the last trump. It was a little too exciting for my taste, and I was thankful when we drew up in quiet East Sixty-Third.

Here our cavalcade broke up. The car went off to the garage, three of the policemen returned to Headquarters, while the fourth, acting on the Inspector's instructions, parked his motor-bike against the curb, and prepared to guard our front door during the rest of the night. Mme. Storey invited him in for a little refreshment, but he was on his toes, and smilingly declined. If his sense of duty had been a little less rigid what a difference it would have made!

I was spending the night with Mme. Storey as I usually did when we went out together. The servants had been instructed not to wait up for us, and they were in bed at the top of the building. They had put out a cold supper for us, and we proceeded directly to the dining-room which is at the rear of the maisonnette at the ground floor level.

It is an old brownstone front, one of twenty or more in a row, but Mme. Storey's ingenuity and taste have worked wonders with the interior layout. The dining-room has a French window opening on the typical New York back yard now transformed into a delightful little formal garden. When my employer switched on the lights her hawk-like eye pounced on that window. Through the light sash curtain stretched inside, she saw that a little square had been cut out of the glass.

"There is somebody in the house," she said quietly.

All the strength seemed to run out of my body. I dropped in a chair.

The room had but one door, that by which we had entered. In order to reach the street where the policeman was posted, one had to cross a square hall in the middle of the house. The main entrance opened on a brick paved passage ending in an iron grilled gate facing the street. The telephone was in the dining-room and that seemed quicker. But when Mme. Storey picked up the receiver she dropped it again.

"Dead," she said.

As she started for the door two men entered.

They were not masked. Rather fine-looking young fellows; picked men; keen. They wore well-tailored tuxedos, their slick heads were bare, each carried a hellish looking automatic in his right hand. All the humanity was frozen out of their faces; they were not men but gun-toters.

I tried to get up but could not. I was dissolved in fear. It was too terrible to find the enemy right in the heart of your own castle. Mme. Storey said coolly: "Well! this is an unexpected pleasure! What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Stick 'em up!" rasped the leader of the two.

We obeyed. What else could we do?

"Should I frisk 'em?" asked the second man.

"Nah!" said the leader. "Ain't no place to hide a gun in them tight dresses. Feel through their wraps though."

We had come in carrying our wraps and had dropped them on a carved chest just inside the door. The man felt through them. Needless to say they contained no guns. He tossed them to us.

"Put 'em on," said the leader. "You can take your hands down. You're coming with us."

"Where?" asked Mme. Storey mildly.

He merely pointed to the window with his gun.

"Is this a kidnapping?" she asked.

"No talk!"

"Because if it is, you have made a mistake. There is nobody belonging to me that would give up a dollar to get me back. And I'm not a rich woman myself."

"I've got nothing to do with that," said the leader. "You can talk to the boss. My orders are just to bring you to him. I was told to treat you with every consideration if you come quietly, but to bring you, see?"

"I'm awfully hungry," said Mme. Storey, glancing wistfully at the table. Maud had put out some caviare sandwiches, *millefoglie*, and a bottle of Johannisberger.

The leader glanced at his elegant wristwatch. "You come home quick with your escort," he said grimly. "I'll give you five minutes to eat.... But keep apart. And no whispering!"

"Perhaps you and your friend will join us," she said brightly. "The wine is good."

"We don't eat," he said. "... But thanks for the offer."

They forced us to sit down at opposite sides of the table so that we could not speak. Mme. Storey touched me reassuringly with her foot. After one bite I gave up. The food choked me.

My employer chewed her sandwiches deliberately. Behind her blank face I could see that she was canvassing every possibility. But there was nothing to be done. The two men stood between us and all help. Nothing that she might have said to them would have done any good. Each of those two was just a finger on a trigger.

After a while the leader said, "Time up."

Mme. Storey arose without further question. We put on our wraps. The second man opened the French window.

"Follow him," said the leader.

There were two more men in the little garden outside; two blacker shadows in the shadow of the high board fence, that stabbed me with a fresh fear. The back of Mme. Storey's house faces a long row of similar backs of houses on Sixty-Second Street. Lights showed here and there in the windows. We know the people who live immediately in the rear, but not those on either side.

The man in advance led the way between the little box hedges to the back of the yard. Here a ladder was planted against the fence near to the left-hand corner. At the top of the ladder a length of plank had been laid catercornered from fence to fence. At the other end of the plank a ladder descended into the yard of the house that adjoined our friends on Sixty-Second Street. All the windows of this house were dark.

The first man went up the ladder and across the plank. Mme. Storey followed with a man, gun in hand, close behind her; then me with another armed man watching every movement I made. With that gun always within a few inches of my body I had no thought except to do what he wanted me to. How strange it was to see the tall slender figure of my employer in her close-fitting evening dress and graceful wrap outlined against the night sky.

The leader brought up the rear of the procession. After he had passed over the ladder and the plank, I could hear him softly drawing them in. But I was not permitted to see where they were hidden.

The first man coolly opened the basement door of the house that faced us, and with a torch in hand to show the way, led us across a kitchen and through a passage to the basement entrance from Sixty-Second Street. It was an inhabited house but the kitchen showed no evidences that meals had been prepared there that day. I judged that the house was empty since the men took no special care to be quiet.

We issued out from under the high stoop of the house to the pavement of Sixty-Second Street. Here a car was waiting with softly running engine. A big, comfortable limousine. Otherwise the street was empty. As we were getting into the car, a young fellow came swinging along, whistling, and I could feel our guards growing tense. The young man noticed nothing, and passed on, thus missing his chance to make the front page next day. The tension relaxed again.

Mme. Storey was placed in the rear seat between two men, and I on one of the small seats with a man beside me. He took care always to let me see the gun in his hand. The remaining man climbed in beside the chauffeur and we started away.

"Can I have a cigarette?" drawled Mme. Storey.

"Sure!" answered several voices.

"You're game all right," growled the young leader with a note almost of admiration in his voice.

However, the guns were not put away.

2

It was easy to follow our course until we got out of town. Up First Avenue throughout the length of the island, across the Harlem River, and on up through Pelham Bay Parkway to the city limits.

As long as we were in the city streets with people on the pavements and other cars passing, I was buoyed up by the hope that *something* must rescue us from our predicament. It did not seem possible that two women could be spirited away in the midst of a populous city. But once we had plunged into the dark roads of Westchester county hope fled.

I was lost then. All I can say is, that after about an hour's travelling the by-road we were following came out from among trees and for a short distance ran along beside a wide body of water that must have been one of the harbours off Long Island Sound. There was a low stone wall and a beach on the other side. A boat waited at the edge of the beach.

The car stopped and we were told to get out. There was something terrifying in the perfection of their arrangements. Not a word was exchanged between the men who brought us in the car and the men waiting in the launch. Along with the four gunmen we entered the launch, and the car went back.

The launch headed for a smart motor yacht lying out in deep water. The shore of the harbour, as well as I could see, was lined all around with modest country places. Lights showed in a few windows. Once the launch pushed off from the beach, guns were put out of sight, cigarettes lighted, and there was a general let-down.

It didn't help me any. When we left solid ground behind us a kind of despair seized on me. I had to fight hard against a rising tide of hysteria. I didn't want to disgrace my employer.

As we approached the yacht the men aboard the launch became quiet again. I didn't see where they went when we mounted the ladder. As soon as we stepped on board the yacht got under way. A young steward with an invidious smile led Mme. Storey and I to a beautifully-furnished little saloon on the after-deck. The chill of two o'clock in the morning was making itself felt, and there was an electric fire burning in a grate. Before it stood our host. I got a slight shock of

surprise. I don't know what I had expected. What I saw was a quiet, dry little man, very trimly made and dressed with an elegance that befitted his surroundings. A sallow skin and watchful pale blue eyes. There was a power in his stillness.

"Good-evening, ladies," he said in a dry voice. "I trust you have not had too uncomfortable a ride."

"Not at all," answered Mme. Storey, mimicking his matter-of-fact air. "Quite exhilarating. May I ask why we were forced to take it?"

"I have a proposition to make you," he calmly answered. "The best way to put it up to you was to give you a little sample of my methods in advance."

"And so we had to be kidnapped."

"Exactly," he said unmoved. "Kidnapping or abduction is my business.... But please sit down, ladies. Take this sofa close to the fire. You are not warmly enough dressed for a ride in an open launch. When I send you back I'll see that you have heavier wraps."

"Oh, you're going to send us back," said Mme. Storey.

"I trust so," he said significantly. "I hope to be able to return you to your house the same way you left it before the motor-cycle policeman goes off duty in the morning. It all depends on you.... A spot of brandy before we get down to business? You are cold."

I looked to see if Mme. Storey would take it. She did, and I thankfully accepted mine. It helped me to control the shaking of my nerves.

"Who are you?" asked Mme. Storey, with a searching glance.

"We have never met, if that's what you mean?" he answered with a slight smile. "Until recently my activities have been confined to a very different field from yours. But I have followed your career from the beginning. I know all about you."

"Not all, I trust," she murmured, sipping the brandy.

He sat down in a chair on the other side of the fire from us and carefully pulled up his trousers. His neat patent leather pumps were the last word. "There is a comfortable stateroom below if Miss Brickley would like to lie down while you and I talk," he said suggestively.

"I am sure she would prefer to stay here," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"Very well," he said. "I know that she enjoys your complete confidence."

"What's your proposition?" she asked bluntly.

He did not answer her. Like a connoisseur he studied her through narrowed eyes as she reclined in her white evening dress against the back of the deep sofa. "It is a great pleasure to me to see you here," he murmured. "You fulfil my ideas of you!"

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey, flicking the ash off her cigarette. "Would you mind getting down to business?"

He did so at once. "In my time I have gone under many names," he said composedly. "You may call me Hamann for convenience. During the last three months I have abducted Johnny Nicholls, the son of Jim Nicholls, state senator from Duchess County; Marjorie Dorlon, the daughter of the President of the Corlears National Bank; and Simon Harker, the English millionaire. Besides other cases that didn't get into the papers.... I may say," he added dryly, "that the amounts collected in ransoms greatly exceed the sums mentioned in the newspapers. This yacht is only one of my perquisites."

"How pleased you must be at your success," murmured Mme. Storey. "How about the other cases that have created

such a sensation lately? I mean Ernest Schmid, the brewer's son; George Ennis; little Dorothy Whitman; Tipo Bertinatti?"

"Bungled jobs," said Hamann with a contemptuous smile. "I had nothing to do with them. Why, Schmid escaped from his captors without paying a cent, and the public was so roused up about the Whitman child that the kidnapers lost their nerve and sent her home."

"But they say that quarter of a million dollars was paid for the return of the Italian banker, Bertinatti."

"Maybe," he said unmoved. "But it was just a lucky break. No planning.... All these jobs you speak of were pulled off by Al Shefford."

"Shefford!" said Mme. Storey. "An old acquaintance of mine!"

"Yeah," said Hamann with a dry glance, "he beat you out in the Lamport diamond case."

"It is a painful recollection!" said Mme. Storey.

"Here's a tip for you," said Hamann; "Shefford is living at the Madagascar Hotel right now under the name of Otto Adams. It's his headquarters. If you put a watch on the place you can round up the whole gang. I can slip you evidence enough too, to convict them."

"Much obliged," said Mme. Storey. "Make a note of it, Bella."

"I admit that Al has nerve and cash," Hamann went on, "he likes to put on a spectacular show, but he's got no head on him. And not much staying power. He's my only serious competitor in the East. If I could get him out of the way...!" He clenched his fist.

"You could organise the territory," put in Mme. Storey slyly.

"You are witty," he remarked, with a stiff smile. "... My stunts are seldom spectacular, but they bring in the coin. I never kidnap children. It excites the public too much. This country is ruled by public opinion, and you've got to study it. Now, the kidnapping of a grown son or daughter doesn't excite the public, but they are just as dear to their parents.

"Another thing. I always choose a subject who is in wrong with the public if I can find one. State Senator Nicholls is awaiting trial under graft charges, while Harker was a foreigner. Nobody cares about him. They were glad to see him leave some of his money here before he went home. In such cases public opinion doesn't egg the newspapers on, and the newspapers don't egg on the police."

"Clever!" murmured Mme. Storey.

"Al Shefford is jealous of my success," Hamann went on. "He's always trying to spoil my game. It was him who got Pencils Mary to tip you off to-night."

"Really!" said Mme. Storey. "Then it would seem rather ungrateful, wouldn't it, if I had him arrested when I got back to town?"

"His tip didn't do you any good, did it?" he said with his stiff grin.

"How do you know it was Al Shefford?" she asked.

"I found his money on one of my men," said Hamann. He ended the sentence with a slight, terrible gesture. The traitor was finished. A cold chill stole through my veins.

"Does Shefford know about this yacht?" asked Mme Storey idly.

"He knows about it," said Hamann with a hard grin, "but he don't know where to find it.... I was just as glad Pencils Mary did tip you off," he went on. "I heard about it before the tip was given. I could have stopped Mary, but I didn't. It

gave me a chance to pull off a neat little stunt. I don't give a darn about the newspapers or the police, but I wanted to impress you."

"I am impressed," she said.

"In a couple of hours I worked out a complete new plan," said Hamann. "Found the unoccupied house on Sixty-Second Street, and got into it. Besides the other details. That's the way I do things. Nothing is left to chance."

"I admit the cleverness of your methods," said Mme. Storey, "but surely you made a dumb play when you picked on me for a victim."

"I don't want money off you," he said quietly.

"What do you want then?"

He waited for a moment before answering, boring into her with strange, narrowed eyes. "Co-operation," he said.

It is not often that anybody gets change out of Mme. Storey. She was fairly taken aback now. She stared. "What do you mean by that?"

"I have the whole business of abducting the subjects down fine," said Hamann coolly. "But the negotiations for their return and for the payment of the money are still difficult owing to the want of the right kind of intermediary. I want you for my intermediary."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Mme. Storey softly.

"I must have a high-class person," Hamann went on in his composed manner. "Somebody who commands the respect of the public and the Press. Nobody would know of course that you and I were working together. On the first occasion you would come forward as a disinterested person, and offer your services as intermediary. When you were once successful in bringing back the abducted person, the relatives would always go to you and you'd have it both ways. I mean besides splitting with me you could collect a fee from the relatives too."

"Amazing!" murmured Mme. Storey.

"Consider the possibilities," said Hamann; "the business that it would bring you, and the reputation you'd build up as a successful negotiator. And all without any risk to yourself. I take the risks."

"There's just one thing," said Mme. Storey very dryly; "the moral side of it. Some people consider kidnapping such a dirty crime!"

"Sure!" said Hamann with perfect composure. "What's your price?"

"What makes you so sure I have a price?"

"Never met anybody yet who didn't."

"Well, let us not go into the moral side of it," said Mme. Storey. "Our points of view are too wide apart. Keep the discussion on a purely business basis. I concede that kidnapping is profitable at the moment, but how long is it going to last? I expect to keep on in the business as long as I am able to work. I cannot conduct my business without the co-operation of the police. Therefore I can't afford to get in wrong with the police. It's as simple as that."

Hamann ran his pale tongue over his lips and smiled slightly. "In one year, working with me," he said softly, "you could put by capital enough to support you in luxury for the rest of your life without working at all.... You're too beautiful a woman to waste your best years in business!"

She gave him smile for smile. "*Retro Sathanas!*" she said softly.

Hamann scowled. "What does that mean?"

"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

His lips drew back over his yellow teeth, and one began to see the beast of prey under the veneer of elegance. "I'm not funning," he snarled.

Mme. Storey met his poisonous glance fairly. "Neither am I," she said.

He attempted to smooth his face. "Wait a minute," he said. "Let's talk figures..."

"Suppose I agreed to go in with you," interrupted Mme. Storey. "How would you check up on me after I was safe at home?"

"I fixed everything before I brought you out here," he said with his stiff smile. "You will be watched. If you attempted to double-cross me..." Again that quiet conclusive gesture.

"Your psychology is faulty," said Mme. Storey calmly. "You can't secure 'co-operation,' as you call it, by threats."

"No, but I can with money," he answered, smiling still. "Money, plenty of money, more money than you can spend! That is sweet to a beautiful and luxurious woman!"

"Oh, very!"

"Money will bind you to me!"

Mme. Storey said nothing. Hamann lit a fresh cigarette with great deliberation. After a while he said with a slight, confident smile:

"How about it?"

"Nothing doing," said Mme. Storey.

It was not the answer he expected. He sat up and pitched the cigarette viciously into the grate. "You're in my power," he snarled.

"I know it," she said steadily. "That's why it seems safer to me to deal frankly with you."

He leaned forward in his chair, fixing her with his narrowed eyes. "You've *got* to do what I tell you!" he said quietly.

Mme Storey crossed her feet, settled herself more comfortably in the sofa, gazed pleasantly at the glowing coals of the heater and said—nothing.

"Do you realise what the alternative is?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"To have an anchor tied to those slim ankles and dropped overboard as we steam up the Sound."

