THE MAGNIFICENT HOAX

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By

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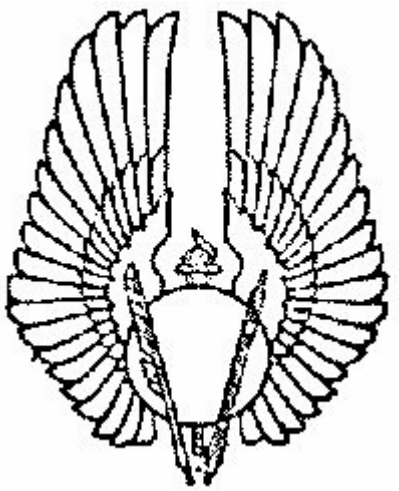

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CHAPTER I

A human being, the shrunken shadow of a man he seemed, was toiling slowly and painfully up the stone steps of the gaunt tenement house. With his left hand he grasped the iron balustrade. His head remained immovably lowered. His footsteps grew wearier and wearier. On the last landing but one he paused for breath. He leaned for a moment or two against the rail. His eyes, sad eyes they were, set in hollow depths, looked wistfully out of the dust-encrusted window, over the tops of the houses, to the curving line of the river with its tangled cluster of masts, a semi-derelict steamer or two moored against the wharves. He moved across to the narrow cracked slit of clouded glass. His fingers failed to dislodge it, to make the slightest effect upon its fastening. It seemed as though it had remained closed since the day it was built. He looked out for a few minutes like a prisoner from his cell, then he returned to his task. Wearily he crawled up to the landing and turned to face the last flight of stairs. After the third step he halted, trembling. It was the one place he dreaded. There was a gap in the balustrade for at least three yards. From where he was, he clutched the end of the iron rail and looked fearfully downwards. All that he could see was a terrifying pool of blackness.

"What a hell of a place," he muttered to himself.

He stood there shivering. It seemed impossible, with his insignificant stock of courage, that he should ever pass that unprotected space. Presently he decided that he must move over to the wall side and lean against that for the remainder of the

journey. For a moment or two, however, that glance below seemed to have completely unnerved him. His knees were shaking. There seemed to be a vacuum at the back of his head.

From the landing below there was a sudden stream of light. A door had been opened. A gaudily dressed woman stepped out and paused for a moment, swinging a key upon her finger. She caught a glimpse of the shrinking figure above.

“Hello!” she exclaimed. “Who’s that?”

“I’m Loman,” he answered. “Anthony Loman—the top-floor lodger here. I’m just home from abroad and the climb is almost too much for me. You look good-natured,” he went on wistfully. “I wonder whether you would mind—er—leaving your door open whilst I tackle these last few steps?”

She laughed in a kind way.

“I believe you’re afraid of that gap in the balustrade,” she said.

“I am,” he confessed with a groan. “My nerve isn’t good.”

“Stay where you are,” she directed, “and I’ll come and help you up.”

“You’re very kind,” he murmured.

She swung up to his side, the powder puff which she had been using still in her hand. Her movements were unusual in their grace, and there was a certain elegance about her entirely at variance with her showy clothes and clumsy use of cosmetics.

She seemed to envelop him with a wave of cheap perfume as she reached his side and passed her strong arm through his.

“Now then,” she said encouragingly, “you have nothing to fear. I’ll be your balustrade. You can lean on me as much as you like. One step—two—up we go. Nothing when you’ve got an arm to help you, is it? You’re the only one on this landing, aren’t you?”

“I am all alone up here,” he answered. “My room is just an attic.”

She looked around at the bare walls, at the heavy door of the fire escape which stood half open. The stark nakedness of the place oppressed her. She shivered as she tightened her grip upon his arm.

“Aren’t you lonely up here?” she asked.

“I want to be,” he assured her.

She shook her head.

“This house is full of bad characters, you know,” she warned him. “I should hate to be up here all alone. There are ten other rooms on my landing. It seems to me that the occupants must spend at least half their time in prison, but anyhow when they’re about they are human beings. I should hate it up here—without a soul near. How the wind whistles through that fire escape door, too!”

“I’m not afraid,” he told her weakly. “I’m only glad to get back. I’ve been in danger. I have been abroad and in hospital but I still have work to do.”

“What sort of work?” she enquired curiously.

“Not work that one talks about. One has to keep one’s mouth closed all the time.”

“Well, is there anything else I can do for you?” she asked. “I’ll be getting along if there isn’t. This place gives me the shivers.”

He made no answer. He had suddenly become almost a dead weight upon her supporting arm. There was an eager, half-terrified light in his deep-set eyes. His trembling finger was pointing towards the door of his room a few feet away.

“What’s that?” he gasped. “For God’s sake tell me. What is it?”

The girl’s eyes followed the direction of his shaking forefinger. She passed her other arm around him. It was obvious that he was on the point of collapse.

“Nothing to be afraid of,” she assured him encouragingly. “It’s just a telegram pinned onto your door.”

“A telegram!” he gasped.

“Yes. Don’t you understand?” she explained. “The telegraph boy has evidently been here, found no one at home and pinned it to the door. Better than pushing it underneath, anyway. Don’t tell me you’re afraid of a telegram!”

The man made no movement. She was conscious, however, that he was making a great struggle.

“Here—give me your key,” she went on. “I’ll open the door for you. I can’t stand about here all night. Give me your key, then I’ll open the door for you and you can go inside and read your telegram. Seems to me you’ve come out of hospital a bit before your time.”

He moved unsteadily forward, still relying chiefly upon her support. She unlocked the door and pushed it back. His head remained fixed all the time. His eyes were rivetted upon the telegram attached to the door by a bent pin. His own name in crude white paint stared at him: L-O-M-A-N.

“Let’s see if we can get any light,” she suggested. “I expect your metre has run out.”

She tried the switch. A feeble light shone out from the single burner. She looked around. It was an attic room with a small iron bedstead, a single chair, a plain deal chest of drawers. There was no pretence at carpet or furnishings of any sort.

“Why don’t you take down your telegram?” she asked. “Shall I do it for you? Here you are.”

She drew out the pin, threw it away and passed him the envelope. A feminine curiosity stirred for a moment in her.

“Want me to read it for you?”

His fingers gripped the envelope. He released her arm. His strength seemed to be returning.

“No,” he declined, with unexpected firmness. “Thank you very much, Miss—Judy, isn’t it?”

“That’s the only name I have hereabouts,” she admitted with a little laugh. “It’s good enough. My, you seem bare here,” she added, looking round. “Haven’t you got anything to eat, or a teapot or anything?”

He moistened his dry lips.

“I’m all right,” he assured her. “I thank you very much for your help, Miss Judy.”

He held the door open. He now seemed feverishly anxious for her to go. She watched the hand which gripped the telegram. It was still shaking violently.

“Are you quite sure that you’re fit to be left alone?” she asked bluntly.

“I must be left alone,” he insisted. “I must read this—message.”

“Well, if it’s good news I shall expect you to come and tell me about it,” she declared, as she held the handle of the door in her fingers. “Eighty-seven, just below. Judy’s the only name on the door—Judy of Bunter’s Buildings. That’s a nice name and address, isn’t it? This is your last chance, Mr. Loman. I haven’t much to give away, but I should like to do something for you. What about a loaf of bread and some margarine? There’s a cup of tea left in my pot, too—only wants warming up.”

“Thank you,” he said wearily, “I need nothing. I must read this message. Afterwards I may need to go out again. I do not wish to seem discourteous,” he added, with what seemed to be a queer reversion to a former forgotten manner of speech, “but I wish you to go. I am pursued by enemies. Now that I have

this message, for my safety's sake I must go further and hide. The Society for which I work will provide me with food and shelter. I have plenty of friends when I dare to communicate with them."

She indulged in a transient grimace as she turned away. She had intended to slam the door as a slight protest against his ingratitude. She caught a glimpse of him, however, at the last moment—a wan, shadowy figure brought almost to the threshold of death by weakness and anxiety—and she changed her mind. She slipped away noiselessly. Once or twice on her way down the stone steps she paused to listen. There came no sound from the room above.

For a young woman who professed to have been late for several of her engagements, Judy of Bunter's Buildings seemed in a curiously undecided frame of mind after she had regained the privacy of her apartment. The first thing she did was to prop the door a few inches open by means of some books and then wheel up a heavy chair to keep it in position. Afterwards she turned out her light and stood for a long time close to that slightly opened space. The minutes passed. The silence which reigned in the upper storeys, at any rate, of the bleak, squalid building, was unbroken. She slipped off her shoes and stood in front of the window. The street below was thronged with people, mostly of the lower nautical type, dwarfed out of all recognition. Lights were flaming from the scattered stalls. Through the window, which she had cautiously opened a few inches, she heard the strains of raucous music from a public house and the shouts of the street vendors around the corner. She opened it still farther and leaned out so far, grasping the side of

the sash for security, that she could see the entrance to the building below. All manner of people passed it. No one entered. She drew away for a time wearily. This period of watching was full of sickening doubts. She had always hated inaction. She had one last look out of the window, glancing across at the river with its traffic of barges, motor craft, and wheezy old steamers being drawn by tugs to what, it seemed, must be their last home. She glanced down at Bunter's Wharf, lying up alongside which was the only decent-looking steamer in sight—a queerly shaped, apparently top-heavy cargo boat. Then she turned back into the room and, with her hands behind her back, commenced a stealthy regular promenade of its narrow limits.

Of all sounds in this gathering darkness that was the one which she had dreaded most. She stood by the door, breathlessly silent, and listened. Someone was mounting the stairs from below, mounting not with the tired uncertainty of a sick man but with a long, bounding stride, shuffling but full of eagerness to arrive at his destination. To her excited apprehensions there was menace in these rapidly approaching footsteps. They had reached the last flight. She crept a little nearer to the crack in the door. Her long delicate fingers trembled as she drew it an inch or two more open. The ascending figure shaped itself through the darkness. A human being—indeterminate of age and physique in his long soiled mackintosh and the hat pulled over his eyes. . . . He was on the landing now. She stood still and let him pass. What she could see of his face was horrible. Deep-set, evil eyes. The complexion of a vampire. The weak slobbery mouth of an idiot. She closed her eyes and drew back, shrinking, into the room.

She remained in the place after the ascending figure had passed, numb for several moments. Then she called out after him. There was no reply. She leaned over the threshold. He was crossing the landing above now, walking swiftly towards Loman's door. She called out once more, but even to herself her voice sounded feeble. The knowledge was suddenly swept in upon her that effort of any sort was useless. Nothing could stop what was to happen. She picked up her small hat and thrust a pin savagely through it. Once more she disfigured her face with dabs of the cheap cosmetics, then she threw everything into her bag and opened the door with trembling fingers. There was no sound to be heard. Was it all over, she wondered? She herself had need of the balustrade as she descended that flight of stairs. Halfway down she stopped as though paralysed. The sound was so faint that it barely reached her ears, but it had its own peculiar horror. It was the cry of a man terrified unto death —the cry of death itself. She turned and ran down the flights of stone steps one after the other into the misty gloom of the night.

CHAPTER II

The saloon bar of the Green Man, the nearest place of refreshment to Bunter's Wharf, was having one of its gala evenings. The mate of the *Henrietta Anne*, trading chiefly between Amsterdam and the port of London, had arrived home earlier in the day to find his full master's certificate awaiting him, and he was celebrating this auspicious epoch of his life in true riverside fashion. There were half a dozen men from his own ship: Joe Havers, the Customs House officer, Tom Bowles, the motor-boat agent, and a few more habitués of the place crowded together. There was a jar of tobacco at anyone's disposal and drinks were free. Captain Jan Henderson—his mother had been a Dutchwoman—was a powerful-looking, burly fellow and, though his face was flushed and his speech somewhat thick, he was still coherent enough.

"Come on, lads, and help yourselves," he shouted. "I'm half a Dutchman but this is no Dutch treat! Keep your money in your pockets. The captain pays! That's the motto to-day."

"The captain pays!" they all echoed. "Here's your health, sir."

"And may you bring the *Henrietta Anne* up to the wharf many a time as slick as you brought her yesterday afternoon," a youngster in the uniform of a petty officer shouted. "A real treat it was—not an inch to spare."

The captain looked around.

“Judy, my lass,” he called out. “One more of those dances and a trifle more leg and less skirt about it! Give the young lady another glass of port,” he roared out to the barman. “Have a look at the tumblers here, Fred.”

Judy, who had removed her hat and revealed a really magnificent head of silky chestnut-coloured hair only a trifle spoilt by rough usage, turned on the gramophone, picked up her skirts and began to dance to the music. It was a popular music hall song of years ago and they all joined in the chorus. Round and round she swung and a murmur of mild applause became almost a furore. Her wickedly shaded eyes sparkled. A streak of natural colour triumphed over the clumsy patches of rouge. The barman, in response to a wink from the captain, pushed on the switch of the gramophone and increased the pace. The girl seemed to become a whirl of gaudy and voluminous, but in their way provocative, underclothes. She sprang onto a chair and the applause grew louder. There was something almost Rubens-like in the bacchanalian swing of her arms, the twistings of her body, the coarse but apparently honest joy in her own abandon. The small audience roared out the chorus at the tops of their voices. The glasses shook upon the mirrored shelves. . . . And then quite suddenly there was a paralysing chaos, a strangled, unnatural silence. All eyes were turned towards the swing door which had been gently pushed open. They remained fixed in consternation upon the neatly dressed, broad-shouldered man who had suddenly entered. He looked around quickly and his eyes seemed to take in everyone. There was nothing in his appearance, however, to justify the commotion which his arrival had excited.

“Well, well, well,” he exclaimed. “Quite a pleasant little

evening you're having, I see. Some dance, that, Judy, eh? If you had lifted your skirts a few inches higher I should have had to hold my hat over my face. Duty, you know! Hard thing, duty, and very disagreeable at times. No need to look so scared, gentlemen—nor you, Fred," he went on, nodding genially to the barman. "You're well within time and everyone seems to be thoroughly good-humoured, I'm glad to see. I'm not on the rampage, I can assure you. So long as there's no brawling I like to see you all having a glass or two. What's this little celebration for?"

They all began to tell him, but the captain roared them down.

"Master's certificate, sir, waiting for me when I got into port—and God knows I've earned it! The old pals are having a drink with me. Honour us by taking just one, Sergeant."

"I'm hanged if I won't," was the pleasant reply. "I'm not much of a seaman myself, but they tell me there's no one knows the river like you, Captain, and no one can bring a steamer of the tonnage of the *Henrietta Anne* into dock as you do. Mine's whisky, barman, out of the special bottle."

"I'll see to that, sir," Sam Martin, the proprietor of the public house, declared. "You leave it to me."

He himself brought over a tumbler filled from a mysterious bottle. The newcomer divided it into two and filled his own up with soda water.

"Well, here's the best to all of you," he said. "Yes, I'll smoke a cigar, too, since you're so kind, Captain. I'm sorry to break into a party like this but you can start again as soon as I've had a

word or two with the young lady there. Get clear away before closing time and all keep as good-humoured as you are now and there won't be any trouble looking for you round the corner."

There was a hearty murmur of good-healths and approval. Sergeant Sanders was a hard man at times, but on the whole he was a popular officer. Judy, who had clambered down from the chair, was busy with her coiffure. She swung round. There was nothing but indifference in her face.

"What do you want with me, Sergeant?" she asked.

"Nothing that will do you any harm, my dear," was the pleasant reply. "Just a question or two. We have to get inquisitive now and then, you know. What about asking Mr. Martin here to let us step into his room for a moment, then we shan't interfere with the party. You will be able to come back and finish your little song and dance. I shan't say that I won't stop and see it—so long as you all promise not to tell the Missus!"