She still said nothing.

He leaned a little closer to her; a hypnotic purring quality came into his voice. "You are a very beautiful woman. And more than beauty, there is a power in you that brings men crawling to your feet. Is it worth while giving up all the delights of living and loving and spending money just for a question of morals?"

"I think so," she said, without looking at him.

His unnatural control suddenly gave way. He sprang up shouting: "Damn you! Stop playing with me!" And raised his clenched fists above his head to strike her down.

I screamed and flung myself in front of her, begging him to let her go and he could do what he liked to me. Moaning with rage he clutched my hair in both his hands and dragging me away from Mme. Storey flung me hard on the floor.

There I lay helpless. I saw him raise his fists again to strike her down. I saw her glance up at him with infinite scorn. I saw his hands drop helplessly. He ran out of the saloon.

I dragged myself up from the floor. Mme. Storey took me in her arms. "Steady, steady, my dear!" she murmured soothingly.

"He'll kill you! He'll kill you!" I cried hysterically.

"Not likely," she said coolly. "He is, above all, a practical man."

3

My employer's example shamed me, and pretty soon I was able to get back at least a semblance of self-control. We sat side by side on the sofa in the elegant little deck saloon, with the electric fire beside us. There was not a human sound to be heard; only the muffled throb of the engines, the soft purr of the generator and the wash of the water alongside.

After a while we heard Hamann coming back. Mme. Storey pressed my hand to give me courage.

He had got the better of his rage, though the marks of it still showed in his hard sallow face. He made no further pretence of playing the elegant gentleman, but was curt and brutal in manner. Sitting in the same chair, he thrust his hands in his pockets and said: "It will cost you a hundred thousand to get off this boat."

"I can't raise it," said Mme. Storey.

"Yeah, that's what they all say." he retorted with an ugly grin. "But they come across when I put the screws on."

"I have an equity in the house on Sixty-Third Street," said Mme. Storey calmly, "but I couldn't raise money on that at short notice. I have five thousand in two bank accounts. I have jewels supposed to be worth a hundred thousand, but they wouldn't bring more than twenty at forced sale. They could be hocked for as much as that. I have securities on which I could borrow about twenty-five thousand to-morrow. They'd bring about ten thousand more if sold outright, but it seems a shame to let them go at the bottom of the market."

After a good bit of wrangling on Hamann's part, she succeeded in convincing him that she spoke the truth. "All right, fifty thousand," he said.

I couldn't hold myself in. "You're taking all she has!" I said. "She earned that money herself, dollar by dollar!"

"Aah, shut up, Redhead!" he said brutally. "You're lucky and you don't know it! You get thrown in for nothing on this deal!"

"I agree to fifty thousand," said Mme. Storey.

"Who can get it for you?" he asked.

"The simplest way would be to send Bella for it. She isn't going to do anything that would jeopardise my safety."

"Oh yeah?" he said. "I'm not taking the chance."

"Well, there's my lawyer, Latham Rowe," said Mme. Storey tranquilly. "He holds a power of attorney from me. He can get the stuff out and raise the money if I send him a letter."

Hamann got up and turned on a desk light. "All right, come and write it."

She sat down at the desk. She had to make several tries before he was satisfied. "Can't you write a straight letter without getting so darned funny?" he snarled.

"Sorry," said Mme. Storey, "it's just my way."

He finally agreed to let the following go:

"DEAR LATHAM,

"I have been kidnapped and am being held for ransom. My kidnapper is looking over my shoulder as I write, hence this formal announcement. The price demanded is fifty thousand. It's too much for a woman, but what would you?

"My friend suggests, and I agree, that you ought to do everything you can to keep my disappearance out of the newspapers. If the news breaks, it will make it almost impossible for you to get the money into the right hands. Then good-night!

"Go at once to my house; quiet the fears of the servants and instruct them what to say in answer to any inquiries. See Inspector Rumsey at Headquarters, thank him for his care of me last night and tell him I've been called to Buffalo on business. If he doesn't believe you, take him into your confidence. Show him this letter and beg him to take no steps until I get home. I ask it as his old friend.

"Meanwhile Bella is with me and we are well, nay, luxuriously lodged. I can say no more. There is nothing to worry about *if you come across with the money promptly*. The man who delivers this to you will instruct you when and where to hand it over."

The letter closed with full instructions as to where her property was to be found and how he was to raise the money.

When this letter had been signed, enclosed and addressed, Hamann took it away with him without a word. The little saloon had windows on three sides, opening on deck. Curtains were drawn across them. In the fourth side there was a door giving on a tiny entrance hall with a stairway leading to the cabins below. This time when Hamann left us he closed the door after him and we heard a key turn in the lock.

A peculiar smile spread over Mme. Storey's face. She gave Hamann a few seconds to get out of the way, then turned off the lights in the saloon, leaving only the glow of the fire shining up in my face. Over the centre table there was a skylight. She kicked off her satin slippers, sprang on the table, unfastened the skylight, and wriggled out on the roof of the cabin.

I sat on staring at the fire with a fast-beating heart, scarcely daring to breathe—for I don't know how long. Measured by my fears, an hour. Finally her slender, silken legs came through the skylight, then the white draperies and her animated face. She fastened the skylight. She had no more than taken her seat beside me when we heard Hamann returning along the deck from the bow. He came in.

"Sitting in the dark?" he said suspiciously.

"So romantic!" murmured Mme. Storey.

Her coolness enraged him. He sat down opposite us with a black scowl. One could see that the recollection of his

first set-to with my employer rankled. He longed to humble her.

"The letter goes ashore in half an hour," he said. "You can stop it any time before that."

"What! after going to all the trouble of writing it?" said Mme. Storey.

"Oh, well, if you're so crazy about ruining yourself," he said with a shrug. "Where will your reputation as number one criminologist be when this comes out? The biter bit, eh? It'll be the joke of the day!"

"We'll have to take in sewing, Bella," said Mme. Storey.

He was no match for her in this verbal fencing, and he wearied of it. "You can go to bed if you want," he said.

"Thank you," she answered. "Beautiful little ship!" she remarked as we got up. "Can we look over her?"

"Sure!" he said, grinning. "You can see that it's no cinch to escape from her, if that's what you have in mind."

We took a complete turn around the deck before going below. We were out in the open Sound now and pitching slightly. The lights of a town on the Connecticut shore showed a mile or so ahead. I couldn't see the name of the yacht painted up anywhere. She was something under a hundred feet long I calculated. Marvellously complete for so small a vessel.

She carried two launches swung on davits amidships. Forward there was another little deck saloon. Looking through the windows as we passed it, we could see the four men who brought us out from town sitting around the dining table in their shirt-sleeves playing bridge. It seemed like a mild game for kidnappers.

Hamann led us down the after-companionway and opened a door on a beautiful double stateroom that extended the whole width of the vessel. With its twin beds, its chintz-covered chairs, its shining toilet articles it was the cosiest nest imaginable.

"I must say you do things in good style," said Mme. Storey.

Hamann grunted surlily. He pointed to a bell button. "There's no woman aboard," he said. "But the steward will fetch you anything you want." He close the door and locked it on us.

"Good-night!" sang out Mme. Storey. There was no answer.

We looked around us. We were prisoners, but what an elegant little prison! It had three big brass-rimmed portholes on either side with pretty chintz curtains hanging over them. Adjoining the cabin was a luxurious bathroom.

Sleep was out of the question, but Mme. Storey persuaded me to lie down on one of the beds and relax. She said:

"When I went over the cabin roof I listened in at the talk in the forward saloon. The town ahead of us is Stanchester. We're running in there to put men ashore with the letter for Latham. They're sending the little Beau Brummell who brought us aboard, and another. One is Maxsy, one Tim.

"On the yacht they intend to spend the day cruising up the Sound, and will run in to Portford harbour at seven to-night, that is just after it gets dark, to pick up Maxsy and Tim. If they bring the money all right we'll be liberated in Portford. Hamann does not own this yacht as he intimated. It was just chartered for a few days. They intend to abandon it at Portford and scatter. The crew are all members of the gang."

From the pocket of her evening wrap Mme. Storey took a small flashlight. "Found this in the wireless cabin," she said. "No one there. It may come in handy. What I was after was a gun, but I had no time to make a search."

We heard the engine room signal sound. Mme. Storey switched off the lights in the stateroom, and opened a porthole. I looked out with her. We were steaming slowly in close to a low spit of land, with summer residences standing amidst their lawns and trees. No lights showed in the houses. At the head of the harbour spread the little town.

The engine-room bell sounded again; the engines stopped. Presently they were reversed. We heard the rattle of the chain as the anchor was dropped. The yacht swung slowly around until the lights of the town were in front of us.

Footsteps sounded on the deck overhead; low voices; the creaking of ropes. They were lowering a launch. "It would be better to let them see us watching them," said Mme. Storey softly. "They know that women are curious."

I opened a second porthole and we both looked out. We saw two men enter the launch, one to steer, one to run the engine, then the wooden-faced Maxsy, now very smartly dressed in a blue lounge suit, and Tim, his side-partner. Maxsy carried a neat little satchel. When he sat down in the stern he was no more than three yards from us. Mme Storey casually hailed him.

"Ask Latham for some of my cigarettes. I'm almost out."

Maxsy grinned hardily over his shoulder and nodded. The launch started away. It circled around and disappeared under the stern of the yacht. We crossed the stateroom and looked out at the other side. There was a medley of small craft anchored here. For awhile we watched the lights of the launch as she threaded amongst them, then we lost her.

"They've put out their lights," said Mme. Storey dryly.

Back at the open port she said: "The regular landing for launches is in front of us there, where the three green lights hang in a line. That's the Stanchester Yacht Club. Very swanky. Naturally our friends want to make a more inconspicuous landing across the harbour."

She lit a cigarette and stood at the open port smoking and thinking. "I've had dinner at the Stanchester Yacht Club," she said presently. "I remember they had a blinker to signal to the yachts at anchor after dark. I suppose the operator's asleep now, but there's no harm in trying. It would be amusing, wouldn't it? if we could send a telegram ashore."

She picked up the little flashlight. My heart began to pound against my ribs. "Suppose ... suppose Hamann sees us?" I stammered.

"He can't see unless he happens to be leaning over the rail just above our heads," she coolly answered. "Anyhow he can only stop us."

Aiming the little light at the club-house, she commenced sending a series of irregular flashes out through the porthole.

"What are you saying?" I asked breathlessly.

"Are you there? ... Are you there? ... Are you there?"

"How do you know their code?"

"This is morse. Everybody knows morse."

When I saw the answering flash from the clubhouse I nearly collapsed out of sheer excitement. It seemed to me that Hamann must get on to what we were doing. But I heard no sound from on deck.

"What are they saying?" I asked.

"Who are you?"

"The wireless operator will see it."

"Yes, but he won't answer.... Don't speak to me now. This needs concentration."

She stood there at the porthole with intent face, her thumb on the button of the flashlight, sending long flashes, short

flashes, pausing. One would have thought it was her everyday work. It lasted so long that the suspense became more than I could bear. I flung myself on the bed and wrapped my arms around my head.

Her sigh of relief roused me. She had let her arm fall. I ran back to my porthole. The club was sending. "What are they saying?" I asked.

"Okay," said Mme. Storey with a satisfied smile. The club stopped sending.

"What did you tell them?" I asked with my heart in my mouth.

Mme. Storey closed the portholes, drew the little curtains, switched on the lights. "We can go to bed now," she said, yawning. "I said: 'This is Yacht *Nada*...'"

"How did you find out the name? I looked everywhere for it."

"It was blown in the glasses out of which we sipped our brandy.... 'Yacht *Nada* R.H.Y.C.'"

"What do those letters stand for?"

"Oh, Royal Halifax Yacht Club, or anything you like. You've got to present your credentials when you're asking a favour.... I said: 'Please notify Otto Adams, Madagascar Hotel that we will run into Portford Harbour at seven to-night.'"

My brain reeled. "Adams? That's Al Shefford," I stuttered. "Why notify Shefford? Why not the police?"

She smiled rather grimly. "If the police tried to board this vessel Hamann would shoot us out of sheer spite. He could not endure to see me trick him like that. But his rival Shefford is a different matter. It would never occur to Hamann that I had betrayed him to Shefford."

"I don't understand," I said helplessly. "How is it going to help us?"

"Wait and see," she said.

Pretty soon we heard the launch coming back. They hoisted her up on the davits, weighed anchor, and resumed their voyage up the Sound.

4

In spite of everything one must sleep. In addition to the key that had been turned on us there was a bolt on the inside of our door, so that we had no fear of being taken unawares. It was nearly noon before we got up. We had run into bad weather and the yacht was pitching a good deal. No land was to be seen through the portholes on either side; only a waste of grey water. When Mme. Storey rang, the young steward with the invidious smile brought a delicious breakfast to our stateroom.

"Well, Hamann doesn't stint his unwilling guests!" said Mme. Storey, casting an eye over the tray.

The steward said: "The boss says you can come on deck if you want."

Mme. Storey glanced at the portholes misted with rain and at her flimsy satin gown. "If the crew would lend us some oilskins..."

He came back in a little while with two suits of black oilskins and when we had finished eating we put them on. My employer looked like a slim boy in hers. The white satin slippers peeping out from the bottoms of the stiff pants were rather incongruous, but she was well pleased with the effect. We strapped the caps under our chins and went up on deck.

Hamann was waiting for us with a surly air. He had a Napoleon complex and it went hard with him to have to admit that for once things had not turned out as he had planned. Mme. Storey was absolutely in his power, yet he had not succeeded in breaking her morale; she had shaken his.

However, now she wanted to remove all suspicions and she set to work to soothe his wounded vanity. She planted me in a chair on deck while she walked up and down with Hamann, flattering him in her subtle, large-eyed manner. I have never seen the man yet who was proof against it, and Hamann wasn't. Gradually he became the little Corporal again; still, dangerous; monosyllabic.

Occasionally I could hear snatches of their talk as they passed me. Mme. Storey said: "What a man you are, Hamann! I'm sorry we have to play on opposite sides of the fence!"

"You can have your law and order," he replied. "I'm free!"

When they came back she was saying with a sigh: "It's a fact a woman becomes weary of tame men!"

"It's up to you," he said.

"I dare not!" she said with an intoxicating, sidelong glance. "I'm afraid of you."

I need not describe the afternoon in detail. I was sick with apprehension of what lay before us. There were books and magazines aboard the yacht, but I couldn't settle down to anything. Fortunately, our situation was sufficient to account for my nervousness. Nobody paid any attention to me.

From the deck we could see no land anywhere. Judging from the way the wind shifted, we spent the time steaming around in a big circle. We were out of the regular track of vessels up and down the Sound. When we did see a boat we gave it a wide berth. Occasionally the wireless operator brought a message to Hamann, but naturally they were not shown to us.

Once when we were in our stateroom Mme. Storey unscrewed the handle on the inside of the bathroom door. I looked at her inquiringly and she said:

"I haven't been able to pick up a gun. I must have something in my hand."

She took off her stockings, dropped the knob in the toe of one and knotted it securely. This home-made weapon she stowed in the pocket of her oilskins. She fastened the bathroom door back to conceal the loss of half its handle, and we went back on deck.

Towards evening the sky cleared and we could see the distant shores. The sun went down in glory. As it began to grow dark we headed north. Ahead of us the lights of the Connecticut villages sparkled like clusters of gems on an endless chain.

Shortly before seven we were entering Portford harbour. This is a much more commodious anchorage than Stanchester. The navigation is tricky because there are a number of islands. The town lies on the Easterly shore of the harbour. The other side and all the islands are covered with the summer homes of the well-to-do. Most of them were closed for the winter. The suburb on the west of the harbour is known as Bolton Point.

We dropped anchor a good-half mile off the town. There was no other vessel lying near us. Hamann said harshly: "You'd better go below now."

"Have a heart, Hamann!" begged Mme. Storey. "We're only human! We'd suffocate down in that cabin now, not knowing what was happening. Let us stay up here where we can see. It's too late for me to do anything to queer the game now, even if I had the chance."

It was sweet to him to hear her asking for a favour. "Oh, all right," he said with an indifferent shrug. "You'll have to go down if any vessel approaches us."

The launch was lowered into the water and four men got in; that is, the two remaining gunmen, the oiler to run the engine and a sailor to steer. They set off, without lights. The engine was heavily muffled down and we lost the sound of it almost immediately. They headed not for the town but for the suburb across the harbour.

The departure of these men left seven on board; Hamann, the skipper, the engineer, the wireless operator, another sailor, the cook and the steward. The last two were flabby specimens not of much account in a mix-up.

I noticed as we strolled around the deck with Hamann that the anchor-chain was caught with a hook in such a manner that it could be instantly thrown off in case the yacht had to run for it. Also, every man was on deck watching.

"Sorry I have to make you wait for your dinner," said Hamann. "We keep a sharp look-out. We don't expect any trouble but we're ready for it! I'll feed you before I put you ashore."