Preceded by the landlord, he led the girl away to the small room at the back of the saloon bar. The captain ordered fresh drinks all round. Nevertheless there was restraint. They wanted Judy back again. They wanted to know what the sergeant had to say to her, and why the door leading into the bar parlour was fast closed.

"What is it you want, Sergeant?" the girl asked, flinging herself into a horsehair easy chair and crossing her legs. "I've done nothing wrong that I know of."

"I'm pretty sure of that, my dear," the sergeant assured her

soothingly. “Somehow I don’t think you’re the sort that are out for the ordinary peccadilloes.”

She looked at him with expressionless face. The rouge had cracked a little on her cheeks and the darkening around her eyes made them seem of an abnormal size.

“I see they didn’t make you a detective for nothing,” she observed. “Well, come on, what is it?”

“I was called to Bunter’s Buildings this evening,” he began. “Been a bit of a tragedy there. Someone—we can’t tell whether it was a lodger, or a visitor, or a stranger—seems to have fallen off the outside fire escape from the top floor. Fell clean down into Bunter’s Alley. We won’t talk about that too much. You were up on the top floor this evening, weren’t you?”

“I was,” Judy assented. “Don’t tell me that it was the poor gentleman I helped into his room?”

The sergeant sighed.

“There’s no one in this world will ever be able to tell who it was unless the searchers are able to do something about his clothes, or they find something amongst his belongings,” he announced gravely. “Twelve storeys onto a cobbled pavement is a big fall, and what they found in the Alley is best not thought of. We just want to know why you were up there and whom you saw?”

“That’s easy enough,” Judy declared. “I came out of my room about the usual time—something like seven o’clock—and I saw that poor loony who has a room in the attic—only he’s nearly

always away—leaning against the balustrade. He's been ill, they say, away in hospital somewhere. Anyway he was as nervous as a kitten. He didn't want to pass that place where the rail's broken. I went and helped him, took his arm and got him into his room. He wasn't fit to be left, but what could one do? I offered to get him some tea or even something to eat, but he almost pushed me out."

"Well, you played the good Samaritan so far as you could," the sergeant remarked. "There was no one else in the room, I suppose?"

"There was no one there and no place for anyone to hide," she assured him. "I turned on the light myself. It was not very good but it was enough for me to see that."

"Just so," the sergeant nodded. "I wonder—you're a pretty observant young lady, Miss Judy—I wonder if, looking round, you happened to notice anything that might have been there? A telegram or letter or anything of that sort?"

"Why, of course I did," she acknowledged. "When we got up there was a telegram pinned onto his door. I left him with it in his hand."

"He didn't open it whilst you were there, then?"

"He did not," she replied. "To tell you the truth—it's only natural, I imagine—I was a trifle curious. He didn't seem to me to be the sort of person to have telegrams. I hoped he would open it whilst I was in the room, but he didn't. He just waited for me to go, getting more and more nervous. I could see that there was no chance, so I came away."

The sergeant stroked his stubbly moustache.

“That seems all right,” he said. “You helped him up to his room like a kindly young lady would. He found a telegram there which he wouldn’t open until you left him. When you went away it was there in his hand.”

“That is the precise truth,” Judy agreed. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

“The fire escape door, now,” the sergeant continued, nodding his assent. “You didn’t happen to notice whether it was bolted or locked or anything of that sort?”

She threw away the match with which she had lit her cigarette and inhaled deeply for a moment.

“It never is,” she replied, waving the smoke away. “It wouldn’t be much good to anyone in a crisis if one had to fumble about with keys or a bolt. It just opens naturally with a handle and you can step out if you want to. I’ve not a very good head myself, but when I took my room the caretaker opened it and made me see where the iron steps began.”

“Rather a dangerous arrangement,” the police officer reflected. “Supposing that poor fellow, for instance, who you say was so ill, had any suicidal intentions, he had only to open the door and walk out.”

“That’s quite true,” she agreed with a shudder. “It isn’t the way I should choose, myself, though.”

The sergeant sighed.

“Well, it all seems clear enough,” he concluded, rising slowly to his feet. “I suppose the poor devil was expecting something from that telegram, he was disappointed and he just did what dozens of these poor down-and-outs do in this part of the world. I should like to have seen the telegram, though.”

“Have your men looked for it?” Judy asked.

“Well, in a sense they have,” the other admitted. “It certainly wasn’t in the room—or any traces of it. It’s very hard to say what was in his pockets when he was picked up. They may be able to judge better later on. On the other hand he may have torn it up and thrown the pieces away just as he took the leap. What kind of age did he seem to you, Judy?”

“I don’t think he could have been old—not even middle-aged,” she reflected, “but he was wasted as though with fever. He was shaking all over just as though he had D.T. It’s my belief he’d been in hospital somewhere and they’d let him out too soon.”

The sergeant moved towards the door.

“Well, I’m sorry to have broken in upon your evening, Judy. You can get back to it now as soon as you like. I’m going to slip out the other way. Same address if we want you for the inquest, I suppose?”

“Same address, and thank you,” she replied. “I did my best for that poor fellow,” she added a little wistfully. “I’m sorry.”

“Maybe he’s better off,” Sanders reflected.

CHAPTER III

The day after the indeterminate inquest upon the body of the unknown man found in Bunter's Alley, Sergeant Sanders presented himself at the tenement house, mounted to the top floor but one, and knocked at Judy's door. It was not until after his second effort that it was grudgingly opened and Judy, clad in a flaming negligee but looking exceedingly weary and dishevelled, gazed out upon her visitor. As soon as she recognised him she made a feeble effort to shut him out, a gesture which he gently but firmly resisted.

"Judy, my dear," he said soothingly, "don't be afraid of an old friend. We treated you all right at the inquest, didn't we? I only want a word or two with you. You're alone, I see."

She opened the door a little wider.

"Yes, I'm alone," she admitted, "and likely to be until I get over that horrible afternoon in your stuffy Court House. I can't sleep at nights for thinking of it."

"I'm not blaming you," he declared. "It was a sight to turn up a strong man. However, they did their best. Our old coroner, he would have waited until you came to from your faint and had you in again. Dr. Grayson, he's a gentleman, though."

The sergeant was inside the room by now, with its cheap bazaar-like ornamentations, its shabby pink bows and fans, its tawdry bed hangings. He looked doubtfully at the chairs

and subsided onto the edge of the bed.

“What is it you want?” she asked.

He stroked his chin.

“Well, Judy,” he said, “this matter of identification still presents complications. The poor chap was unrecognisable all right, but what was left of his clothes seemed somehow too good for your friend, Mr. Loman, and besides that, these few little trinkets don’t look as though they belonged to a tenant of Bunker’s Buildings.”

He displayed a battered gold cigarette case, the crushed fragments of a *briquet*, a stained pocket-book—the material of which, however, was of fine morocco.

“Ever seen any of these before?” he asked, looking at her keenly.

She shook her head.

“Never,” she declared. “They might very well have been Mr. Loman’s, though. He was quite well dressed and looked as though he belonged to the West End the first day he came here.”

“That’s quite in accordance with our own information,” the sergeant agreed. “The coroner had the same idea when he adjourned the inquest. There’ll never be a definite verdict, so far as I can see. ‘Some person unknown.’ That’s how they’ll bury him and that’s what he is. Opens up an interesting question, though.”

“What question?” she demanded.

“The question of who Mr. Loman really was.”

She sat down on the bed by his side. She was nervously twisting and untwisting her hands.

“He was a queer chap anyway,” she admitted. “He was always fond of these sudden disappearances, although he had never been away so long as this time. As to throwing himself off that fire escape, I should never have dreamed that he would have the courage to do such a thing.”

“Someone else,” the visitor reflected, “might have thrown him off.”

He was sitting side by side with Judy and he could almost feel the little shivers that were going through her body. He dived into his pocket and produced a flask.

“Got two glasses and any water fit to drink?” he enquired.

She pointed to a shelf. He found two tumblers of coarse glass, washed them out with tap water and rescued a syphon from the floor.

“Quite a handy man at a picnic, aren’t you?” she observed, with an attempt at lightness. “There are some biscuits in that cupboard.”

He found them and placed the glass of whisky-and-soda in her hand.

“Judy,” he said, “there’s no one going to worry you about this job but you must buck up and help us so far as you can.”

“How can I help you?” she asked.

“Perhaps not at all,” the sergeant admitted soothingly. “However, we’ll see later on. The question we’re up against now is: Are those remains really the remains of Mr. Loman? If so, did he have a visitor that night, and where’s the telegram?”

She remained silent with her eyes fixed upon the opposite wall.

“Think hard,” he begged. “You’re sure you didn’t see a stranger about the place that evening?”

“Not a sign of one,” she declared.

“Or did you see anything more of the telegram?”

“I saw it when I unpinned it from the door,” she replied, “and that’s all. Mr. Loman fairly snatched it away from me. I never saw him open it, even. Wherever he is—in hell or wandering about the streets—he took it with him.”

Her visitor sighed heavily.

“I’m disappointed, Judy,” he confessed, taking a sip from his tumbler. “I thought he might have put his head in at the door to say good-bye to you and just beg you not to mention that he was going away. You see, it wouldn’t have seemed important to you then, so you would have promised all right, naturally. Now it’s become very important indeed.”

“Why should he say good-bye to me even if he were doing a flit?” she demanded. “He wasn’t one of my friends. He’s never been in this room in his life. He was a poor skeleton of a fellow that I just took pity on that last day and helped up to his room. He’s never been anything to me, Mr. Sanders. Don’t you get any wrong ideas in your head.”

“I’m not harbouring any, of my own good will,” he assured her, “but I don’t see how it happens, Judy, that you—a strong young woman—have come to this broken-down state just because they asked you to identify some remains that oughtn’t to have been exhibited. Days ago it was, and here you are shivering and all, so to speak, on edge.”

“Perhaps I’ve been drinking too much,” she confessed doggedly. “We were all pretty gay, you know, at the Green Man that night. We went on board the boat after we left the pub—the whole crowd of us.”

He stroked his stubbly moustache.

“You sometimes make me a bit thoughtful, young lady,” he admitted. “You seem to go the whole hog with these fellows and yet every now and then there seems something about you entirely different.”

Judy was recovering herself.

“You do take notice, don’t you?” she remarked with a chuckle.

“That’s my job,” he answered. “You’ve never given us any trouble, Judy, and I’m not looking to bring any on you, but there’s a mystery about that man Loman, a mystery about the

telegram, a mystery about the remains that were found smashed to pulp down in the Alley. It's our business to get at the bottom of these things."

"Well, you generally find out what you want to."

The sergeant rose to his feet. He shook the biscuit crumbs from his overcoat and replaced the flask in his pocket.

"We find out grains of truth now and then," he acknowledged, "but we make some awful boggles sometimes. Of course, the Chief says my great fault is that I'm too credulous."

"It doesn't seem to me that you're that way."

"This case, for instance," he went on. "I've got to take the whole of it on trust."

"What do you mean?"

Sergeant Sanders passed his coat sleeve over his black Homburg hat. Judy slipped off the bed and stood by his side.

"Well," he pointed out, "I have to believe you when you tell me that there was never anything between you and Loman and that he didn't show you the contents of the telegram. I have to believe you when you tell me that you didn't see him except for those few minutes when you helped him upstairs and you didn't know that he was thinking of committing suicide, and your evidence in Court that you heard no sounds of a struggle on the top floor. . . . With all that believing, you see, I don't get anywhere. That's what being too credulous means. I have to try and find another loose end."

She stretched herself lazily. There was something of the old colour in her cheeks and light in her eyes.

"Well," she acknowledged, "that whisky has done me a great deal of good. I guess I shall go down and visit my friends at the Green Man as soon as it's opening time. Shall I be seeing you there?"

He shook his head.

"You never can tell. I may stick around here or I may find myself working at the other end of the case."

"What do you mean—the other end of the case?" she asked, with a suspicious gleam in her eyes.

"Miss Judy," he explained, "the first thing a detective has to learn is that there are two ways of going to work about a job like this. You can start from what actually happened and go forward, or you can imagine what may have happened, work backwards on some of your ideas, and try and pick up a bit of the truth that way. Seems to me that's what I'm driven to."

"I wish you luck, Mr. Sanders," she said.

He smiled, drew on a pair of worn dogskin gloves, forgot his manners so far as to cram his hat over his head, and opened the door. From the other side of the threshold he looked back.

"Before I say good-bye, Judy," he ventured ingratiatingly, "you wouldn't like to tell me, I suppose, what really happened to Mr. Loman? No, I know you wouldn't, so I shan't ask you."

He closed the door quickly. The boot she had thrown at him fell harmlessly against its panels. The sergeant went down the stone steps whistling softly to himself.

CHAPTER IV

The man who had been curled up, apparently half asleep, amongst the sacks at the back of the shed on Bunter's Wharf, threw off the strip of tarpaulin which he had drawn around him and sat up with a start. Captain Jan Henderson, the disturber of his peace, took one glance at the skulking figure and returned the electric torch to his pocket.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded. "Don't you know that this wharf is private property?"

The intruder rose unwillingly to his feet.

"There isn't such a thing as private property," he muttered. "A chap as hasn't got a roof over his head has a right to sleep anywhere. What harm am I doing anyway, Captain Henderson?"

"A great deal more than your skin's worth," was the belligerent reply. "There's a thousand barrels of oil stacked under that roof and the stuff that's in these cases would make a pretty bonfire. Come on, out you go!"

The trespasser stretched himself. He looked the captain up and down and scowled. His physique would have made any sort of a personal encounter impossible.

"Where am I to go to?" he demanded.

"Out of that gate," was the harsh reply, "and leg it along,

too. If you aren't out in sixty seconds I'll give you a chance to try what the water's like to-night."

The young man shambled off. The captain followed him a few yards behind. The main gates on to the wharf were closed but the pedestrians' entrance was still open. Captain Henderson pushed his companion through and, drawing a rusty key from his pocket, locked the gate.

"You're a nice one, you are," the latter grumbled. "I thought I'd got shelter for the night, at any rate. I wasn't doing any harm."

The captain spat upon the sidewalk.

"You choose some other wharf sheds to lie about in," he enjoined. "I don't like tramps round my steamer nor near my cargo. Remember that so long as you stay in these parts. Here's a bob for you. Go and get something to warm you up."

The man snatched at the coin, turned up his coat collar, muttered a word of thanks and strode off. The captain, after pausing to light his pipe, followed some distance behind.

"Curse these fellows," he muttered gloomily to himself. "They're all eyes and noses anyway. If they ain't on the job themselves they're just the stuff for old Sanders to pump."

He strode on in gloomy silence, mounted the long incline and arrived in a region where a tangle of buses, tramcars and lorries made traffic at any hour of the day a difficult task. He hailed a passing taxi and stepped inside.

"Number 8B, Adelphi Terrace," he directed. "Step on it,

my lad. I don't want to be all night getting there."

"Do my best, Captain," the other promised amiably.

His best was good. In less than three quarters of an hour the taxi was climbing the Savoy Hill from the Embankment; it threaded its way down the Strand, turned into Adam Street, and finally drew up at its destination. The captain looked around him.

"H'm," he observed to himself. "Not much of a place for a toff. What about waiting for me, my lad? I'll be half-an-hour. No more."

"Cost you half a crown."

The captain nodded assent, rang the bell, and was promptly conducted by a solemn-visaged butler into a very pleasant library with a fine view over the Thames. The captain looked round at the bookshelves by which he was surrounded with a gurgle of consternation.