"Oh, I hope nothing happens!" murmured Mme. Storey, making her voice tremble slightly.

"I heard from Maxsy a couple of times," said Hamann soothingly. "Up to four-thirty this afternoon everything was going all right."

I could feel a tremble of laughter go through her. It made me a little sore that she could laugh.

"We couldn't eat while we're in such suspense," she said. "But a spot of brandy would help!"

It was on my account she suggested it. Hamann took us into the deck saloon for it. It kept me going.

Back outside again, we leaned our elbows on the starboard rail. Up and down the yacht stood the quiet figures, listening, trying to pierce the darkness with their eyes. The tide was running out and the nose of the *Nada* was pointing towards the head of the bay. Somewhere in that direction there was a swing bridge and occasionally as a vehicle passed over it we could hear it rattle. Apart from that it was so still I wondered my companion did not hear the beating of my heart. The lights of the town were abeam. So far as I could see nothing moved on the water between us and them.

In spite of all this watching, suddenly a motorboat appeared out of the darkness almost alongside us. They must have been paddling it or merely drifting, because we had heard no engine exhaust. It was not an alarming apparition, being but a small boat, and having only two men in it. Hamann whispered:

"Get inside."

We obeyed. Hamann himself retreated inside the door at the head of the companion stairs, and stood looking out. Mme. Storey and I were behind him, looking over his shoulder.

One of the men in the motor boat stood up. He had an official looking cap on. "Yacht ahoy!" he hailed. "What vessel is that?"

The skipper went to the head of the ladder and turned on a flood-light which brilliantly illuminated the motor-boat, while everybody on board the yacht remained in shadow. "Yacht *Nada*," he said.

"Who's your owner?"

"Mr. Foster."

"What Foster?"

"Joseph Foster."

The second man in the small boat sculled with an oar to bring his craft closer.

"You can't come aboard," said the skipper.

"Guess you don't know who I am," said the man in the cap.

"I don't care who the hell you are."

"United States motor-boat inspection service. I want to see your papers." He threw the lapel of his coat back, flashing what appeared to be a badge.

"You can't come aboard," repeated the skipper. "You know as well as I do that this is not the right time for an inspection. Come back in the morning and you can see everything."

"It's not for you to say what's the time for an inspection," blustered the man in the boat. "I'm coming aboard."

The skipper's broad frame blocked the ladder. "If you set foot on this ladder I'll throw you off," he warned. The engineer, the wireless man, the sailor, quietly gathered behind him to back him up.

"We'll make a test case of this!" shouted the man in the cap furiously. "Just put your hands on me, that's all! Just try to resist the Federal authorities and see what it will cost you!"

"I'll take my chance of it," growled the skipper.

However, the man in the cap did not try to come aboard. A long, noisy wrangle resulted, with much profanity on both sides. It seemed like a senseless performance on the part of the self-styled Inspector. Suddenly it came to me that it was only to cover a deeper game. I looked over my shoulder. I was just in time to see through the glass door across the lobby, the silhouette of a man slipping over the rail with a gun between his teeth. I almost fainted.

A moment later we heard a low frightened cry from the direction of the galley up forward: "Boss! Boss! They're all over us!"

Mme. Storey must already have had the home-made blackjack in her hand. Before Hamann could make a move she swung it above her head in both hands and brought it down. There was a dullish crack, and the man dropped as if he had not a bone in his body.

I didn't have to be told what to do then. Mme. Storey seized him by one arm, I by the other. We whisked him down the stairs and threw him into our stateroom. She took his gun off him. We slammed the door, locked it and took the key.

5

We crept up the stairs again. There was an ominous silence on deck. One had the feeling that the yacht was swarming with men all seeking cover. Suddenly all the lights went out. Looking through the port door I could see a bit of the top of a big motor-boat lying close under the yacht's quarter. On the other side the little boat had drifted away into the dark. The head of the skipper appeared around the starboard door.

"Where's the boss?" he whispered tensely.

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey. "What is happening?"

"Hi-jackers," he said curtly. "Save yourselves." And disappeared.

We retreated half-way down the stairs and lay peeping over the top step. In this position we commanded both doors.

The moments that followed were like some crazy dream. It was impossible to tell what was happening. There was no continuity. We heard a squeal of terror from the galley, a slammed door, the smash of crockery, then silence.

Neither side was anxious to attract attention, and it was all very quiet. There was not a shot fired. A hunched-up figure ran past the doors on the port side. There was the sound of a blow just beyond, and it ran no farther. On the other side two black shadows edged into view before the open door, locked in an embrace; swaying, panting, cursing horribly. They hung there for a moment, then staggered on out of range of our sight. From farther forward there was a loud splash.

This is what really happened. The *Nada's* men were licked before it started owing to the unaccountable failure of their boss to take command. They thought he had ratted on them. When the cook and steward were seized like rabbits in the galley and tied up with napkins, there were only four left on the *Nada*. There were eight in the attacking party.

The four made no attempt to put up a fight but only hunted for cover. The skipper locked himself in the pilot house. They smashed in the door and dragged him out. For a while the engineer successfully defended himself at the door of his engine-room, but somebody dropped through the skylight and took him in the rear. The wireless man jumped overboard, but was hauled back.

It was all over in a minute or two. Quiet fell; the lights went on again. It was still dark in the lobby. A burly figure came along the deck on the port side and blocked the doorway. He had a gun in his hand. Mme. Storey recognised his outline.

"Al Shefford," she said quietly. "I see you got my message."

"Cheese! Rosika Storey!" he cried. "So it was from you! Where's the damn light switch?"

"Just beyond your hand."

The lights flared on, and we saw Shefford above us with his red face and ragged blonde moustache, like Attila the Hun in a cloth cap. "Where's Hamann?" he demanded excitedly. "Has that —— given us the slip? Cheese! if Hamann has made a getaway what's the good of it all."

"Hamann is safe," said Mme. Storey crisply. "I tapped him, and locked him up in a stateroom. You can get him out now. Here's the key. I took his gun."

"Cheese! Rosy, what a woman you are!" said Shefford admiringly. "... Where's the ransom money?" he asked. "Has it been brought aboard?"

Mme. Storey hesitated before answering. "They only started off after it a few minutes ago. It will be an hour before they get back.... What is the ransom money to you?" she asked with assumed indignation.

The big man, caught napping, scratched his head and grinned to carry it off. "Aah, after helping you to get it back I'm entitled to a little commission, ain't I? Look at the expense I been to to-day."

"Oh, a commission," she said as if anxious to placate him. "Sure, I don't mind paying you a commission."

Taking a man with him, Shefford went below and fetched up Hamann. The latter's senses had returned but he was still groggy. Never have I seen such an expression of rage and hatred in a human face.

"I'll get you yet before I die, you butcher!" he snarled.

Shefford roared with laughter. "You don't owe me nothing for this, Bill. It was the Madame yonder that fetched me up here."

Hamann stared at Mme. Storey. "How could you do that?" he demanded.

"A little bird carried the message for me," she said airily, "Through the porthole."

Hamann was speechless. His hard face turned as yellow as saffron. I think his heart almost broke out of pure chagrin.

It suited Shefford's humorous fancy to line up his prisoners along the port rail, handcuffing each one to an upright stanchion. He had brought handcuffs especially for the purpose, he said. There they had to stand a couple of yards apart, helpless and ridiculous.

"Soon as we get ashore we'll telephone the police to come and fetch you," said Shefford.

Hamann found his voice again. I wish I could reproduce it. Never have I heard anything like the heartfelt and masterly curses that he called down on Shefford's head. The big fellow merely grinned.

"Go it, Bill!" he said. "The Bible ain't nothing alongside of you!"

Shefford led Mme. Storey over to the starboard side of the vessel. He was anxious to ingratiate himself with her. "Rosy, you sure are a wonder! I got to hand it to you. I'll say there ain't another woman living that could have taken Bill Hamann into camp so neat! I'm the only man that was ever too much for you, Rosy. You and me's a pair!"

"We ought to go into business together," she said slyly.

"Sure! Sure! Just what I had in mind!" he cried.

He wondered why she laughed.

Suddenly the *Nada* was enveloped in a dazzling white light that showed up every wrinkle in our clothes. We instinctively ducked inside a doorway to escape the glare. Shefford in his turn began to curse viciously.

A big yacht lying close off the town had picked us up with her searchlight. I have said there was very little noise made in the capture of the *Nada*, but there was some, and it was a still night. Something of the fracas had reached the yacht and they were curious to learn the cause of it.

Shefford was bitter. "I'll have to get out of this quick," he said. "They'll be sending a boat over to investigate. Damn it, what a rotten piece of luck! Before the money comes!"

"Can't you trust me for the commission?" asked Mme. Storey with an innocent air.

"Aah! you'll never see a penny of it neither," he snarled. "If the police are in possession, can you see Hamann's guys bringing it aboard?"

Mme. Storey made it appear as if this had occurred to her for the first time. "That's so!" she said. "What shall I do?"

"It's nothing to me what you do," he said callously. He ordered his men into the launch alongside.

"Wait a minute!" said Mme. Storey. "I'm coming with you."

"What the hell for?"

"I want my money!"

He laughed.

"I know where it's to be handed over," she said. "I can take you there. I overheard all their plans last night."

"Ho!" said Shefford in a changed voice. "That's different. Hop in!"

"Wait!" she said. "If these people come aboard, Hamann will persuade them he was held up by hi-jackers and they'll set him free."

Shefford's face fell. "We can telephone from the first pay station we come to."

"That will be too late.... Half a moment! I've got an idea!"

She ran into the after saloon, and snatching up pen and paper, hastily scribbled a letter as follows:

"To THE POLICE:

"The prisoners you find aboard this vessel are Bill Hamann and his gang. They are the kidnappers of Johnny Nichols, Marjorie Dorlon, Simon Harker and others. They kidnapped me last night, but I succeeded in turning the tables on them. I have gone now to try to round up the rest of the gang. Notify Inspector Rumsey at Police Headquarters New York, and guard these men well until you hear further from me.

"ROSIKA STOREY."

Shefford, reading this over her shoulder as fast as she wrote it, was delighted. "Where is the money to be handed over, Rosy?" he asked.

"The launch from the yacht is to pick up the two men coming from town at a waterfront hotel called Keelers."

"I know it. What time?"

"Seven forty-five."

He glanced at his watch. "Plenty of time! It's just seven."

"But what could you do in a public hotel?"

Shefford scratched his head. "Sure! That's bad! That's bad! A landing in front and an automobile highway behind. How were the guys with the money going to get to Keeler's?"

"They get off the trolley at Rodd's Corner and walk."

"Ha!" cried Shefford. "Then we'll lay for them at Rodd's Corner. I passed it twice to-day. Elegant lonely spot."

"Have you got a car?" asked Mme. Storey.

"No. Don't need a car. Rodd's Corner ain't but ten minutes walk from my hangout."

"Your hangout?"

"Sure. We come up here early this morning to look over the ground. We hired the two boats and then we had to have a hideout. We broke into a closed-up house that's only used for week-ends over on Bolton Point. Swell place. No other houses near. Booze in the frigidaire, and everything...."

Shefford was interrupted by a voice from on deck saying, "Cheese it, boss! There's boats putting off from the shore!"

"Come on!" cried Shefford, making for the door.

Mme. Storey paused only long enough to pin the note she had written to the cabin door. She and Shefford jumped into the launch together. I was already in it. My employer was no sooner in, than she clambered back aboard the yacht again.

"What the hell...!" began Shefford.

"My pocket-book!" she gasped. "I won't be a second!"

In order to reach the saloon door she had to pass Hamann. He raised his free hand to strike her, but she dodged. In a moment she appeared again, pocket-book under arm. She jumped down into the launch and we cast off.

6

Shefford's launch was a speedy, smooth-running affair of mahogany with an automobile engine that could scarcely be heard. We started away from the yacht towing the smaller motor-boat that had been used by the pretended Inspector.

Even before I had jumped into the launch I had seen from the moving lights that a small fleet was setting out from the town to see what was the matter aboard the *Nada*. Shefford kept the launch in the long shadow cast by the yacht. He carried no lights.

A good-size cruiser suddenly appeared around the bow of the *Nada* with a searchlight mounted on her bow. Sweeping the harbour with it, she picked us up, and tooted a shrill blast on her whistle like a huntsman at the sight of the quarry. Shefford cast off the boat he was towing.

We turned sharp to the right, heading for the islands at the mouth of the harbour. The searchlight held us like a fly on the end of a pin. To Shefford and his gang it was a matter of life and death since they were old offenders. Some joked, some cursed, some bit their fingers in silence. It was an ugly bunch of faces revealed in the cold glare of the searchlight.

Then everybody saw that we were walking right away from our pursuers, and the strain relaxed.

We gained the shelter of the islands. Once around the first point we never saw the cruiser again, though we could follow her for a time by the reflected glow of her wildly searching light. They took it for granted that we would try to escape by the open Sound, whereas we doubled back into the harbour over by the Westerly side.

Shefford, Mme. Storey and I were seated amidships in the launch, just behind the chauffeur who was running it. As soon as he felt himself safe Shefford resumed his ingratiating tone towards my employer.

"As soon as we get the money for you you can have the launch to carry you back to Portford so as you can look after Hamann and his mob."

"Thanks," said Mme. Storey dryly. "What will you do?"

"Oh, we'll scatter according to plan," he said vaguely. "And call it a good night's work. All for you, Rosy."

"Certainly is white of you!"

"Which guys is it is bringing the money out from town?"

"Maxsy and Tim."

"I know them. Hamann's shock troops. I got handcuffs for them too, and you can take them back with you. Certainly is a public service to round up that dirty gang."

"You're right," said Mme. Storey still more dryly.

"We can't take this whole army up to Rodd's Corner," Shefford went on. "There ain't enough cover for them. I'll take three good men and leave the rest of the bunch waiting at Winterson's."

"And me," she put in.

"Oh sure, if you want to go."

"It's my money."

"Sure, you got every right to come along if you want to. I just thought being a woman and there may be an ugly scrap..."

"I'll go with you."

"Suits me."

As soon as we lost the searchlight I became aware that there were millions of stars shining in a velvety black sky. The water of the harbour was as smooth as oil. The reflections of the lights around the shores were like spears striking down into it. Around the islands there was a good salty smell of seaweed. You couldn't help but be struck by the contrast between the quiet beauty of the night and the depraved crew it covered.

In a few minutes Winterson's hove in view, half seen by starlight. It was an attractive plain house in the modern style, covered with shingles, and having a big chimney at either end. It stood on a curving spit of sand looking straight across the harbour at Portford a mile and a half away. In front of the house a flower garden struggled for existence in the sandy soil, while behind the spit of sand was a deep-water cove where the launch could lie without danger of being picked up by a wandering searchlight.

"Did you ever see anything more snug?" said Shefford. "It was just made for us."

They nosed the launch into the cove, and tied up to a floating stage below the shuttered house. The men jumped out, and Shefford issued some whispered orders. Mme. Storey, keeping her eyes fixed on the men, lingered long enough in the launch to lean forward and let her hand flutter across the instrument board.

Shefford turned around to hand her out. "Let's take a look at the house," he said. "It's a neat job."

"What's the use?" said Mme. Storey.

"We got time to spare."

He led us up some steps and a short path to the kitchen door. I suspected a trick and kept pulling at my employer's sleeve. But she paid no attention. Two men entered the house in advance of us. Shefford stood aside to allow us to go through the door. The instant we were in, it slammed behind us, and a key turned. We heard a coarse laugh from the other side.

"I knew it! I knew it!" I whispered bitterly.

"There was nothing else for us to do," answered Mme. Storey calmly.

One of the men turned a flashlight on us. "Certainly was a dirty trick," he said insinuatingly. "But what could I do? Orders is orders."

"It doesn't matter," said Mme. Storey composedly. "Al's got to come back here."

"Sure, he'll be back in half an hour with the money. It was only because it makes him nervous to have a woman around when there's any fighting."

We passed through kitchen, pantry, dining-room, into the big living-room which spread across the front of the house. An inviting room with a hundred little touches of comfort. It gave a woman an odd sensation to be making free with another woman's house like that.

The man with the light was quite a character. He was called Spike Lilly. Very talkative.

"Make yourself at home, ladies. Everything here was left comfortable for the family next weekend. Even ginger ale in the frigidaire."

He laid his torch on the table so we could see each other's faces. We all sat down like company, and Spike made conversation. "It's an honour for us guys to be sitting here with you, ma'am. I wish you'd tell us how you do it."

"Do what?"

"Always get your man."

"I don't always get him. Al Shefford slipped through my fingers once. Did he ever tell you the story?"

"Yeah," said Spike dryly. "Two three dozen times.... Tell us about some guy you did land."

"Sorry, you'll have to excuse me," said Mme. Storey. "I'm too anxious about my money."

The other man was searching around the room with a flashlight. "Here's playing cards," he said.

"Good!" cried Spike. "Will you join us in a game of pinochle, ladies?"

The flashlight was fastened upside down to the lighting fixture over the centre table, and within the cold white circle that it cast we sat down to our game. We made a weird picture. My partner was a husky youth called Ginger who would have been handsome if his eyes hadn't been set too close together. Mme. Storey and Spike kept up a running fire of wise-cracking. I played my cards as in a dream.

"I suppose you wouldn't give a guy like me a job on your force," said Spike. "They say you got to set a thief to catch a thief."

"Oh, I often do that," said Mme. Storey.

"Will you try me out?"

"Come and see me."

"Oh yeah?"

Half an hour passed; three quarters. The game of pinochle was interrupted by a low whistle outside the house. "Al's back," said Spike.

The two men stood up, dropping their cards. My heart died within me when I saw Spike pull a gun, and Ginger a couple of pairs of jingling handcuffs.

"Stand up, ladies!" said Spike with a hard grin, "and stick your hands behind you!"

I obeyed, and Ginger, coming behind, me snapped handcuffs on my wrists. Mme. Storey had sprung up from her chair, but she thrust her hands stubbornly in the pockets of her oilskin pants.

"What does this mean?" she cried volubly. "After I've done you a good turn are you double-crossing me? Are you going to steal my money?"

"I don't know nothing about that," said Spike. "I'm following my orders. Put your hands behind you!"

"I'll see you damned first! Where's Al Shefford? Let him tell me to my face he's going to steal my money!"

Spike lost his grin. "Put your hands behind you, or I'll crack you over the head!" he rasped.

"I won't! I won't! I want to see Al Shefford!"

By such tactics my employer delayed matters until Shefford himself ran in through the dining-room, red-faced and snarling.

"What's the matter here? Why don't youse guys come on?"

"This dame won't submit," said Spike.

"Won't submit! Hit her over the head!"

"Where's my money?" cried Mme. Storey.

Shefford laughed. "Did you think I was going to give it back? You're too trusting for a dick, Rosy! It's my job to kidnap folks for ransom, and it's your job to catch kidnappers. Catch me if you're man enough!"

"Give me my money!" she cried.

Shefford raised his huge fist. "Put your hands behind you!" he snarled. "Or I'll spoil that pretty face!"

She obeyed. First our hands, then our ankles were locked together.

"Lay them on the sofas so they can rest comfortable," said Shefford, laughing. "You can holler all you want. There's no inhabited house within half a mile.... I won't let you starve," he added. "As soon as we get clear away I'll telephone the Portford police to come and get you. See! I'll put the key to the handcuffs up here on the door-frame."

Mme. Storey was laid on one sofa, I on another. The men started out. Shefford paused in the doorway for a final taunt.

"At that I'm showing you Christian charity," he said. "If you had your way you'd put me in States Prison for the rest of my life. But you got to catch me first." He held up two stubby fingers. "I'm two up on you now, Rosy!"

We could hear him laughing still as he crossed the dining-room and went out through the kitchen door.

Sounds of confusion arose outside; men running around the house; blows; a voice crying out, "The key is gone!" Immediately Shefford came running back, knocking over the dining-room chairs in wild haste; colliding with the door-frame. What a change in him! He carried no light, but we could hear him panting with terror.

He ran silently for a window and threw it up; threw back the shutters. A little light came in from the starry sky. As Shefford was slinging a thick leg across the sill, a flash was thrown into his face and a hard voice ordered him to put up his hands.

He staggered back from the window. He turned to run out the way he had come. But the dining-room door opened and a light blazed through it. Alongside the light was a hand pointing a gun. And the voice that belonged to the hand said:

"Put your hands in front of you, Shefford!"

A policeman climbed through the window; two entered from the dining-room. With lights and guns they backed Shefford into a corner of the room like a wild beast showing his teeth. Slowly the thick arms went out in front of him. Handcuffs clicked. "Where's Mme. Storey?" demanded an authoritative voice.

"Here!"

Lights were thrown on her where she lay bound on the sofa in the black oilskins, smiling pleasantly.

"Good God! Did they hurt you?" cried the chief of police.

"Not in the least. You'll find the key to these handcuffs on top of the door frame yonder.... I didn't know how long it would take you to get here so I stole the switch key of their motor-boat. I dropped it alongside the kitchen steps."

Somebody brought in a gasoline lantern. A good many men crowded in. The Portford police were rather a nondescript lot as regards uniforms, but husky. The chief was very smart in brass buttons and gold stripes. A young man.

Mme. Storey and I were quickly released. We stood up and stamped our feet to restore the circulation.

"Well, Al," said Mme. Storey. "It's a topsy-turvy world. You're too trusting for a kidnapper!"

"Aah!" he snarled. "It was just a fluke! It's no credit to you!"

"Fluke nothing," said the chief. "It was Mme. Storey brought us here. She told Hamann that you were hanging out in Winterson's house, and Hamann was tickled to death to pass the tip to me."

Shefford looked at her from under lowering brows. "So that's what you run back on the yacht for!" he said bitterly. His head sunk. He had no more to say.

Little remains to be told. The prisoners included Maxsy and Tim, whom Shefford had brought to Winterson's house. We piled into the two launches, and going around by way of Keeler's Hotel, surprised the launch from the *Nada* still waiting for the men with the money. That made the haul complete.

We then headed for the *Nada* where Hamann and his crew were still chained to the stanchions awaiting the return of the police. The whole mob was carried ashore to the little police station in Portford. It is doubtful if such an array of brilliant criminal talent was ever collected under one roof before. The young chief surveyed his prisoners with swelling pride.

"By God! I guess this will put little old Portford on the front page!" he said. "Two gangs of kidnappers caught the same night! A dozen sensational mysteries cleared up! And we owe it all to you, Ma'am. If I have anything to do with it I'll see that you are presented with the freedom of this burgh and a golden key!"

Mme. Storey merely smoked and smiled. She clung to the smart valise which contained the ransom money.

There was only one local press correspondent on the scene. He nearly passed out with the importance of the job that devolved on him as the first to give the story to the world. He was a little fellow wearing thick glasses. You could see him thinking in three-inch headlines as his pencil flew over the paper.

**RIVAL KIDNAPPERS CAUGHT! MADAME
STOREY CALLS ON AL SHEFFORD TO NAB
BILL HAMANN. AFTERWARDS MAKES
HAMANN HELP HER TO TRAP SHEFFORD!**

THE MURDERS IN THE HOTEL CATHAY

The cases of the Princesse de Rochecouart and M. Guimet had brought Mme. Storey so much notoriety in Paris that she could no longer enjoy her vacations there in obscurity. That was why she had announced her intention of going to China for the summer. We intended to forget psychology and crime for two months. As usual we booked as Mrs. and Miss Renfrew—I the sister-in-law.

Unluckily for our plans, the first time we started to walk the deck of the *Asama Maru* after leaving San Francisco, my employer saw an acquaintance coming towards us.

"Confound it! here is Barrett Forbes," she muttered.

I looked with strong curiosity because Barrett Forbes had lately inherited uncounted millions from his father. Well, he was no Prince Charming, but a nice, everyday sort of young fellow with a worried expression and a slight stoop. I felt sorry for him. What was the use of being so rich if it only put a hump in your back?

In passing us he kept his eyes front, but I saw from his self-conscious look that he had recognised Mme. Storey. "He knew you," I said. "Why did he make believe not to?"

"I'm not going to worry about that," she replied. "Let's go below. Hereafter I'll take my exercise after dark."

We had not been long in our sitting-room when the telephone rang. I understood from what I heard that Forbes was pleading with my employer for an interview. She finally consented.

"Bribed a steward to tell him our cabin numbers," she said, hanging up. "He's travelling incog. himself."

In a moment or two he was at the door. There was something about him that appealed to the maternal instinct; something good-hearted, helpless, dogged. He was very plainly dressed. The only touch of elegance he permitted himself was a stick-pin with a beautiful blue pearl. The unusual colour caught my eye. Mme. Storey introduced me, "My secretary, Miss Brickley."

I scarcely existed for him. He sat down on the sofa and accepted a cigarette—but presently put it down unlighted. "It's very good of you to let me tell you my story," he said.

"Not at all," said my employer. "One can always listen to a story. But I warned you I wouldn't do any work this summer."

"I suppose you know that my father died two months ago," he began.

Mme. Storey bowed.

"Heart, they called it," he said bitterly. "I suppose it was. I don't want to imply that this thing actually killed him, but it certainly hastened his end."

I saw my employer's attention sharpen. If there was anything queer about the death of J. J. Forbes it was a big case.

"I'm afraid he cut rather a ridiculous figure towards the end of his life," the young man went on. "He had discovered that money-making wasn't enough, and he started in to acquire culture."

"Nothing ridiculous in that," said Mme. Storey.

He gave her a grateful look and continued.

"Last summer he went to China with a party of friends. He liked Peking so well that he stayed on there after his friends had left. I cabled asking him if it wasn't unwise to stay alone. He replied telling me to mind my own business." Young Forbes smiled bleakly.

"Shortly afterwards I received a cable from him in our private code instructing me to wire him a million dollars. I thought he must have got into some terrible jam. When I cabled for particulars I was again invited to mind my own

business. Well, the money was his. He gave elaborate instructions how it was to be sent through half a dozen banks, and ordered me not to speak of the matter to anybody.

"When he got home he refused at first to say what he had done with the money. Finally, after again swearing me to secrecy, it all came out. He had purchased a great collection of Chinese art; finer than anything in America. In fact it was a part of the Imperial art treasures, and he had bought it direct from General Li, who had captured Peking and wanted the money to pay his soldiers.

"I didn't like the transaction. I suspected that the Chinese people now felt that these treasures belonged to them. But what could I say? Who had a better right to the stuff than the soldier who had captured Peking? my father asked. The Imperial family was dead or scattered. If he hadn't bought it some other American would. Anyhow the money was paid over and the goods on the way.

"My father could talk of nothing but paintings, porcelains, jades, ivories and bronzes. He was full of the jargon of collectors that he had picked up in Peking; of the Sung, Tang and Ming periods; of Chien Lung and Kang Hsi.

"In due course the consignment arrived. It was then necessary to employ an art expert to represent us at the appraisal of the objects in the custom house. I needn't mention this man's name. My father paid him well to keep his mouth shut. The plan was to have the stuff transported to our country place in Greenwich where it was to be kept for a few years without anything being said about it.

"I'll will it to the Metropolitan museum,' my father said. 'After I am gone they will find out that old J. J. was something more than a mere money-grubber.'"

"Well, to make a long story short, the packing-cases were found to contain nothing but rubbish; cheap new stuff, and flimsy imitations of the antique. The art expert made no attempt to hide his contempt for it. It was his laughter which cut deepest.

"My father paid the duty demanded by the government, and had the stuff shipped to Greenwich. Since then I have been loading it on my motor-boat a case or two at a time, and carrying it out into the Sound at night and dumping it. There it lies. God knows what it cost my father to keep the story out of the papers.

"He failed in health. During his last illness when his mind wandered, he would still be muttering about the Sung and the Tang periods, and Kang Hsi porcelains." Young Forbes turned away his head. "It was not the money he had lost but the blow to his pride. He was a hard man, but he had never cheated anybody in his life."

After a silence, Forbes continued. "The thing grew on me slowly. After a couple of months I felt I had to do something about it. So I decided to go out to China under an assumed name, and try to run the scoundrels down. There may be a regularly organised gang preying on American tourists. It's up to me to put a stop to it. Don't you agree?"

Mme. Storey firmly shook her head. "You are not the one to do it," she said. "You are only repeating your father's mistake in going into this alone."

"There wasn't anybody I could tell without giving away the whole story.... I'm not travelling alone. I have engaged a young prize-fighter for a bodyguard. He doesn't know my real purpose."

"What have you got to go on?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Not much," Forbes confessed. "My father told me nothing about the acquaintances he made in Peking, or how the negotiations were carried through. He stopped at the Hotel Cathay. He did tell me how he was taken into the Forbidden City at night and shown the art treasures by the light of a pocket flash."

"Here's the point," said Mme. Storey; "was he shown genuine treasures, or was it the worthless stuff he afterwards received?"

"He was certain that a substitution had been made."

"I don't see how you're going to prove that he didn't get what he bought," she said with blunt kindness. "Especially since the stuff is now at the bottom of Long Island Sound. In fact you have no case at all."

"It's very simple," said Forbes eagerly; "I shall stop at the Hotel Cathay under an assumed name. I shall let it be known that I am interested in art and have plenty of money. Then if anybody tries to sell me the Imperial art treasures, I'll have them, don't you see?"

"Much too simple," said Mme. Storey grimly. "This is the cleverest swindle I have yet met. And the boldest. Do you imagine that you will be a match for the brain that conceived it? Pocket your loss, and go back home."

He stubbornly shook his head. "It isn't the money. I can't give it up."

For a long time she argued with him. It was all to no purpose. He wouldn't listen.

"It was a great stroke of luck meeting you on the way to Peking," he said diffidently. "If I could only persuade you to..."

"No!" she said definitely. "I wouldn't touch it. I know no more about China than you do."

"But you'll be my friend?"

"Certainly I'll be your friend."

Mme. Storey had other meetings with Barrett Forbes in her cabin, but they passed on deck without recognition, because she thought it quite likely the gang might have a scout or steerer on the *Asama Maru*. We arranged to part at Shanghai and take different routes to Peking.

Tom Monaghan was the prize-fighter. There was no reason why he and I should copy the aloofness of our employers, and we soon came together on deck. As the idle days passed we became very friendly, though goodness knows what a lad like that would see in sober red-headed me. I had never known anybody like him; so simple, so funny, so intensely masculine. He had been stable-boy, jockey, tramp. I learned a lot about life from him. I had looked forward with keen pleasure to our stay together in Peking—then after one brief glimpse of him in the hotel, came the news that he and Barrett Forbes had gone!

2

This happened while General Li, the war lord from Honan, was master of Peking. The Nationalists had moved the capital to Nanking. Everybody said we two women were foolhardy to be travelling in China at such a time, but that only spurred my employer on. In order to reach Peking we had to go around by Mukden, since the two warring armies were camped across the direct line from Shanghai. Our two friends of the journey, I can scarcely call them our clients, were to take ship to Tientsin and join us in Peking. It would have been highly imprudent for us to travel together.

I got a big thrill when the train slid through the ancient towering walls. Wall after wall, because Peking is a nest of walled cities, one within the other. Squalor and magnificence rubbing elbows; trolley cars and camels; street pedlars like figures out of the Middle Ages, swinging their rattles and ringing their odd bells; swarms of rickshaws passing in clouds of dust as silently as birds.

We swept into a semi-circular driveway before the Hotel Cathay, and my boy dropped the shafts of his rickshaw so abruptly I almost fell out on top of him. The hotel was a modern building, but weird in its architecture; low and spreading, covered with grotesque ornament like an Aztec temple. A pool in front with red lotuses blooming.

We were shown to a luxurious suite, very queerly furnished. Only the bathrooms looked homelike. I was reassured to find that the door of each room was furnished with a stout chain to fasten when you went to bed. When we were left

alone Mme. Storey said: "Our friends are here before us. I saw their names on the register. Their rooms are 242, 243, and 244."

"Can we get in touch with them?" I asked eagerly.

She shook her head. "We must appear to meet as if for the first."

The Cathay was built by an American whom some call our greatest architect, and some a madman. Instead of being a neat parallelogram whose plan you could grasp at a glance, it sprawled all over the place, with terraces, flying bridges, roof gardens piled on top of each other like a palace of the imagination. I never was sure of finding my way.

When we went in for dinner we came face to face with our two friends coming out; Barrett Forbes the young millionaire, neat and subdued as always; and Tom Monaghan, prize-fighter-body-guard, with his sporty clothes and cagey eye. As soon as I saw them I no longer felt like a stranger in Peking. Not a flicker of recognition passed between us, but I could *feel* Tom grinning behind his poker face.

When we came out from dinner there was no sign of them. We sat down in the lobby, and ordered coffee and liqueurs. Queer people surrounded us; mysterious-looking, romantic, disreputable; in other words, the East. My distinguished employer attracted sly glances. You could see people asking each other, "Who is she?" Our friends never showed up.

"What can be the matter with them?" I asked.

"Oh, Forbes is a cautious soul," said Mme. Storey carelessly. "Doesn't want to risk anything by being too precipitate."

The hotel manager, who was French and youngish, came strolling over to us. He was depressed, it appeared. Since the Nationalists had moved the capital to Nanking, business was rotten. He had about thirty guests and accommodations for three hundred. The servants were revolutionary. He didn't like China anyhow. How could one run a hotel without knowing what was going on behind one's back.

Mme. Storey wearied of the gloomy Frenchman and we went to bed. She leaned on the window-sill of our sitting-room with a sigh. Just across the street towered the rose-coloured wall of the Forbidden City with points of the fantastic golden roofs of the palaces showing over the top in the dying light.