"What on earth does a chap want with all that stuff littering up the place?" was his mental comment. "Not a bit of skirt in one of those pictures, either. I always said he wanted teaching how to spend his money."

The doors were quietly opened and closed. The captain rose from his chair and clumsily saluted. The newcomer, a tall man, of leaner build than his visitor, but muscular and with a look of health on his studious face—notwithstanding its pallor—pointed to two easy chairs and threw himself into one of them.

"Come along, Captain," he invited cheerfully. "Get it off your

chest. What's wrong? I've ordered some whisky. It will be here in a moment. In the meantime go ahead."

"What I want to say, sir, is just this," Henderson began. "It's time we began to move the stuff."

"And why, may I ask?"

"We've had a rotten time ever since we docked down there, guv'nor," the captain explained. "Never did see so many curious people about in my life."

"What sort of curious people?"

"Well, for one thing the new Deptford Police barge has been by half a dozen times since three o'clock. There have been more strangers than usual about the wharf, too, and I've just found a young fellow who might be one of the local squiffs lying about amongst the sacks. Then the sergeant from the police station, sir, he's in the pub we all use every night and, though he don't say much, he listens. My God, he does listen! I want to begin unloading the cargo, sir, and that's flat."

"Stop a minute, Captain," his host enjoined. "What about this fellow Loman who was picked up dead in Bunter's Alley?"

"I don't know nothing about him," was the stolid reply. "He was drifting about asking questions like the rest of them last time we was in dock and I can't get it out of my head that I saw him messing about in Amsterdam on the wharves there with one of the men from the factory."

"Do you know anything about the accident?"

“Nothing more than was in the papers,” the captain declared. “He’s been in the hospital, they say, for some time and came home kind of broken-down. Must have been off his chump to choose that way of suiciding.”

The captain felt the steady scrutiny of the other’s clear, keen eyes. He resisted their severe enquiry, however, with complete success. The whisky had been silently served and after that first draught the captain had decided that there were still things in life worth living for.

“If it’s the chap I believe it was, sir, he was always a bit dotty in the head,” the captain confided. “Used to go about preaching amongst the wharf hands a few years ago. Just the sort that don’t seem to have any guts, but suicide’s easy. I bet he couldn’t have fought a round to save his life.”

“I’m glad you know nothing about the business,” the other pronounced. “I think, perhaps, it would be wise to do as you suggest and get on with the unloading. Twelve vans shall be down as soon as it’s daylight to-morrow morning. Be careful that you superintend everything yourself. Is there anything else?”

“There ain’t nothing special as I can point to, sir,” Henderson said hesitatingly, “but I’ve got the feeling that there’s something going on that I don’t understand.”

“Explain yourself if you can,” was the curt injunction.

“What I mean is that I seem to smell spies all round the blasted place,” the captain confided. “It’s my belief that that chap Loman that suicided from Bunter’s Buildings was one of ’em. Then there’s a young woman all the time down there—a real

swell amongst the tarts—turns everyone's head who speaks to her. She seems to be turning inquisitive. She lives in Bunter's Buildings too. Then, night after night, there's that Sergeant Sanders sitting in his corner, joining in the conversation, just an odd question here and there. He's picking up more than he ought to know."

"Keep your mouth shut when these people question you," his host advised him with a faint smile. "You would only get the worst of an exchange of wits. If you're really being watched you only have to show the least signs of funk and they'll have the inside out of the *Henrietta Anne*."

The captain grunted. He was not gaining very much reassurance from his patron.

"It's all very well for you, sir," he complained. "Unless one of us splits—and that ain't likely—you're as safe as the angels. I'm the one that's carrying the whole of the risk."

"You're well paid for it."

"Nobody's denying that, but I shouldn't have much chance of spending my money in quod."

The man in the opposite easy chair shrugged his shoulders.

"You're in a lachrymose frame of mind, my friend," he observed. "Help yourself to a little more whisky. That's right. . . . Chuck up your job if you're afraid. Meanwhile, the vans will be down, commencing at six o'clock in the morning, mind. Better stay on duty to-night. And remember—don't let that local fellow, Sanders, pump you. Keep him away from the Customs

House men if you can. Sorry to hurry you off but I have an appointment in half an hour. You can remember this, Captain. You're safe. Unless you exceed instructions, or make some absurd blunder, you're as safe as you can be. There will be a thumping cheque for you to-morrow night."

The butler opened the door. The captain was dismissed with a pleasant nod. He rejoined the taxicab with a little grunt of relief. A few words with his patron never failed to restore his confidence.

Traffic was bad on the way back and it was an hour before Captain Henderson opened the side door of the Green Man and made his way to the small apartment behind the bar. Fred slid back the window which communicated with the main premises and, recognising his customer, nodded amiably.

"What will it be, Captain?" he enquired.

"A hot whisky, and look sharp about it," was the terse reply. "Give me the best, too. I've been drinking some in the West End that makes your stuff taste like methylated spirits."

The barman grinned.

"There's no better whisky than what we serve," he declared confidently. "That stuff in the swell places is all watered. . . . Judy's outside. Shall I send her in?"

The captain hesitated.

"What sort of crowd are in the saloon bar?" he asked.

“The usual.”

“That fellow Sanders?”

“Too early for him. About nine o’clock’s his time.”

“Yes, send Judy in.”

Judy paused on the threshold of the room.

“What are you doing in here alone?” she asked Henderson.

“Come and put your feet on the fender and I’ll order you a drop of grog,” he invited.

She shook her head.

“Got a date,” she answered. “I was down by the wharf this afternoon. Seemed to me there was quite a crowd hanging around.”

The captain scowled into the fire. Judy lit a cigarette and lounged with her back against the table.

“I don’t fancy the look of things,” he confided, blowing out a cloud of smoke from his pipe. “That fellow Sanders is getting too inquisitive. What’s he want down on the wharf, anyway? He hasn’t any right there that I know of. Then to-night, not long ago, I found a chap hiding amongst the sacks.”

She held the cigarette away from her for a moment and listened. Then she looked carefully round the room and made sure that the

service window communicating with the bar was closed.

“When are they fetching away the stuff you’re afraid of?” she asked.

“To-morrow morning.”

“When did you hear that?”

“About an hour ago. I’ve been up West. Got my wind up a bit and I’ve been to see the boss.”

She looked at him curiously.

“You’d better be careful, Captain Jan Henderson,” she warned him. “You won’t hold your job long if they think you’ve lost your nerve.”

“I don’t know about nerve,” he grunted. “I’ve lost my stomach for the job. I’m forty years old to-morrow, and I have no fancy for a twenty-year stretch.”

She removed her cigarette from her lips and looked at him for a moment thoughtfully. A close observer might have come to the conclusion that she had no fancy for Captain Henderson.

“Look here,” she said. “I don’t know the exact position, of course, or what the contraband is that you land now and then, but at the end of the year I should imagine that you earn a great deal more by running that trifle of risk than you could earn any other way.”

“If all goes well,” he put in cautiously.

“You do that for another year or so,” she went on, “and you’re a made man. Would you rather go plodding on for half a lifetime on the wretched salary you had before you got the job on the *Henrietta Anne*?”

“Don’t know as I would,” he admitted. “Come on, let’s get a bit more cheerful. Have a drink, Judy. I’ll have a double one myself.”

He rang the bell and gave an order. Judy looked at the clock and yawned.

“I can’t stop,” she warned him. “I told you I had a date at home. I only looked in to see how things were going on.”

“You can damn’ well miss your date then,” he growled, rising to his feet. “It’s time you and me spent an evening together, Judy. You’re always kidding me—one day next week and that sort of thing. To-night would suit me fine to spend the evening with you. I just want something to take my mind off things and there ain’t a girl down this way as I fancies like you. You know that.”

The barman came in with the drinks upon a battered pewter tray. Judy held her glass disparagingly up to the light and returned it.

“That’s the end of a bottle, Fred,” she told the man severely. “You know very well that I’m not likely to drink those dregs. Serve them to someone who’s half-seas over. Don’t try to palm them off on a good customer.”

Fred grinned apologetically.

“It was the old Missus that gave it to me,” he confided. “I’ll take

it back again and open a fresh bottle for you. They're asking out there if you're going to dance to-night."

"I'm not," she declared. "And if that wall-eyed young man who keeps the motor-boat garage is out there you tell him I'm engaged. Couldn't go to the cinema this evening on any account."

"He's been waiting a quarter of an hour for you," Fred ventured.

"He can wait till Doomsday so far as I'm concerned," Judy replied carelessly. "You don't know what Doomsday means, do you, Fred? Never you mind about that. Go and get me a glass of port out of a fresh bottle—and hurry."

"That's the ticket," Captain Henderson agreed, taking a long drink of his grog. "Hurry's the word, Judy my dear. You've said it. If anyone's taking you out to-night it's me! I'll break that young motorman's head if he gets butting in."

"Better not get opening your own mouth too wide, Captain," Judy cautioned him. "There's no one taking me out to-night. You see that door?"

The man's eyes travelled slowly towards it.

"Aye."

"Well, I'm going to drink my port and then I'm going to slip out that way into the street and I'm off back to Bunter's Buildings. Don't let anyone try to stop me—that's all."

"You're hurrying back to keep your date?" Henderson demanded

with a sullen light in his eyes.

“To go about my own business anyway,” she told him.

Fred brought in the glass of port and set it down. He had no sooner disappeared than Henderson, who had risen to his feet, lurched over towards his companion. He made a clumsy effort to take her into his arms. She slipped to one side.

“Look here,” she warned him. “No rough stuff from you unless you’re looking for trouble.”

“I’m tired of being made a fool of,” he declared truculently. “Are you going to be my girl or aren’t you?”

“I’m not and that’s a straight enough answer for any man,” she insisted. “I’m going to be no one’s girl. I play the fool with all of you but there isn’t one of you I’d take seriously. There’s not one of you I want a step nearer than you are now,” she added with an ominous flash in her eyes. “Don’t try that on with me, Captain Henderson.”

He glanced around the room, then he stepped past her to the hatch opening from the bar and deliberately slipped in the bolt.

“Judy,” he began, with a very ugly leer on his face, “I’ve stood this fooling long enough. It’s got to come to an end. You hear? There’s not a soul in the bar, they’ve just gone out. You can bawl your head off—Blast!”

She slung the contents of her glass straight in his eyes, passed him like a flash, opened the side door, and was out in the street. She even turned and looked round.

“If you follow me one yard, you brute,” she threatened, “if you dare to come anywhere near my room, you’ll get all the trouble you’re looking for! There’s nothing doing with me. Do you hear? Stick to your job and keep your mouth closed.”

She was gone into the mist and lightly falling rain, a flying figure between the blurred lamp-posts. Henderson looked after her with a wicked light in his eyes, but he made no movement. There was a touch on his shoulder. Fred, the barman, had come in through the saloon entrance.

“Listen, Captain Henderson,” he said impressively. “Judy has her humours and when she’s got them she’s best left alone. If anyone tried to rough-handle her and the crowd in the saloon bar got to know about it you’d find yourself face downwards in the river mud. I’m warning you!”

Captain Henderson wiped the dripping wine from his face. He was still breathing hard. The single word he muttered under his breath brought the barman’s fist within an inch of his chin.

“All right,” he muttered. “Spilt my grog, though, the little devil has. Bring me another, Fred. No, bring me a bottle. I’ve got to drink something to-night.”

The man looked at him doubtfully.

“Just as you please, Captain,” he replied, “but if you take my advice you’ll go back to the ship where it don’t matter if you do wag your chin a bit. . . .”

Henderson, a few minutes later, poured himself out and drank, from the bottle which had been placed before him, in one long

greedy swallow, a glass of grog which was nearly neat. Then, with the bottle under his arm, he turned towards the door which opened upon the street and looked down towards the mist-shrouded river.

“Maybe you’re right, Fred,” he grunted. “Listen here, lad, though: if that chap Sanders gets hanging around to-night tell him I’ve gone up Wapping way on a binge. I’m locking the wharf gate and I don’t want visitors. Get me?”

“That’s all right, Captain,” the man answered. “Good night.”

He returned to his duties behind the counter. Henderson lurched off in the opposite direction to that in which Judy had disappeared and was soon lost in the mists.

CHAPTER V

It was Captain Jan Henderson's oft repeated and passionately related story, during the next few weeks, that after leaving the Green Man he set his course steadily towards the wharf, boarded the *Henrietta Anne* and made his way into his cabin. He then procured a jug of hot water from David, the cabin steward, and mixed himself a grog. After that things became a little hazy. He remembered at last turning the bottle upside down and finding it empty. He greeted his realisation of the fact with a roar of laughter. He felt lighthearted and gay. Suddenly he thought of Judy. The thought was like a devouring fire. He rose to his feet, put on his cap and made his way by some circuitous route to Bunter's Buildings. He must have had an electric torch in his pocket, for he remembered searching every door for some indication as to the name of its tenant. He remembered finding it —JUDY—upon a glistening ivory visiting card. He knocked at the door and found it locked. Then, for the first time, his good nature began to fade away. He was angry. He knocked again. There was no response. He put his knee to the door and, with its crash inwards, that extraordinary lapse of memory of his commenced. He had an idea that Judy was there but he was never sure. He had an idea that he was carrying her up those stairs, struggling and lighting, towards the fire escape. Then came the blank wall. Not another gleam of recollection. Until this awakening in utterly unfamiliar surroundings.

He was lying, for the first time in his life it may be presumed,

upon a silken coverlet spread over a small canopied bedstead. There were springs to the bed—a luxury to which he was unaccustomed—and there was a gleam of whiter linen than any he had ever seen before. Gradually he raised himself to a sitting posture and looked around. He was in his day clothes—even his shoes were not unlaced. The appointments and furniture of the room were such as he had encountered many times during a life of wanderings culminating in nocturnal adventures. There were dingy fans attached to the walls. There was a weary plant of some sort upon a tumble-down table. There were photographs of unimaginable-looking people in battered frames. There was a bare chest of drawers of pine wood, two rickety chairs and a strip of carpet. He sat up and held his head and asked himself the question: Where the hell am I?

Reason returned in laggard fashion to the still half-drunken man. Slowly he began to patch things together. He remembered leaving the *Henrietta Anne*. He remembered making his way in a state of considerable emotion and excitement to the tenement house known as Bunter's Buildings. He remembered peering at the cards upon the doors until he came to the one with the single name printed upon it—JUDY. He remembered trying the handle softly and finding the door locked. He remembered letting go with his knee, and a crash. And that was just everything he did remember. The room was empty now. There was no trace of any other occupant. Judy's hat and coat hung in their accustomed place, but of Judy there was neither sign nor, at the moment, any definite memory. Only—he gripped onto the side of the bed. A further haunting vision was floating before his mind. The room began to turn around him. He fancied that he remembered carrying something that tore at him and

struggled up that last flight of steps. The vision grew more horrible. The inquest. The open door and that fire escape. He sat for a moment on the edge of the bed, breathing hard, with sweat running down his face. Then he staggered to his feet, pushed the door away from its solitary hinge and stood upon the threshold. Looking up he could just see the top storey, he could just see the iron door leading out into eternity—open. . . . Somehow or other he made his way back to the bed and he did then what he had never done in his life before. He fainted.

It was an hour later when he staggered down the stairs, passed out into the street and set his face towards the wharves. The cold rain, falling now heavily, washed his cheeks and seemed to bring him back to a measure of sanity. With every step he felt his physical strength returning. His memory, however, was encumbered only by a clogged panorama of horrors. If he had done—an evil thing—he had done it in that fit of unconsciousness. Wouldn't do him much good in court, he thought, with a shiver of horror. He turned to the right. He reached the gate. He unlocked it and made his way to the edge of the quay.