"Fancy retiring to one's room at nine o'clock in Peking!" she said disgustedly.

"Let's telephone to the boys' suite," I said.

But she wouldn't allow it. "We don't know who may be sitting at the telephone switchboard."

At breakfast time there was still no sign of our friends. As we came out of the dining-room M. Deschamps, the manager, hastened to us.

"I should like to change your rooms," he said effusively. "I have a better suite. It is the best in the house. Rooms 242, 243, and 244."

Mme. Storey and I avoided looking at each other. "Oh, have they just been vacated?" she asked carelessly.

"Yes, Madame. Two young men. Americans. They left suddenly for Tientsin. I have just sent their baggage after them. Young Americans are so impulsive!"

I had a horrible foreboding of disaster. It was impossible that the boys should have gone away without communicating with us. Mme. Storey warned me with a glance to keep my face from betraying me.

"Let us look at the rooms," she said.

Accompanying us through the corridors, M. Deschamps talked in his voluble fashion. "The young men were here two nights only. They came on the *Derrflinger* to Tientsin. I understood they were going to stop with me indefinitely, but this morning I received a telegram to forward their baggage back to Tientsin. On inquiry I learned that their beds had not been slept in. The money to pay their bill was in an envelope on the table. They must have left last night. I saw them at dinner. I sent their baggage on the morning train."

"I didn't know there was a morning train," said Mme. Storey idly.

"Oh yes, Madame. Nine o'clock."

I saw her glance at her watch. The train had gone. The suite he took us to lay beyond our present rooms at the end of the same corridor. Three large and handsomely-furnished rooms overlooking the Forbidden City on one side, and on the other the temples to the north.

Mme. Storey was playing the careless, fashionable woman. "We'll take the rooms," she said graciously. "Let the boy bring our things right in."

"But Madame," protested the manager, "he should give the rooms a cleaning first."

This was what she wished to prevent. "He can do it later," she said with a pettish air. "I want our things brought in before I go out."

M. Deschamps, accustomed to the vagaries of rich ladies, bowed and gave the order to the boy.

"Put all our things in our bags and bring them in here," Mme. Storey added to the boy. This was to delay him as long as possible.

When we were left alone she pulled down the covers of the bed. "This bed was slept in last night," she said grimly. "No professional bedmaker made it. Look at the wrinkles."

"Follow the boy," she went on, "and fetch the little black bag that has our passports in it. Is there anything else in your baggage that could give away our real names? Think hard."

I shook my head. "You told me to destroy everything."

"Also bring me the magnifying glass out of the middle-size brown bag. Don't let the boy see what you came for. Dump everything out of the bag as if by accident, and leave him to pick it up."

When I brought her the glass she applied herself to the examination of the three rooms. First the bedroom by which we had entered the suite; then the parlour, a corner room; finally the second bedroom beyond the parlour; furniture, floors, walls. The heavy-piled rugs on the floors seemed to have a particular interest for her.

I was posted by the door of the first bedroom to listen for anybody coming along the corridor.

When Mme. Storey had finished her examination she said soberly, "They are done for, Bella."

It was like a stab. "Oh, no!" I murmured involuntarily. "How can you be sure yet? Maybe ... Maybe ..."

"They are done for!" she repeated. "We must make up our minds to it.... The boys were as bored last night as we were. They went to bed immediately after they came up from dinner. Eight cigarette butts in the tray beside one bed; six by the other. While they slept men entered this room from the corridor...."

"Why this room?"

"The chains are still in place on the other two doors."

"Maybe they came through a window."

"No, they brought none of the famous Peking dust with them ... There must have been four or five of them."

"How can you tell?"

She led me to the door of the parlour and made me stretch out on the floor. "Look along the surface of the rug in there and notice how the pile has been pressed down by the passage of many pairs of feet. It must have been towards morning when they came—the quietest hour."

"Why?"

"Because the pile of the rugs has a certain elasticity. If they had come earlier the tracks would have disappeared by now. Notice how well-defined the tracks of the room-boy are. He has been in there and come out only once this morning. While my tracks around the edge of the rug are sharply printed."

We arose and looked around the room we were in. "This was Forbes' room," she said. "I found several black hairs around the bed. They had living roots."

"Pulled from his head?"

"No. There was no struggle in here. Knocked from his head by a blow from a blunt instrument, I should say. His body was then rolled up in a sheet of jute sacking. There are particles of jute on the rug beside the bed."

"They may not be dead," I put in eagerly. "Perhaps they were knocked on the head and carried away for ransom."

She shook her head. "In that case why so much care to arrange the rooms? And all the business of sending for the baggage? No. What was aimed at was a complete disappearance. There will never be any demand for ransom."

The faintly struggling hope in my breast gave up.

"In the farther bedroom Tom Monaghan put up a fight," Mme. Storey went on. "There are particles of abraded skin sticking to the rough plaster wall beside the bed, and two small bloodstains on the rug. Melted candle grease has been dropped on the stains to hide them. An ingenious idea, but when you scrape away the grease there is the blood. It was either Europeans who did this or highly sophisticated Chinese. There are no fingerprints."

"In Tom's room," she continued, "the small desk chair such as there is in every room was smashed and carried away with the bodies. It has been replaced by a similar chair from one of the unoccupied rooms. In the struggle the rug must have been thrown back, and when they straightened it, they overlooked a little piece of the broken chair. I found it under the rug."

She showed me a fish-shaped sliver of waxed yellow wood, and carefully bestowed it in her pocket-book.

"But how could they have got in?" I cried. "The chains are still up on the doors of the other rooms. It is not believable that the careful Forbes would go to bed and leave his door unchained."

Mme. Storey studied further. Finally she pointed to a little cupboard alongside the door which concealed the telephone. Opening the door of this cupboard, and reaching through it, she opened a similar little door, and we looked into the corridor.

"This arrangement is to enable the boy on duty in the hall to answer your phone when you are out, and take a message. It didn't occur to the ingenious designer that it might also be used for another purpose." Going into the corridor she showed how a slender person, by wriggling part way through the telephone cupboard, might extend an arm into the

room and unchain the door.

Now we heard the boy coming along the corridor with the first load of our belongings. Flat and bland in his long white gown this "boy" looked like the father of a large family, possibly a grandfather. He treated Mme. Storey and I with an indulgent air, like little girls who must be humoured. At first I had found this very engaging, but I distrusted the Chinese smile. His name was Chou.

As he entered, my employer resumed her pettish air. "We've changed our minds. We don't like these rooms. It is too far to walk to the elevator."

"All right, Missee," he said with unchanged smile, and picked up the bags again.

"Do you think he can be in on it?" I asked when he had gone.

She shrugged. "If he had, the beds would have been properly made."

"He must have seen that they had been slept in."

"Well, as a hotel-servant he has probably learned to forget a good deal of what he sees."

"What are you going to do?" I asked with a feeling of helplessness.

She answered slowly: "If I consulted my own wishes, I'd keep my mouth shut and go to work in secrecy. But I can't take that responsibility.... Let's find the manager."

We started back to our rooms. Just outside the door of the royal suite there was a break in the wall of the corridor where you looked over a stone parapet down into a transverse hall that was known in Peking as Paradise Alley. The entertainment rooms opened off it. Beyond the parapet a little stone stairway went down, so cunningly hidden in the wall I had not noticed it before.

"That is where the bodies were carried down," murmured Mme. Storey.

Tom's shapely body, cold and limp! I shivered.

The manager was in our rooms almost as soon as we were, full of anxiety because we had turned down his best suite. Mme. Storey shrugged it aside.

"Funny, those two young men should have left so suddenly," she murmured with meaning.

M. Deschamps who was of an impressionable nature, looked anxious.

"One hears of such odd things happening in China. What kind of an order did you get to forward their baggage?"

"Telegram, Madame."

"Well, of course it's none of my business, but if it was me I should notify the police of the circumstances."

"I suppose you are right," he said, changing colour. Turning to Chou he asked: "When did you last see the young gentlemen?"

"See him go down catch piecee dinner seven o'clock."

"Did you hear them talk about going away or see them packing?"

"No, sir."

"When did you find out they had gone?"

"This morning. Porter bring chit for trunks and bags."

"Was the room in order?"

"Yes, sir. All same like now."

"Bags packed?"

"Yes, sir. All same packed and locked."

"How late at night is this boy on duty?" put in Mme. Storey.

"Until midnight, Madame."

"Is he alone in the hall?"

"Number two boy was off last night."

"Have we no protection after midnight?" she asked with feigned anxiety.

"The watchman, Madame. He makes his rounds all night."

"Only one watchman? It must take him hours to get around."

"Every half hour, Madame."

She made believe to be satisfied.

"I'll attend to this matter at once," he said. "Come boy!" He ran away in a flutter of excitement. Mme. Storey lit a cigarette and dropped in a chair. "I shall keep the sliver of wood. It will be of more use to me than to a Chinese policeman."

"You *could* help them," I said.

She shrugged. "For all I know the official investigation may be conducted by the murderers.... Bella, these young men were removed because their presence in Peking threatened an enormously profitable racket. That means that the Imperial treasures are still being offered for sale. If we can find out who's offering them, we'll have the murderers."

"How could they have discovered Forbes' identity so soon?"

"Easily. Somebody visited his room when he was out and took a look at his passport. You may be sure we are all watched. Yet somehow, you and I must persuade them to put us on the sucker list."

"Suppose it's the great Li himself?" I suggested with my heart in my throat.

"Well, anyhow, that would be exhilarating," she said, blowing a smoke ring and watching it. "All our recent cases have been so tame!"

There is little that need be said about the official investigation. All the obvious things were done; the hotel searched from top to bottom, and everybody in it questioned. Nothing came of it. And how could we tell what was really going on behind the polite yellow masks of the police?

It was soon established that the young men had not taken the train to Tientsin. The telegram sent from that city was

found to have been written in block letters. The agent said he had taken it through his wicket without paying any attention to the sender. The sender was not found.

A watch was put on the baggage, but it was not claimed. Upon being opened, everything was found to have been thrown in pell-mell. The presence of several pieces of valuable jewellery proved that robbery had not figured as a motive.

When the identity of the victims became known, the cables under the Pacific grew hot. The Forbes family stirred up things in Washington, and our Minister in Peking was drawn into the affair. There was little he could do beyond making "strong representations." A tremendous hubbub was kicked up in America, and there was talk of lending armed support to the Nationalists, Li's adversaries in the field.

We heard that Li was having scores of Chinese arrested and tortured in an effort to placate the American minister. Chou, our boy, was amongst them. On four occasions he was led away by the police, and would return to his work hours later, shaken and grey-faced. My feelings began to react in his favour.

Mme. Storey believed that the bodies were still in the hotel. It appeared that the three rear entrances were locked at midnight and a burglar alarm set. The alarm was found to be in good working order. "They could hardly be carried out through the front office wrapped in sacking," she said.

Consequently, as opportunity offered, she pursued her own quiet search through that fantastic building. It offered plenty of hiding-places. I might say that since heat, power and light were furnished by electricity, there was no furnace in the hotel. Also the entire building rested on a thick slab of concrete. This precluded the two commonest ways of disposing of a body.

The two beautiful garden courts offered likely places. My employer strolled about them clinging to my arm while she searched every foot with apparently careless eyes. I was her camouflage. On the day after the murders the ground had certainly not been disturbed anywhere. But she went over it again.

Before the police search of the hotel was made, we discovered that the broken chair had been returned to the royal suite. It was so beautifully mended you would never have known it had been broken unless you were looking for it. The scarred piece had been replaced. "Our thugs seem to enjoy the freedom of the hotel," remarked Mme. Storey.

On the third morning when we left the dining-room after breakfast the garden to the left happened to be deserted for the moment. We took advantage of the opportunity to stroll around it. The Chinese gardener had laid it out in such perfect scale that it seemed like an immense place. There was actually a little brook running through with a miniature bridge and a shady bower on the far side.

At the upper end there was a plantation of trees and shrubs to screen the kitchen windows. You could almost lose yourself in here. Passing through the shaded path Mme. Storey's unerring eye perceived freshly crumbled earth scattered about the roots of the shrubs. Posting me as a lookout, she bent down to examine the spot.

"The earth has not been dug up," she said, as we resumed our walk. "Some loose earth of a different texture was scattered here last night. A couple of bushels of it. We must find out where it came from. It is rich loam such as florists use."

That night Mme. Storey determined to sit up to watch the watchmen. Since the murders a second man had been put on at night. The two went around together. From our corridor a sort of flying bridge was carried over one of the gardens to the roof of the main dining-room. This wide, flat deck was a favourite spot for lounging on moonlight nights. Here we took up our station after the hotel had quieted down.

At the rear a bold square tower like a donjon keep rose up thirty or forty feet higher. This contained the grand ballroom which is famous throughout the East. It was never used during our stay. It could be entered by French windows direct from the flat roof where we sat.

The Chinese watchmen looked at us out of the corners of their slant eyes each time they passed, and we could see

them pause inside the ballroom to stare back at us. It made me feel small and strange to be sitting on that high moonlit deck during the small hours in China.

We could follow the course of the watchmen through the building by the glint of their flashlights through the dark windows. Mme. Storey observed that after crossing the deck and entering the ballroom they did not go down the grand stairway, but descended a little service stair to the ground floor where they began their rounds anew. When she had seen them do this twice she said:

"Anybody who was familiar with this habit of the watchman's would know that he was safe from discovery on the grand stairway during the night. We must have a look at it in the daylight."

The whole rear part of the hotel had been designed for entertaining on a grand scale. It had its own imposing entrance on another street, and the main stairway led from this door up to the ballroom. On it the mad architect had lavished all his art. There was no interior finish. The whole was roughly constructed of grey pitted lava stone, barbaric and splendid; cunningly designed by its very rudeness to set off beautifully gowned women.

Next morning Mme. Storey and I sauntered up this stairway, entirely alone in that part of the building. On every corner in this hotel you were surprised by some novel effect. On the wide landing of the stairway, having a space of about three feet by seven to spare at either side, the architect had hollowed out pits in the solid grey stone, and had filled the holes with earth level with the floor. These little beds at the moment were set out with scarlet azaleas in bloom.

While I was admiring the effect, I caught sight of Mme. Storey gazing at it with a significant eye, and my heart contracted. It was not difficult to guess of what she was thinking. The shape of those patches of brown earth was only too suggestive.

"The azaleas are not quite as brilliant as they ought to be," she said dryly. "Azaleas should not be disturbed during their blossoming."

Dropping to her knees on the landing, she thrust her hands into the loose mould. I turned away my head.

A slight exclamation of pain from her caused me to look again. She had a finger in her mouth. Carefully parting the earth with her other hand, she picked up a tiny object and blew the loose dirt from it. It was Barrett Forbes' scarf pin with the blue pearl. I caught hold of the balustrade.

Mme. Storey dropped the pin in her pocket-book, and smoothed the earth level again. "For the moment nothing must be said about this. We don't want anybody to run away." Slipping her arm through mine, she led me on upstairs.

5

As a pair of idle, rich women willing to be amused, we soon found ourselves "intimate" friends with the crowd of well-dressed loafers who hung out in the public rooms of the Cathay. These people didn't live in the hotel. They were divided mostly into two classes; philanderers and pan-handlers.

It was amongst the pan-handlers that we hoped to find a lead to our goal. There was a sad lack of variety in their approach. After three cocktails they would whisper in Mme. Storey's ear in ripe husky voices that, if she was interested, as a personal favour they could introduce her to a Chinese collector who had some pieces such as never came into the market, etc., etc.

Such people were too seedy and second-rate ever to have taken part in a big deal, but Colonel Hodgdon was a cut above them. He lived in the hotel, an old gentleman with beautiful ivory-coloured hair, and goatee. He didn't associate with the gang or drink cocktails. Sometimes he was to be seen sipping a glass of pale sherry, and sometimes he played chess with an old Chinese as dignified as himself.

"He looks like a latter-day saint," I said.

"Or a super-come-on man," amended Mme. Storey.

As he made no move in our direction, she moved in his. Passing him with his glass of sherry, she said with a smile: "I beg your pardon, but what does one do with one's letters here? Can the post office read our kind of writing?"

He arose with an old-world bow. "It would be safer if you asked the clerk at the desk to add the address in Chinese."

He made no attempt to follow up this opening. Mme. Storey undertook other approaches. Colonel Hodgdon was always polite—and a little distant.

Meanwhile my employer had cabled in code to her attorney in New York asking him to arrange to have a credit of one hundred thousand dollars placed to her order in the National City Bank, Peking.

On the day after this money arrived, as we returned to the hotel for lunch, Colonel Hodgdon arose from his seat in the lobby and bowed. "Good-morning, ladies. Am I privileged by my white hairs to invite you to join me in a little refreshment? One must not stand on ceremony in a foreign land."

Mme. Storey and I avoided looking at each other.

Cocktails naturally merged into lunch. The Colonel was a delightful companion; widely travelled; accustomed to the best society. It appeared that he acted as commissionaire or agent in Peking for wealthy collectors of Chinese art all over the world. He let us understand that his was a very exclusive business. If he picked up a dozen perfect objects in a year, he said, he felt that his time had been well spent.

One thing led to another and the Colonel finally began to speak of a marvellous powder-blue vase twenty-four inches high that had just come into his possession from a mysterious source. It happened to be in his room at the moment. Would we care to see it?

His room was on the first bedroom floor, a modest chamber with no attempts at decoration except the lovely blue vase on the table between the windows. To me it looked truly distinguished and beautiful, but I am no expert. Mme. Storey went into raptures over it, whether sincere or not I couldn't tell.

"Yes, it's lovely," said the Colonel off-handedly. "Unfortunately for me it's not particularly valuable, since there are four others like it known."

"What do I care about that?" cried Mme. Storey. "To me beauty is all! ... Whom did you buy it for?" she asked anxiously.

"Anybody who wants it."

"Could I ... Could I?" she stammered, eager and diffident.

"Why, certainly. As a rule ladies do not care to invest such sums."

"I came to China to form a collection," she said. "I haven't told anybody because I was afraid of being rooked. What is the price?"

His air remained admirably detached. "Five thousand."

"May I bring a friend to look at it and advise me?"

"Certainly! I should have suggested it if you hadn't."

After some more raptures we took our leave.

"Was it genuine?" I asked.

"This one was. This is the window-dressing."

From our suite she 'phoned to the United States Legation (where we had already called to pay our respects) asking to have somebody recommended to her who could advise her in respect to the purchase of works of art. The Minister himself said that the best connoisseur of Chinese art he knew of was his own Chinese Counsellor, Mr. George Stengel, and that Mr. Stengel would be happy to call on Mrs. Renfrew later in the afternoon.

At four we were surprised to see a handsome Chinese standing in our doorway; long gown of blue brocade; sleeveless black jacket; round cap. He looked like one of the high-caste Manchus who do not show marked Chinese characteristics. He smiled at our expressions.

"Yes, my name is really George Stengel," he said. "But my mother was Chinese. So this outfit comes natural to me. Helps me in my work here."

He would have stood out in any company of men anywhere. I resented him, he was so attractive to women and he knew it so well. His English was perfect. I could even distinguish a hint of the New York intonation, and it made me homesick.

Mme. Storey coolly accepted the challenge of his bold smile. "What is a Chinese Counsellor?" she asked. "Sit down."

He produced cigarettes of a new and seductive aroma. "I'm a sort of liaison officer between the American minister and the Chinese. I'm supposed to tell him everything that goes on in China."

"And do you?"

"Good God, no! Solomon himself would be baffled by the situation here in Peking. I know as much as anybody of what is going on and that is—nothing!"

When Mme. Storey finally told him what she wanted of him, he laughed. "Old Hodgdon won't be any too pleased to see you bringing me to look at his vase. We're not the best of friends. You see, we sometimes find ourselves in pursuit of the same prize. He gets it because he has more money, but he blames me for running up the price."

"Is he reliable?" she asked.

"Oh, average," he said with frank cynicism. "But I must say he knows his stuff."

We presently went downstairs to view the blue vase. The two men were polite to each other, no more; Hodgdon very formal, Stengel with a grin around the corners of his lips.

"Well, is it the real thing?" asked Mme. Storey after we had returned to our suite. We already felt as if we had known Stengel for months. He had that way with him.

"Surely," he said. "The real powder blue; very unusual to find a piece of that size. How much did he ask you for it?"

"Five thousand."

"H'm!" he said, surprised. "The old boy must be hard up. He usually asks twice what a thing is worth to begin with. Offer him four thousand, but pay five if he sticks at it."

The business being over we had cocktails served in our parlour. When he got up to go they made a date for cocktails on the following afternoon. "Come as you are," said Mme. Storey.

"Surely!" he said. "This is my best bib and tucker."

His gown was fastened by several marvellous jade buttons, each representing a little writhing dragon, deeply undercut.

"I spotted the buttons," she said.

"Ah, then you do know something about Chinese art."

"Oh, one recognises the real thing anywhere."

"These buttons are the most valuable thing I possess," he said. "A gift from the old Tigress; I refer to the late Empress Dowager."

Mme. Storey ran her sensitive finger over the carving. "Exquisite!"

6

The powder blue vase was duly delivered and paid for. A beautiful friendship developed with Colonel Hodgdon. He set about, as he said, combing Peking for more artistic treasures worthy to put beside the vase. Out of curiosity my employer asked him what he thought of Stengel.

"An able man," he said with a shrug of distaste. "And his official position gives him first-rate standing. But I don't like him."

One morning the Colonel came to the parlour of our suite wearing a great air of mystery. He said to Mme. Storey:

"Can I see you in private for a few minutes?"

"Oh, you can speak quite freely before my sister-in-law," she said. "She is acquainted with all my affairs."

"A very strange thing has happened," he said solemnly. "It is such a difficult and hazardous business I scarcely know whether I ought to open it to a woman."

"Make believe I am a man."

"This affair—if we go on with it, must be conducted in the most absolute secrecy. If it got out the city would rise!"

"You can rely on us to say nothing, Colonel."

After some hesitation he said: "A Chinese of very high rank has approached me with a proposition to sell a part of the Imperial art treasures."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mme. Storey, opening her eyes like saucers.

As for me, though we were expecting this, my heart started beating like a steam drill.

"How much have you got to invest?" he asked bluntly.

"I have a hundred thousand in the bank here," she said anxiously. "I might add another hundred thousand to it."

"Is that all?" he said, disappointed.

"Isn't two hundred thousand enough?"

"Of course, my dear," he said with a paternal air, "to you and I two hundred thousand is an awful lot of money. But these official Chinese think in big figures."

"It's all I could get together at short notice."

"Well, I'll see what I can do.... There's just one thing more, They ask for a New York reference."

"But if it's a cash transaction?"

"It's just to lull the fears of the Chinese."

"All right. My attorney is Latham Rowe of Rowe and Rowe. Everybody in New York knows him."

When he had gone I said anxiously: "They will cable!"

"Of course," said Mme. Storey. "In my last cable to Latham I told him what to say if he received any inquiries about Mrs. Renfrew."

I need not detail all the conversations that took place relative to the Imperial treasures. We reached a stage when Colonel Hodgdon informed us that the deal was concluded.

"I have made a selection of the best pieces," he said. "They will be sent to your suite to-morrow in four trunks. Trunks arriving in a hotel arouse no curiosity. They will come from the railway station, and the proper labels will be affixed. You and I can go over everything."

"This is a change from the former procedure," I said when the door had closed after him.

"I expect they change the modus to suit each case," said Mme. Storey. "For a million you are taken into the Forbidden City and shown the lot; for two hundred thousand you get four trunksful to the hotel."

To-morrow came and went and there was no sign of the trunks. Colonel Hodgdon was very apologetic. "Nothing ever comes on time in China."

On the following day he came to us with a long face. "I'm so sorry! Some hitch has arisen. The Chinese are always mysterious."

His expressions were polite, but all the steam had gone out of them. It was clear that he had lost interest in us. The deal was off.

Mme. Storey was bitterly chagrined. She said when we were alone: "I thought I had every loophole guarded!"

If they have discovered who we are, I said with a sinking heart, "our lives are not worth a dime's purchase in Peking!"

Before the morning was out we happened to see the tails of Colonel Hodgdon's cutaway disappearing into 243, the parlour of the royal suite. Upon making inquiry I learned that a party of four men had arrived the day before, and had been given the suite and additional rooms. They were English and the chief of the party was obviously a person of consequence. Their names appeared on the register as Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson.

"What a lack of imagination!" commented Mme. Storey.

The "Cathay" was a hotbed of chicanery and intrigue. Consequently it was natural for Mme. Storey to murmur to me within hearing of one of the smart Eurasian bell-boys: "I'd give five dollars American to know the real name of the English milord in 243."

Within half an hour the boy stood before us in the lobby extending his tray towards Mme. Storey, with an envelope upon it.... In the envelope was a slip on which was written:

"Sir Bertram Overmayer."

The boy got his fiver. Mme Storey was all smiles again. "Cheap at half the price!" she murmured flippantly to me.

"Who is Sir Bertram Overmayer?" I asked.

"The most famous art dealer in London, my darling. It simply means that they've hooked the biggest fish in their sea, and have abandoned the pursuit of minnows like us. See, here they come."

The four men crossed the lobby; in advance a rotund little English Jew who walked as if he owned the earth and despised it; three satellites following. Two of them were good looking and had roving eyes.

"We will work through them," murmured Mme. Storey. "You and I will suborn the two young ones. I like young Englishmen."

"You know I'm no good at that sort of thing," I objected.

"Nonsense, my dear! Unpractised wiles are ever the most effective!"

7

Meanwhile as our Minister brought more pressure to bear on General Li, a culprit had to be produced. On the same morning, just as Mme. Storey and I had finished dressing for lunch, we heard pitiful cries in the corridor.

Running out, we saw Chou, our room-boy, in the hands of three uniformed men, soldiers, not police. He was putting up a desperate fight, clawing at the door-jambes, the door-handles, anything that afforded a momentary hold. The soldiers with impassive yellow faces were dragging him towards the stairs. When he saw us he screamed: "Missee! Missee! Help! They goin' kill me now! And my blutter! And son! Help! Help!"

Mme. Storey turned pale. Chou was dragged around the corner of the stairway. We heard his heels thudding down from step to step. His cries grew fainter.

"Come on, Bella!" she cried, running back into our rooms. "Quick! your prettiest hat. White gloves. Make yourself smart. Quick!"

I obeyed her. "But what ... what can we do?" I stammered.

She never answered me. In a moment or two she ran out with me at her heels. We could not wait for the elevator, but ran down the two flights of shallow stairs. On a step lay one of Chou's white slippers. Mme. Storey ran through the gallery and across the lobby.

"Wait!" I urged her. "We must have advice. Telephone Stengel!"

"Can't stop!" she muttered.

At the door of the hotel a swarm of rickshaws descended on us. We chose the two boys we usually employed and climbed in. To the interpreter who stood at the door, Mme. Storey said:

"Tell them to take us to General Li's headquarters."

The man gaped at her.

"You heard what I said. Tell them!"

"But Madame ... General Li never receives foreign ladies!"

"I have an appointment with him. Tell them!"

He obeyed with a dazed air, and the boys dashed away at top speed. It was all one to them. They could see that Mme. Storey was in a hurry, and they had had experience of her generosity.

We sped straight ahead down a broad street and afterwards through a maze of tortuous, dirty lanes. We banged over ruts and turned corners with a wheel in the air. With sharp cries the boys warned babies and gossiping women out of the way. Chickens squawked and fluttered; dogs barked. It had the effect of more speed than a high-powered car.

They dropped the shafts, panting, in front of an exquisite little marble arch rising as beautiful as a flower amidst the mud walls, and signified that they would wait there for us. As we got out Mme. Storey whispered to me: "Tuck your handbag under the cushions. Our hands must be empty."

Passing through the arch we were faced by a gate-house covered with gorgeous enamelled tiles depicting green dragons on a yellow ground. Sentries were on guard, and immediately inside the gate an officer stepped forward holding out his hand—for a pass.

Mme. Storey never stopped walking. "How do you do," she said with her most charming smile. "I am Mrs. Renfrew. I have a pass, but I can't stop to get it out. I have an appointment with General Li and I'm a little late. Thank you so much."

The officer was dazed by this flow of language, of which he understood not a word. Elegant foreign ladies were something new in his experience. He didn't know what to do—and he did nothing.

We hastened on through a vast walled forecourt, paved with cobble stones, grass springing greenly between. There was a flagged walk down the middle. On each side were graceful pavilions with turned-up eaves, soldiers lounging outside, and a row of shaggy Manchurian ponies tethered to a long bar.

At the end of the flagged walk rose a fine tower with a three-tiered Chinese roof glittering with golden tiles. The entrance was through a sort of tunnel. Here we were barred by two sentries who crossed bayonets before us. A little door in the tunnel opened, and an officer issued out, extending his hand. He was of stiffer fibre than the first.

Mme. Storey played the great lady. "I am Mrs. Renfrew. I am not accustomed to be kept waiting. I wish to see General Li on a matter of great importance. Please send word that Mrs. Renfrew is here." And so forth.

He had no English, and in the end her magnificent air overwhelmed him. He hesitated, and finally sent an orderly on through the tunnel.

"Hurry! Hurry!" commanded Mme. Storey. The impassive Chinaman actually broke into a trot.

It seemed hours while we waited in the tunnel, but I suppose it was only a few minutes. The officer, unable to bear Mme. Storey's imperious mien, retired into his cubbyhole.

Finally we saw the orderly returning, accompanied by a little Chinese wearing horn-rimmed glasses and a black coat, evidently a secretary. The sentries lowered their bayonets, and Mme. Storey instantly swept through, meeting the secretary at the other side of the tunnel. She never stopped walking.

"How do you do. So good of you to come out to meet me. I am Mrs. Renfrew. I must see General Li on a matter of the most urgent importance. There is not a moment to lose!" etc., etc.

He trotted along beside her, protesting. He spoke good English. "But Madame, General Li cannot see you. You have no appointment. Appointments must be made several days in advance. He cannot see you now."

"That's all right. I *quite* understand. I am Mrs. Renfrew. I won't keep him a minute. Matter of the greatest importance...."

Straight across another great grass-grown court she swept, carrying us in her train. More Chinese soldiers staring. A superb flight of marble steps in front of us, guarded by bronze incense burners in the shape of various birds and animals. At the top of the steps a gorgeous palace with massive curved roof borne up on towering wooden columns.

Up the steps we went, and into a noble hall with a forest of smooth red-lacquered pillars losing themselves in the gloom of the roof. Soldiers everywhere in wrinkled grey cotton uniforms. In this place the harassed secretary succeeded in making a stand. "You cannot see General Li, Madame. That is positive. He is holding a council."

With a mixture of cajolery and imperiousness she answered: "That's quite all right. Just tell him I'm here. Mrs. Renfrew. Won't keep him a minute." There was a honeyed threat in her last words. "I'll wait here until I see him."

The worried little man slipped through a sliding panel at the back of the great hall. From the care he took in opening and closing the panel, we guessed that the General himself was on the other side of it. Mme. Storey turned to me with a droll face.

"Talk about crashing gates!"

"We're not in yet."

"We shall be. I shan't wait more than two minutes."

And presently she did indeed walk up to the panel and push it open. All the Chinese were so dumbfounded by her act, they stood stock still. Through the opening I had a glimpse of more officers. Mme. Storey said winningly: "May I come in?"

There was no answer. She coolly walked in with me pressing close behind. I was so frightened my legs would scarcely bear me, but I was bound to share her fate. I saw one of the officers put a hand to his pistol holster. All were looking at our hands. I appreciated then the wisdom of coming empty-handed when you call on a dictator.

It was another fine hall, smaller than the first, decorated with exquisite wood-carvings and ancient painted screens. A common kitchen table had been introduced amidst this antique splendour, and five Chinese officers of high rank were seated at it, with a larger group standing behind them.

There was no need to be told which was the Commander. He was a horror, but he had distinction. The biggest Chinese I ever saw. Six feet and something when he stood, and fat beyond all credence. Each button of his uniform outlined a separate billow of fat running around his body. His head was shaven, and his enormous, smooth, bland face was like that of a bronze Buddha that has stood for centuries exposed to the weather.

Out of this expanse looked a pair of pig eyes without any expression whatsoever. It was frightful; it was inhuman. Only by their liquid glint would you have known them for living eyes. A hideous old Buddha, dead to human feeling. I was ready to sink under that porcine gaze.

Not so Mme. Storey. Her chin went up. "I wish to speak to General Li on a matter of pressing importance," she said.

His mask remained unchanged; only the lips moved a little. "I am engaged," he said in English. "Please retire."

Mme. Storey took a step nearer. "This matter will not wait," she said, resolutely smiling. "There is an innocent man being led to execution. It is Chou, my room-boy at the Hotel Cathay."

Some of the officers permitted themselves to smile at her notion of an important matter. Li beckoned to one of them and asked a question. Upon being answered he said to Mme. Storey.

"I am told that Chou has confessed to the murder of the two Americans, and has implicated his two brothers and his son."

"That cannot be, sir," said Mme. Storey firmly. "He was taken away protesting his innocence. He was examined

four times, and nothing was brought against him. Somebody has deceived you, sir. It has been represented to you that the execution of these men is necessary to satisfy the Americans. I am an American and I tell you my people will not be satisfied. We do not execute men without trying them."

After consulting with his officer, Li said: "They are being tried now."

"Is it a public trial?" asked Mme. Storey. "Shall you publish a report of it? If not, the trial will not convince my people."

The bronze Buddha began to show signs of impatience. "It is a civil matter. I shall not interfere."

Another General spoke up: "Please retire, Madame."