"*Henrietta Anne* ahoy!" he shouted in a voice which he utterly failed to remember or recognise.

David, the cabin steward, a bundle of crumpled clothes upon the deck,—a pimply-faced, ragged-haired, long-legged youth,—rose wearily to his feet, came limping along, and pushed down a gangway. Henderson mounted. The youth made a clumsy attempt at a salute. The captain took him by the shoulders.

“Look here, my lad,” he said, “see this?”

He drew from his pocket a half-crown. The youth stared at it in amazement.

“Listen to me carefully,” his master enjoined. “You can earn this half-crown.”

“What do you want me to do now, Captain?” was the anxious enquiry. “Anything you say.”

“You know where Bunter’s Alley is, just below the buildings?”

“Don’t I?” the lad answered, a certain fearsomeness in his tone.

“You go straight there,” Henderson went on, steadily enough, although his breath was coming a little shorter. “You go to the spot where that body was found. You look round. You tell me whether there’s anything unusual to be seen—if there’s any crowd there or people hanging around of any sort. You understand?”

The youth shook his head.

“I’ll go, guv’nor,” he said, with a shiver which seemed to shake his whole body. “I don’t understand, but I’ll go.”

“Never mind understanding,” the captain groaned. “I slept out last night and I had a dream. I dreamt that there was another body lying in the same place. I just can’t get it out of my head. I’ve got to have someone go and look. You go—you look—you bring me back word and you get the half-crown. You get five shillings if there’s no commotion there, if—if nothing’s

happened.”

“I get the half-crown either way, Captain?”

“You get the half-crown either way.”

The cabin steward went off with long loping strides, a queer ungainly figure, with thin shoulders and unwholesome-looking face. Henderson watched him until he disappeared, then he began to walk the deck. He walked it a dozen times with quick irregular footsteps. He peered out across the river—no damned police boats about this morning—then he staggered to the companionway, pushed open the door of his own cabin, and entered. He took down a bottle of brandy from the cupboard, poured out a liberal allowance into a tumbler and drank it. It tasted like raw fire. Suddenly he realised that his throat was burning. He poured out water and drank a great jugful. It was that bottle of whisky the night before. There it was—the empty bottle—lying upon the carpet. . . . He crept up once more on deck. This time the strength seemed to have gone from his knees. He walked unsteadily. Once or twice he had to hold onto the rail or some stationary object—and always his eyes were fixed upon the pathway on the other side of the gate. It seemed an eternity of time; but the moment came when the youth re-appeared. There was nothing to be gathered from his walk. He came along with the usual spiritless slouch, which it seemed that nothing could ever change. He crossed the quay without looking up. It was only when he was mounting the gangway that he recognised the captain holding onto the rail. He grinned at him feebly.

“I’ve been,” he reported. “I want the five bob.”

Somehow or other the captain produced it. The youth gripped it hard in his dirty bony fingers.

“There weren’t nobody in the alley but a baker’s boy and a milkman,” he reported. “There wasn’t nothing there and nothing ’ad ’appened. Reckon you had the nightmares.”

“Say it again, David,” the captain implored him, in an unfamiliar voice.

“There wasn’t anything in the alley worth speaking about except what I’ve told you. There was a couple of lads playing tig and that there baker and milkman. Not a thing ’ad ’appened there, s’help me God. You must have ’ad the nightmares —’ad ’em proper. I see that empty bottle this morning.”

Captain Henderson turned around. Somehow or other he reached the companionway. Somehow or other he staggered into his cabin. He sank into his chair. His head fell forward onto his folded arms. He felt himself crying like a child.

CHAPTER VI

It was a great night at Ordino's, the most fashionable of the night restaurants in London, recently turned into a club and alarmingly exclusive. Ordino himself, who had just discontinued his brief chat with the *chef d'orchestre*, looked around the room with justifiable pride. He was quick to notice a certain commotion near the entrance. Alfonso, his most reliable understudy, was bowing to the ground. Two guests had just arrived. Alfonso, with many words of greeting, was conducting them to a corner table near the wall, which was usually reserved in case Royalty might appear. Ordino hurried away and joined the little group already assembled round the table. The maître d'hôtel fell back. The *sommelier* followed his example. Alfonso yielded place. Ordino bowed low to these most desirable patrons.

"Lady Judith," he exclaimed, "this is marvellous! We are all so happy to see you back. And Sir Gregory, too. You have both had a delightful trip, I trust? We read of rough weather in the Bay."

It was Lady Judith who replied. She was a singularly beautiful woman, singular also inasmuch as she seemed to have utterly disdained even the smaller arts of the beauty parlour. Her lips showed only a faint line of colour and the ivory pallor of her complexion was a miracle for one returned, barely twenty-four hours according to the telegrams, from a Mediterranean cruise.

"Adorable, my dear Ordino," she assured him. "But oh, the food! The wine came from you and it was excellent, but even

Sir Gregory's wonderful steward knew nothing about mixing a cocktail. And the cooking—oh, I cannot tell you. I starve!"

"Two double Martinis first," Sir Gregory, the tall dark man on her left, ordered. "Afterwards you will see our heads together over the menu, Ordino. We are not only hungry, we are greedy."

"However good the cold storage is," Lady Judith observed, "there comes a time when most food on a boat tastes the same way. We had very nearly reached that point."

"We had reached it," Sir Gregory declared grimly. "Tell us the news, Ordino."

Lady Judith leaned back amongst the cushions, sipped her Martini happily, and lit a cigarette. Ordino was voluble. He spoke of trouble in a famous family. There were two divorces to report. A separation was certain in a ducal household. A very celebrated and popular young man had had to leave the country suddenly without explanation. Lady Sybil was really engaged at last. The Duke of Crewkerne had joined the club. Sir Gregory finished his cocktail and held up his hand.

"Enough," he begged. "Touching this business of dining . . ."

"Oh, I am so much with you," Lady Judith agreed. "No more gossip, Ordino. Give us the rest a little at a time—just a spice with each course. Now, we choose what we eat."

Ordino himself wrote down the selected dishes with his own particular gold pencil upon his own seldom-used block. On his way to the chef he was stopped by a distinguished patron of the place.

“Tell me, Ordino,” the latter asked, “to whom are you showing all these wonderful attentions? Who is the beautiful lady with the Italian complexion, those attractive eyes and the splendid figure—and her companion?”

Ordino looked at the speaker in surprise. It seemed absurd that any member of the club did not know his famous clients. Then he remembered that the enquirer was an American.

“The lady, sir,” he confided, “is Lady Judith Martellon, daughter of the Earl of Martellon. She would be the most popular young lady in English society but she is always off on some wild expedition or another. Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt, the man of so much distinction with her, is a great friend. They are supposed to be engaged but there is not much money and one does not know.”

The American, his curiosity satisfied, nodded and passed on. Ordino spent a pleasant ten minutes with the chef. The business of preparing the feast was made simpler by the preliminary service of a great bowl of caviar and a flask of vodka. Ordino was a very happy man. He superintended the service of the caviar himself, and despatched the waiter in search of special lemons just arrived from his own birthplace in Sicily.

“There is one thing I wish to mention,” Ordino confided, leaning slightly towards Sir Gregory. “You remember Major Granderson?”

“The fellow we tried to get out of re-electing?” Sir Gregory reflected. “Yes, I remember him.”

“We decided,” Ordino went on, dropping his voice, “that he

was perhaps a little too inquisitive to be a desirable member. Then we discovered that he was a nephew of Longhurst's, one of our directors, so we had to elect him."

"And is he still inquisitive?"

"He has been here two or three times a week for the last three months," Ordino continued. "I have made a point of going to speak to him on each occasion. Sooner or later he has always brought the conversation round to your yachting cruise."

"Don't see why he should be so interested in us," Sir Gregory remarked. "I scarcely know the fellow."