Ignoring this, Mme. Storey addressed herself to Li as one superior person to another: "May I speak with you alone for a minute?"

"No," he said. "I have important business before me."

Still smiling, not servilely, she said: "May I speak a few words in your ear?"

There was a pause, while his inhuman eyes fastened on her face. I saw a spark of something stirring in their depths. To my astonishment he came out with: "Yes." And motioned to his officers to stand back.

Mme. Storey, leaning across the table, put her lips near to that enormous ear and whispered rapidly. Not a muscle of his face changed, but he said in his dead voice: "Very well. I agree."

He reached for his writing-case, and dipping the brush in the ink, rapidly wrote (or painted) a brief message in big Chinese characters down the middle of the strip of paper. "Show that to any of my officers," he said, "and the men will be released."

"Thank you," said Mme. Storey simply. "Good-day, General. Good-day, gentlemen." And out we swept like a breeze. Li deputed one of his officers to accompany us.

"Hurry!" said Mme. Storey. "I think this trial is likely to be brief!"

We fairly ran through the great hall, down the steps, through the first long court, the tunnel, the second court, the outer gate. The Chinese officer had to stir his stumps to keep up with us. His dignity suffered.

He called a third rickshaw for his own use, and giving the direction to the boys, we were off again at top speed. Our boys, stimulated by the recollection of Mme. Storey's tips, left the officer behind.

"Now, if only they don't lose their way!" prayed Mme. Storey.

Through the everlasting winding lanes, between the invariable mud-plastered walls, I didn't see how they could avoid losing the way.

In a wider street where the boys ran side by side for a moment or two I was able to ask: "What did you say to Li that brought him around so quickly?"

She answered: "I said: 'I am an American detective. I have found the bodies of the murdered men. If you will let these men go, I promise to give you the name of the real murderer within a week.'"

"Suppose Li himself is implicated in it!" I gasped.

"Well, it would work either way," she said enigmatically.

"But you don't know the real murderer!"

"I have a week."

Our boys stopped before a modest gate in the mud wall, having two sentry boxes outside. At sight of the Commander-in-Chief's ideographs the sentries opened the gate, and we saw a wide stretch of bare earth outside, probably the parade ground, with some buildings on the far side.

The sentries respectfully represented that the rickshaws must wait outside. We were about to get down when we saw a small crowd issuing out of the buildings across the field. Mme. Storey threw a whole handful of silver at the sentries and they allowed the boys to run in.

"Quick!" she cried. "Ten dollars to each of you if you make it!"

We flew over the field in a cloud of yellow dust.

I shall not say much about the scene that followed. Four pinioned, downcast figures, one in white, three in blue, were led out like cattle at the end of ropes, and forced to kneel in a row on the ground. One collapsed, and was kicked back into a kneeling posture. I could not see their faces.

Beside them stood the executioner, a huge proud Mongol, with a thin drooping moustache. He was naked to the waist, and stood carelessly feeling the edge of his sword, conscious of the admiration of the onlookers. A nightmare scene from the Middle Ages!

There was only a small crowd and a few policemen. No ceremony. When the executioner had satisfied himself of the keenness of his blade, he gave it a preliminary twirl around his head. Then he saw us coming and paused—from a good-natured desire not to deprive us of the show, I suppose.

Mme. Storey stood up in the rickshaw, waving the General's order. "Stop! Stop! Stop!" she cried.

If you could have seen the four faces of the condemned, straining up as they knelt, with wild hope, yet fearing to hope! A scream of joy broke from the white-clad one.

"Missees! My Missees!"

The lordly executioner glanced at the order, and with a grunt thrust his sword into its scabbard. A servant helped him into his upper garment. He strode away full of injured dignity. A police official took the order, and gave instructions for the prisoners to be released. The crowd dispersed. There was no excitement.

Those four poor creatures cast themselves down at Mme. Storey's feet and kissed the hem of her skirt.

8

It appeared that a Chinese could act promptly when it suited his purpose. On returning to the hotel Mme. Storey found a letter waiting for her. Plain white envelope addressed in an unformed hand like a boy's: "Mrs. Renfrew, Hotel Cathay," and at the side a perpendicular row of Chinese characters. It contained a letter and enclosure. Mme. Storey read the letter with a grin, and handed it over.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I send you what you call safe-conduct for help you do my work. Show this to any officer or soldier of mine and give command. I write this by own hand. Please excuse mistake English.

"Li."

The enclosure was a strip of paper engrossed with a single column of the General's bold Chinese characters. Under the signature it had been stamped with a red seal.

It made my head swim. "But you can't read the Chinese writing," I said. "Perhaps it's only a trick!"

"Perhaps," she said, putting the papers away in her bag.

As we were about to enter the dining-room, she paused. "Sir Bertram's men are lunching without their master," she murmured. "It's too good an opportunity to be passed up. They're almost finished. Let's sit down where we can intercept them."

We had cocktails served at a little table in the lobby. In a few minutes the three men came out; "Dr. Brown" and "Mr. Robinson" the young ones, and "Mr. Jones," who was elderly. Mme. Storey looked at them as they advanced. I cannot say that she smiled, but she allowed a certain allure to appear in her eyes. Mr. Jones, feeling himself too old for that sort of thing perhaps, bowed and passed on; the younger pair stopped by our table as if they had suddenly taken root.

There was some light talk back and forth. I found it easier than I expected to join in. When you are so far away from home everything goes. After a while Dr. Brown asked Mme. Storey the inevitable question: "How do you like Peking?"

"So-so," she said. "It's dull sometimes for two lone women."

He was a brisk young man, and he instantly said: "Why be alone?"

She smiled at him. "We're longing for a glimpse of Peking night life."

"Come out with us," said Dr. Brown.

"Oh, do!" added Robinson, looking at me.

"All right," said Mme. Storey in her large way. "How about to-night?"

The two men exchanged an uneasy look. "So sorry," said Brown, "we can't go to-night."

"I see! Other ladies are before us!"

"No!" he protested. "We know no ladies in Peking. It's some business of our associate's, Mr. Smith. We're going out with him."

Mme. Storey allowed her attention to stray. "Oh, well, some other time," she said casually.

They went on a little crestfallen.

"To-night's the night," she murmured.

"What can we do?" I said helplessly. "Two women!"

"We'll consult Chou."

"Shouldn't you warn Sir Bertram?" I said uneasily.

"Why should I? If he goes into a shady deal, that's his look-out."

After eating our belated lunch we returned to our rooms and rang for Chou. Upon coming into my employer's presence his eyes filled with tears and his knees shook. She shut off fresh demonstrations by saying: "Listen, Chou! I've got a better way for you to show your feelings than by falling on your face. I want you to work for me."

"I work! I work!" he protested, clasping his hands. "You try me!"

"My job is to find the men who killed the young American," she went on. "Do you understand?"

He nodded eagerly. "Detecliff!"

"The rich Englishmen and his friends are going out to-night. I must follow them. Will you help me?"

Chou was startled. "Foreign ladies no go Chinese city at night," he said. (What he really said was "fallen ladies," but he didn't mean it the way it sounded.)

"Then we'll go as Chinese women. They wear veils over their faces."

"No! No!" protested Chou. "Too much danger for my misses!"

Mme. Storey took Li's safe-conduct from her pocket-book and showed it to him. I was satisfied of its genuineness when I saw the effect it produced. Chou was stupefied with astonishment, and more than ever inclined to fall down and worship my employer.

"You get plenty soldiers help you," he said.

"I don't want soldiers," said Mme. Storey. "I must act secretly in order to get my men."

"All right," said Chou. "I help you to-night. And my brothers. And my son."

The arrangements were quickly made. He was to get number two boy to take his place on the hall at six o'clock.

At teatime Stengel came. Mme. Storey had expressed a wish to see a Chinese house, and he was taking us to his place. It made me sore to see how pleased she was with him. He was dressed in Western style this afternoon; perfectly cut suit of Shantung silk; expensive Panama, etc. The white clothes set off his dark good looks effectively. He fired up with admiration upon beholding my employer in her summer finery. Well, it was something to have made a conquest of a man like that.

He brought a partner for me, a foreign-looking lad with mournful dark eyes. I couldn't quite place his nationality. He was introduced as Mr. Fenelon.

We began the journey in a motor-car. They are a useless sort of luxury in Peking, because they can only drive up and down some of the main streets. We went up the famous Hatamen Street, the Broadway of Peking, and around Coal Hill, under the fantastically-shaped temple they call the Dagoba. At the entrance to another district of tortuous lanes, we changed to rickshaws and went on between the interminable mud walls. One never knew what might lie behind those walls.

We stopped before a red-lacquered gate. Stengel pulled a bell and it immediately swung open. Inside were three young girls bowing almost to the ground. I never thought Chinese girls could be so pretty. They were dressed in trousers and short jackets of gaily embroidered silk, the colours harmonising like flowers in a garden. Docile and wistful faces. I wondered what their status might be in a bachelor's household. It was not one house, but a series of little houses surrounding a small paved court, with pink oleanders blooming in tubs. Living-room at one side, dining-room on the other, bedrooms at the back. Glimpses of charming interiors as we passed along. The man had taste.

He led us through a circular opening in the wall that he called his "moon-door" into a tiny garden. It was no bigger than a New York back-yard, but cunningly contrived to give an effect of spaciousness; a little pool ringed with miniature cypresses; an acacia tree, a tree of Heaven; borders of flowers.

We sat under a grape-vine with Stengel's study at our back, a long room with one entire side of glass facing the garden. The furniture was of modernistic Chinese design, very clever. Our host had made it himself. A few exquisite Chinese paintings on the wall and bits of old brocade. The sad little girls brought tea. I nibbled at strange sweetmeats.

Truly, we seemed far from New York.

Later, when Mme. Storey and Stengel strolled away together Fenelon and I discussed our host.

"Stengel enjoys a unique position in Peking," he said. "He is the only individual who is accepted on an equal footing in both European and Chinese circles."

"That ought to put our legation in a favoured position," I said.

"It does."

"How do the Chinese regard him?"

"Quite as one of themselves."

"What are his relations with the present government?"

Fenelon laughed. "Well, after all, he's an American citizen," he said, "and I don't suppose that Li exactly confides in him. But he has to be friendly."

"You appear to be greatly attached to him."

"Oh, yes!" he cried. "Stengel has been a second father to me!"

"What is your nationality?" I asked.

"China is my country," he replied dryly.

Eurasian.

When we were all together, Mme. Storey and Stengel endlessly sparred with each other.

"Why did you decide to make your home in China?" she asked.

"Well, China is the last remaining place on earth where you feel that anything may happen."

"And it does," she murmured.

"There is still scope for a man's initiative here. The steam roller has not flattened us all to a dead level.... China is the country for strong natures—like yours!" he added with his bold glance.

"Women seem to have a pretty thin time," suggested Mme. Storey.

"It's their own fault. If they ask for the iron heel they get it.... But a man tires of meekness and docility in women."

"Naturally," she said. "He must meet with some resistance in order to be able to feel his own power."

"A man has his softer side that he hides from all the world—but one!" he murmured.

"Very successfully," said Mme. Storey.

At nine o'clock that night Mme. Storey and I were being pulled slowly back and forth in front of the hotel, while Chou in a third rickshaw waited at the corner where he could watch both entrances. Chou looked quite the mandarin in

his best blue robe. Mme. Storey and I were wearing the semi-fitted dresses with the high collars and tight slips that modern Chinese women affect. Over them we had thrown embroidered silk coats, and our heads and faces were covered with the chiffon veils that all Peking ladies wear as a protection from the dust.

The rickshaws were drawn by three stalwart young men, Chou's relatives, who had been so near death that day. We called them Fong, Weng and Young Chou. Their eyes were eloquent with gratitude and adoration. It was nice to feel that we were in the hands of men who would die for us. Care sat lightly on them. They showed no traces of the ordeal they had been through. It was a glorious moonlight night, and rickshaws, singly and in pairs, drifted mysteriously past us through the shimmering haze.

In due course Sir Bertram and his three friends appeared at the door of the hotel and hailed rickshaws. Issuing out of the drive, they turned West. We joined Chou and followed. Straight along the main, tree-bordered street where the trolley cars ran. I don't know the name of it. It follows the lofty front wall of the Forbidden City. The main gate, with its famous pair of winged columns, was open, but nobody was passing in or out. Technically, the Forbidden City is public property nowadays.

At the farther corner of the great wall the Overmayer party turned to the right around it. We could follow them among the other rickshaws by their Western style hats.

"They are going into the Forbidden City," murmured Mme. Storey. "Stengel had described it to me. Wheeled vehicles have to enter by a side gate."

We made another turn to the right and were lost between towering walls with only a narrow strip of sky showing overhead. It had the look of an ancient sally port. A turn to the left and we found ourselves in the first court of the ancient city of palaces, a vast paved square flooded with moonlight. Low pavilions crouched at the foot of the surrounding walls. Behind us was a great tower guarding the gate, and in front of us at the top of a flight of steps a huge dream palace sleeping in the moonlight, its fantastic turned-up golden roof faintly gleaming.

"There's a bigger court beyond," remarked Mme. Storey. "These buildings along the wall were the eunuchs' quarters. The elephants were kept in the next court."

The Overmayer party turned out of the central paved way, and jogged obliquely over the cobbles towards the right. They had picked up somebody within the walls, for there were five rickshaws now. They were swallowed up within the shadow of the pavilions under the wall, and Mme. Storey passed word to our boys to slow up. We couldn't follow them out of the main way without betraying ourselves.

Presently we met the five rickshaws returning empty. Mme. Storey murmured to Chou: "Let your boy ask those boys where they left their fares."

The question was asked and answered as we passed—a natural question from one rickshaw boy to another. Chou translated the answer:

"At the private door to the Grand Chamberlain's palace."

We now headed across the cobble stones and under an open pavilion found the little door. The opening had apparently been cut through the great wall itself. There was nobody about. The door was locked and an exclamation of chagrin escaped Mme. Storey.

"All our trouble for nothing!"

Chou said: (I will no longer attempt to reproduce his pidgin English.) "This door guarded by soldiers every night. Imperial treasures kept in Grand Chamberlain's palace."

"Is there any other way in?" asked my employer.

"Main gate. Soldiers watch there too."

"Maybe they've been taken away also," she said. "If not, perhaps I can persuade them to let me in." She touched the bosom of her dress.

Retracing our steps to the entrance of the court, Chou led us to the left through an alley corresponding to the one by which we had entered from the other side. After proceeding a little way, the lofty wall on our left turned an angle, and in the lower wall which abutted on it, we stopped before a closed double gate. "No soldiers," said Chou.

The place was as silent as the grave. The gates were about nine feet high. We alighted from the rickshaws. Mme. Storey signified to Wong to squat down so that she could stand on his shoulders. He rose up and she peeped over the gate.

She bent down to us, whispering: "Nobody in sight. Chou, you come with me. Bella, you come or stay as you please. Let the boys walk up and down with the rickshaws until we come back." She drew herself over the top of the gate and disappeared.

I had to go. I climbed on Feng's shoulders and went over blindly. Chou, aided by two boys, followed me with considerable difficulty. It was easy to climb down inside the gate with the aid of the bars that secured it.

We found ourselves in a smallish flagged court, with a low building at either side, and another gate facing us at the end. We crouched in the shadow of the first gate watching and listening. The buildings showed no light; the moon made a broad path on the flagstones; there was not a sound except the faint murmur of the city around us.

"Funny thing," whispered Chou. "No soldiers. This their barracks."

"Come on!" said Mme. Storey.

We crept around the darker side of the compound. The second gate was in full moonlight, and we paused in the shadows to consult before venturing to approach it.

"I can't get over the gate without the boys to help me," said Chou sadly. "Go back, Missee!"

"No!" she said. "You can put me over the gate. You wait here. Better stay with him, Bella. I must depend on my wits now."

"I'm going with you," I said.

At the gate Mme. Storey mounted on Chou's fat shoulders.... After a look over the top she bent down to whisper: "They're in here, Bella. Better stay!"

"No!" I said, blindly obstinate.

As I went over the gate I was horribly conscious of the striking silhouette I was making against the moon. I expected a shot, I dropped near dead with terror into the shadow on the other side, and crouched there to let the beating of my heart quiet down.

This was a more imposing courtyard. At either side rose a graceful pavilion with up-curved roof, and at the end a small palace. All the buildings were raised above the level of the court, the end one higher than the sides. The middle of the court was sunk, forming a large marble basin designed to hold water, but dry now. The buildings had glass fronts. As we looked up at the palace, the moon was reflected like a great eye in one of the panes.

Mme. Storey pointed to the pavilion on our left. Presently I was able to make out not a light, but the reflection of a light slowly moving inside. It was as unearthly as will-o'-the-wisp.

Mme. Storey whispered: "Better stay where you are," and started away. I followed her.

Those inside the pavilion had entered by the farthest sliding door, which they had left pushed back behind them. In

order to reach it, we let ourselves into the dry basin, and crept to the other end in shadow. Climbing out into the moonlight, Mme. Storey snaked her body up the steps and stuck her head inside the open door.

She disappeared inside. I went after her. Once inside the building I could hear a murmur of voices from the other end. In the actual presence of danger I forgot to be afraid.

The pavilion comprised one great room, arranged like a museum. As our eyes accustomed themselves to the dim light, we made out that all the tables, cabinets and show-cases were arranged in two aisles, running the length of the building. The party, having completed a view of the rear aisle was now rounding into the front to return. They moved very slowly, with long pauses to examine the different objects.

We could not hear what was being said, and crept closer to the speakers through the rear aisle. Very present in my mind was the danger of their getting out first and locking the door behind them. Mme. Storey stopped. We could not see the people in the front aisle, but we had come close enough to hear their murmuring voices. From the shuffling of their feet we judged there must be eight or ten men in the party.

The talk was all about the art on display; quality, workmanship, period. A voice said—Sir Bertram's we guessed: "But isn't this a part of the public museum where people come?"

Another replied, speaking with a curious measured Chinese accent: "No, Excellency. Public museum is in grand audience chamber. Inferior works are shown there. These things have been put out here—for you."

"Won't they be missed?"

"General Li will take measures to prevent that."

"Well, I'm satisfied that the things are as you represented them, and I will pay the price named. But how do you propose to protect me?"

"Protect you, Excellency?"

"As one business man to another, how can I be sure of getting what I pay for?"

The Chinese voice answered smoothly: "I propose that you and I come back here other nights and oversee the packing and the shipping of the articles ourselves."

At this moment somebody in the group must have knocked against one of the exhibits. There was a rattle and exclamation of alarm. Our stretched nerves betrayed us. We started, and some article in the showcase beside us fell over on its glass shelf with a crash.

Instantly all was confusion. Voices cried out in English: "Somebody here! ... Thieves! ... Catch them!" And a crazy jabber of Chinese.

10

Mme. Storey and I rushed for the door, bumping into things regardlessly. There was a series of crashes. The Chinese got there before us. Their flashlights gave them a cruel advantage. They flashed in our eyes and we could see nothing.

I tried to dodge the man facing me, but he flung an arm around me and clapped his other hand over my mouth. In vain I tried to get my teeth in it. I saw another seize Mme. Storey. Men behind kept their light trained on us.

I struggled desperately, but the man's arm was like a steel band around me. We went down on the floor. He tore the scarf from around my neck, and forcing my mouth open, wound it around my head so tightly I thought my lips would split

apart. Something else around my eyes. With a long piece of material he bound my arms to my sides, and I was helpless. My ankles were bound also. I supposed that Mme. Storey had fared no better, because I heard no sound from her.

Apparently the Englishmen had remained at the other end of the pavilion. When all was quiet again the voice with the Chinese accent spoke up coolly beside us. "We have them, Excellency. A pair of thieves. I will carry them out and hand them over. You may proceed with your examination of the exhibits. I return in ten minutes."

A man picked me up and tossing me over his shoulder as carelessly as a sack, carried me out. The Chinese smell of him sickened me. Outside the door he turned to the left, that is, in the direction away from the gate over which we had come. Hearing was the only faculty left to me. I distinguished the footfalls of another man beside us; only one. This man presently spoke to my captor in Chinese. In the authoritative voice I recognised the leader.

I was carried a little distance in the open air, perhaps a couple of hundred yards, making several twists and turns. Then I heard the murmur of a number of Chinese voices, and soft exclamations of surprise as we were brought up. The leader spoke a word that produced instant silence. I was put down on the stones, and to my joy I found myself touching Mme. Storey. She pressed her shoulder warmly against mine. I was suffering cruel pain from the gag.

I heard the knock of a rifle butt on the pavement and guessed that we were in the hands of soldiers. The leader addressed them in curt, cruel phrases that caused all the courage to run out of me, leaving me weak. *What was he telling them to do with us?* It was agonising not to know what had to be faced. The voice ceased, and when the men around us resumed their whispering, I knew he had gone back.

After that I had to lie there bound, gagged, blinded, awaiting for I knew not what. A door opened and closed nearby. From certain regularity in the whispering of the men, I guessed that they were playing a game of some kind.

Then the door opened again, and immediately a bustle arose around us. More men had added themselves to the soldiers guarding us. I was pulled to a sitting position while a foul-smelling basket was inverted over my head, and tied under my arm-pits. I knew that in China prisoners were transported through the streets in this manner. I was then lifted bodily and thrust inside a box with curtains at the sides; a palanquin, such as I had often seen in Peking.

My palanquin was lifted to the shoulders of men, and we started forward. We entered a close-echoing passage and issued into the open air again. A door closed behind us and was locked. I guessed that we had passed through the wall and come out into the first court of the Forbidden City. After that I had no means of knowing where we went.

The bare feet of my carriers shuffled beneath me. Alongside clumped the soldiers in their boots. We must have come out into a street for I heard people around us. I twisted in my bonds and tried to cry out. Nothing but a smothered groan issued from the gag. Even if I was heard nobody would dare interfere with the soldiers. I fought to keep a grip on myself, but all the horrors of Chinese prisons that I had ever read of kept recurring to me, and imagined horrors more dreadful still. Hysteria seized on me.

In this state of collapse I suddenly heard a clear voice ahead of me: "Put me down, men." Mme. Storey. There was a sudden, surprised stoppage. My palanquin was lowered to the ground. I heard her say: "Is there anybody who can speak English?"

A voice replied: "I speak a little English, Lady."

"Who are you?"

"I officer these men."

"Then take this thing off my head and unfasten my arms. I carry an order from General Li. I will show it to you." Evidently he hesitated, for she spoke more sharply: "If I am deceiving you, you can tie me up again."

There was a pause. I heard a certain movement in front; then my employer's voice: "There it is!"

Chinese voices murmured in astonishment. The officer said in uncertainty: "Lady, the Lord Chang Tai Lung, who

send you prison, he carry order with General Li seal."

"Mine is the latest," said Mme. Storey. "It was issued to-day."

Evidently this prevailed, for arms reached inside my palanquin and drew me out. The disgusting basket was removed from my head; my blindfold and gag removed; my limbs unbound. I stood up, stamped my numb feet and rubbed my sore mouth. Mme. Storey was beside me. We were in one of the winding alleys between mud walls. Passers-by stopped to stare. The officer stood bowing before my employer.

"My boys are waiting at the main gate of the Grand Chamberlain's palace," she said haughtily. "Take me there."

They wanted us to get into the palanquins again, but we had had more than enough of that. We walked with our late jailors who had suddenly become our protectors. It was like a fantastic dream.

"How did you get clear of your gag?" I whispered to Mme. Storey.

"Chewed my way through."

11

Great was the astonishment of Fong, Weng and young Chou when we returned on the outside of the gate with a file of soldiers. Young Chou was boosted over the gate to fetch out his father. When we were reunited, Mme. Storey said to Chou, while the soldiers waited: "I must seek advice before I take any further steps. Take me to the house of my friend George Stengel."

The old man's face fell. "Very late, Missee. Very dangerous for ladies to be out."

"We have our escort," she said. "If you don't want to come I must engage other boys."

"I come," he said resignedly.

Mme. Storey produced Stengel's address from her pocket-book. Chou repeated it to the boys, and we set off at a sedate pace, followed by our guard. There were ten men with the officer.

Quarter of an hour later we were ringing the bell outside Stengel's gate. There were still people in the streets. Peking never seems to go to bed. A wicket in the gate was opened, and the face of a man-servant looked out.

"Mrs. Renfrew calling," said my employer.

"Master not home," he informed us.

"I have to see him," she said. "I'll wait." The man looked doubtfully at the size of our escort. However he opened the gate.

Mme. Storey said to Chou: "You and the boys can go now. I may have to wait some time for Mr. Stengel. He'll take me home."

Chou, with obvious reluctance, gave the order, and they departed.

"Soldiers stay outside," said Stengel's servant.

"Oh, let them come in," said Mme. Storey cajolingly. "They are thirsty, poor fellows. Give them tea. Mr. Stengel would wish it. These men are my escort, furnished by General Li."

The great name had its effect. The soldiers were admitted and the gate closed and barred. We all went into the dining-room on the right of the court, and presently tea was served by the man-servant. We had seen the heads of the three little girls peeping through a window at the back of the court. Mme. Storey disappeared.

While the soldiers were drinking, the bell rang again, and the servant went out to open the gate. It was Stengel and Fenelon. The former was in Chinese costume. I recognised the magnificent brocade robe with the jade buttons that he had worn on the occasions of our first meeting. I saw Mme. Storey advancing to greet him, and I went out. Behind Stengel, the servant was barring the gate.

At the sight of Mme. Storey Stengel turned rigid. "You! Here!" he murmured.

Looking past me obliquely into the dining-room, he saw the soldiers. Quick as thought he turned and sprang for the gate. Fenelon looked on, aghast and helpless.

"Seize that man!" cried Mme. Storey.

The soldiers ran out. Stengel was seized by the legs as he was going over the top of the gate, dragged back. Not until he struck the ground did the soldiers realise whom they had. They released him as if he had been red-hot, and shrank back. Stengel cursed them savagely in Chinese. Fenelon was paralysed.

Mme. Storey produced the paper with the red seal and exhibited it. "Arrest him!" she cried. "It is by General Li's order!"

Stengel laughed loudly. "I too, carry General Li's order!" he said in English. "These men know me." He added something in Chinese with a confident air.

"Very well," said Mme. Storey coolly. "General Li shall choose between us. Let one of the soldiers be sent for him, and we'll wait until he comes."

"Li doesn't obey the orders of women!" said Stengel contemptuously.

"I will write a chit that will bring him," she answered grimly.

Stengel's eyes bolted. He glanced longingly at the top of the gate. The soldiers observed it.

"He is afraid to face Li!" cried Mme. Storey.

The worried Chinese officer was now convinced. He addressed Stengel in his own tongue. His manner was respectful, but there was firmness in it. It was clear that he was telling Stengel that he must await the decision of the commander-in-chief.

With a shrug Stengel left the gate and lighted a cigarette. At a desk in the living-room Mme. Storey wrote her letter to General Li. It was handed to two soldiers who were ordered to run all the way to Headquarters.

Then we settled ourselves to wait. The suspense was nerve-racking. The Chinese officer had decided to sink or swim with Mme. Storey. He ordered Stengel into the dining-room and posted men at the door and the windows. Stengel paced up and down inside like a wolf behind bars. Fenelon sat crushed on one of the oleander tubs, pressing his head between his hands. My employer coolly went on with her search of the place.

Only once did we hear from Stengel. Catching sight of Mme. Storey, he came to the window. "What's your real name, woman?" he demanded.

"Rosika Storey, if that means anything to you," she answered.

For a moment he showed his teeth at her in a hell of rage and chagrin—then abruptly turned his back.

From over the wall we could still hear the sounds of the city. The street vendors were uttering their strange cries;

ringing their bells, beating their little drums.

In point of time we did not have to wait long. A mighty roar approaching through the night resolved itself into the exhausts of a dozen motorcycles, armed with shrieking sirens. They came to a stop in front with a noise like the end of all things. The gate was opened and Li strode in, attended by several officers and a squad of men.

The Commander was wearing Chinese costume which lent dignity to his incredible corpulence. He could carry it. His huge smooth face exhibited the same inhuman impassivity. Only the pig eyes sparkled. Wherever he moved a soldier stood on each side of him with a drawn pistol.

"So, Mrs. Renfrew," he said with a casual bow. "You write me you got murderer. Where is he?"

She pointed into the dining-room.

"Ah, Stengel," he said, without surprise or any other feeling. "Come out."

Stengel approached. He had drawn a mask over his face which made him look wholly Chinese. He kept his head up.

Mme. Storey said: "To-night in the palace of the Grand Chamberlain I heard him consummating the sale of the Imperial art treasures to Sir Bertram Overmayer, the Englishman. He represented to Sir Bertram that he was acting under your orders."

"He lie," said Li blandly. "He betray American Minister to me past time. Now betray me to the world. Treachery is his profession."

Stengel said nothing.

"What about the murders?" asked Li. "What reason Stengel kill young Americans?"

"Last year," said Mme Storey, "he swindled Barrett Forbes' father out of a million dollars through a pretended sale of the Imperial art treasures. The young man came to China seeking justice. He stood in Stengel's way."

"Where were the bodies hidden?"

"In two stone pots of earth alongside the grand stairway in the Hotel Cathay."

"What proof you got Stengel is the murderer?"

Mme. Storey turned into the living-room to pick up two objects that she had laid there. "On the night of the murders a chair was smashed in one of the hotel rooms," she said. "Under the rug I found a sliver of wood that had been knocked from it." She exhibited the fish-shaped piece on her palm.

"The chair had been carried away," she went on. "Later it was returned to the room, very skilfully mended. I learned that Stengel's hobby was cabinet-making. To-night I found amongst the rubbish in his workshop the broken piece of the chair that had been replaced. Here it is." She showed a side piece of the waxed yellow wood with a fresh scar in it. "Observe General, how this sliver of wood exactly fits the scar."

Li grunted. It was the greatest sign of emotion we ever saw him betray. "It is sufficient," he said.

After consulting with his aide-de-camp, Li started to address Mme. Storey, but his English broke down. He issued instructions to his officer. Stengel heard and his face turned ghastly. The aide translated:

"General Li wish me to say that under China's treaties with the Powers he is bound to hand over your citizens to their own government for trial. He will therefore have the pleasure of sending Stengel under guard to the United States Legation to-morrow."

Stengel, hearing himself abandoned to his fate, broke into a passionate flood of protests and supplications in

Chinese. I suspect that some dirty Chinese linen was aired in public at that moment, for the Chinese officers looked uncomfortable. Li himself, perfectly indifferent, turned his shoulder and issued a curt command.

Two soldiers seized Stengel and led him through the gate. When he saw that his plea was useless he bit it off short and went out with his head up. Fenelon followed him.

General Li attempted another address to Mme. Storey, but again his English was insufficient. The aide translated.

"General Li wish me to say that he will give himself the pleasure of calling on you officially at your hotel tomorrow afternoon to thank you in the name of his government for your great service to North China."

My employer bowed.

Meanwhile, Li was peering through the living-room windows. "Stengel got much pretty things," he remarked. He issued instructions to his aide.

The latter said: "General Li say if you like anything here, take it. Take all if you want."

"What!" exclaimed Mme. Storey.

The officer said coolly: "It is our custom to confiscate the goods of a malefactor."

Mme. Storey bowed again to express her appreciation, but I need hardly say that no pieces from Stengel's collection were ever added to hers.

After more compliments and bows, the General and his suite departed. Two motor-cycles with sidecars were left for us, and we roared and shrieked our way back to the hotel. When we gained the quiet of our own rooms I was still dazed.

"Why didn't you give me some warning of what was going to happen?" I asked reproachfully.

"You have such an expressive face, my dear!" said Mme. Storey. "And Chinese eyes are sharp!"

"When did you first begin to suspect Stengel?" I asked.

"Almost from the beginning. He and old Hodgdon played up to each other too beautifully."

"Played up to each other? They were unfriendly!"

She smiled. "Did you take notes of what they said about each other?"

"Yes."

"Read them over!"

"How did you recognise Stengel in the pavilion? His voice was perfectly disguised."

"It was Stengel who carried me out," she said. "My hand came into contact with one of the jade buttons of his robe. The carving of those dragons was unique."

"After all, Li is not such a bad sort," I remarked.

She smiled at me peculiarly.

"Good God!" I stammered. "Do you mean to say that Li ... that all the time it was Li who..."

She shrugged. "All I can say for certain is that it appears to be unwise for American crooks to try conclusions with

the Chinese sort."

THE END

THE AUTHOR

HULBERT FOOTNER

Hulbert Footner, whose inside knowledge of the underworld of New York and Chicago makes his crime stories ring so true, has had an amazingly adventurous career. He was obliged to leave school at fourteen to earn his own living as an office boy and clerk—such a bare living that when he wanted new shoes, he had to sell his stamp collection. But from his room he could see the stage door of the old Grand Opera House, and becoming stage struck, he wrote a play which was actually accepted, while he was given a small part himself. But he was, the critics insisted, a rotten actor, so there was nothing for it but a return to the hated commercial life.

A year or two later the next break came when a friend in Calgary, Alberta, representing Footner as a star reporter from the *New York Herald*, got him a job on the *Morning Albertan*. Footner played up well and spent a year expanding two-line telegram dispatches (all the paper could afford) into front-page stories.

Then, adventure calling, he embarked on a twelve-hundred mile trip, alone, into the almost unknown Northern Regions of the province. Returning to New York, he obtained a well-paid job in a mysterious investment house which proved to be crooked. After a brief period of penury some stories were accepted by the *Century Magazine*, and so Footner's career as an author began. He now lives in Maryland in Charlesgift, one of the oldest houses in America, built in 1650.

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NOTE

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