"I can just recall him," Lady Judith announced. "He is tall and thin and has a rather worn, sensitive face and tired eyes. I always thought him rather interesting-looking."

"He may be perfectly harmless," Ordino concluded, having glanced over his shoulder and discovered that the waiter with the fresh dish of lemons was bearing down upon them. "Still, I did hear a faint rumour—nothing that could be substantiated, though—which was not altogether pleasant. Then his interest in your yachting cruise, considering how slightly you are acquainted, seemed strange."

"And the rumour?" Sir Gregory asked.

Ordino waved his hand. A matter so slight had passed from his memory. The maître d'hôtel had re-established himself at the table. The waiter was slicing and serving the fresh lemons. The subject of Major Granderson was dropped.

The returned travellers did ample justice to the very choicest meal which the famous club restaurant could serve. There were many friends who paused at their table on their way in and out of the room, but though they were cordially received they were not encouraged to linger.

"You see, my dear Agnes," Lady Judith observed to one girl who showed no signs of moving on, "to-night we are two very hungry people. To-morrow night, by the end of the week at any rate, we shall be our normal selves again. Just now our chief interest in life is food. Everything about our cruise was wonderful, including the host," she concluded with a little smile to Sir Gregory, "but as he himself complained the most, he won't mind my saying that our chef ought to have been thrown overboard."

"Perfect scoundrel," Sir Gregory agreed. "Must have forged his credentials, I'm sure of that."

The girl took the hint and passed on. A well-known sporting peer, who was also a journalist, strolled across the room to them smoking a large cigar.

"We're no use to you, old chap," Sir Gregory assured him, as soon as the preliminary greetings were over. "Just a little paragraph that we have returned from a cruise mostly in Mediterranean seas, sunburnt but famished, that's the limit."

"Aren't you going to tell us the places you've been to?" the visitor enquired in a disappointed tone. "Everybody's been so curious."

Lady Judith shook her head.

“That’s the one question we’re not going to answer,” she confided. “Both Gregory here and myself are under a solemn compact not to tell a soul. We’re going again next year and we have actually discovered one or two almost unvisited spots.”

“Seems rather too bad,” the journalist grumbled. “I thought I had a nice little story for my Sunday column when I saw you two here.”

“If you mention a word more than that brief but happy paragraph which I have just suggested—” Sir Gregory began firmly.

“He won’t, I know,” Lady Judith interrupted, with an appealing glance upwards.

“You have probably been in mischief, both of you,” the journalist grumbled. “Sickeningly selfish, though, to hinder a pal who is trying to make an honest living.”

He lounged off with a good-natured farewell nod. Sir Gregory tapped a cigarette upon the table and lit it.

“I don’t know whether it’s my fancy,” he remarked thoughtfully, “but people seem to be terribly interested in our yachting cruise.”

Lady Judith shrugged her white shoulders.

“After all,” she reminded him, “it’s a vilely personal age. These poor paragraph writers would pillory their own mothers or fathers for a guinea. I suppose they think that two very much talked-about people like you and me, Gregory, ought to have taken a chaperon. What does it matter? I still have some appetite

left and I can't bear these interruptions."

After dinner Lady Judith and a cousin, the Honourable Algernon Veasey, who had been sitting at a table a short distance away, danced. Sir Gregory, with the air of an habitué, left the room, made his way up a back staircase, along a passage and into a spacious, handsomely furnished apartment on the first floor. There were several cabinets against the walls, of solid and handsome design, and in the centre of the room, upon a magnificent Turkish rug, was a highly polished mahogany table, around which were six high-backed chairs. Sir Gregory threw himself into one of them and pressed lightly with his heel upon the floor. In a moment or two Ordino, calm and bland, presented himself. Sir Gregory looked at him keenly. It was almost as if he were anticipating some measure of trouble, but there was none to come.

"Things going all right, Ordino?" he asked.

"Sir Gregory," was the earnest reply, "to you, as chairman of the company, I wish to offer my congratulations. For luncheon, for dinner, for supper, for every possible meal we are obliged to turn away hundreds of possible patrons. Our prices are higher than anyone else's. We are making a larger scale of profit. The accountants here yesterday were dumbfounded at our turnover. They went through the books three times before they decided to make out our profit and loss account. The results seemed impossible. As regards," he went on, "the other channels of income, you are standing upon the threshold, Sir Gregory, of a great fortune."

For a single moment Gregory Fawsitt half closed his eyes, a little wearily. The man's suave complacency, his even tone, his air of complete satisfaction, grated upon him.

"We ought to make money," he said. "We run tremendous risks."

The only reply upon which Ordino ventured was a slight shrug of the shoulders. Once, in the tiny village where he had been born, they called him "the man with the face of a bull and the heart of a lion." It was certainly true that he had never known fear.

"There are many similar undertakings, there is much that is done in Paris and New York where the risks are far greater. New York depends upon an enormous system of bribery. Over here the police remain our enemies, but we run a machine which is nearly what they say of a motor car—foolproof."

Gregory Fawsitt motioned with his head towards one of the cabinets. Ordino rose to his feet at once. He produced a bottle of choice whisky, a glass, and soda water. Cigars and cigarettes were upon the table. The visitor smoked and meditated for a moment or two in silence.

"This week's delivery was the largest you have ever had, Ordino," he observed.

The man smiled.

"One thousand Dutch cheeses," he murmured. "They were the larger size too. I will admit that even I felt qualms. Yet, what did it matter? We could have received twice the shipment without even a curious look. Your packing and organisation are

simply marvellous, Sir Gregory."

"And the demand continues the same?"

"It grows—it grows every week," Ordino confided. "While we are on the subject, there is one comment, and only one, which several of our clients have made and that is scarcely in the way of criticism. There have been a few complaints of what they used to call in China 'the little women's snow.' Old Lady Addington declares that it does not send her to sleep nearly as quickly as it used to."

"What these people forget," Sir Gregory pointed out, "is that the longer they take the stuff the less effect it has upon them. There's no chance for any adulteration, Ordino. It comes to us first hand—I can promise you that."

"There's no one in the world doubts that, sir," the little man chuckled, "and the complaints are nothing. They do not amount to a snap of the fingers. All that we pray for is that you may be starting for another yachting cruise—well, if it was to-morrow it would not be too soon. It's like the craze for cosmetics amongst the women, sir. It grows and grows all the time. Would you like to look at your accounts?"

Sir Gregory nodded. Ordino unlocked a safe, withdrew a small ledger from it, turned to a page about halfway through the volume and pointed to some recent entries.

"We have paid nineteen thousand seven hundred into your account this week, Sir Gregory," he said. "You have about eight thousand to come. Then there are the 'B' payments which have gone over to Switzerland. They're not so much, because until

this week we have been short of stock, but they come to something like twelve thousand odd."

Sir Gregory nodded silently. He closed the book, fastened the spring lock and leaned back in his chair. Sometimes it all seemed like a dream to him even now. He had never been a poor man, but wealth such as was flowing in now was a thing of which he had never dreamed. And from what a source it came! A grim look for a moment changed his whole expression. Ordino watched his patron with some uneasiness. He dreamed of the days when he might do without these figureheads, these spineless Britishers whom the world so easily believed could do no wrong because they had lived apparently blameless lives and bore honoured names. Some day or other they would develop what they called consciences and then the whole business would crumple up.

"Her ladyship must come and sign our book some day," he said. "I have the signatures of four members of the Royal family since you left for your last cruise."

Sir Gregory rose to his feet.

"I must go down and join the others," he decided.

The inner side of the wall possessed instead of windows small Gothic-shaped apertures looking down on the restaurant below. Sir Gregory drew back the curtain of one and glanced downwards. The place now was packed with people, a seething mass of humanity moving slowly and with difficulty to the music. Almost immediately below were Lady Judith and her companion. Sir Gregory watched her for a moment. She was

dancing with perfect grace but languidly, swaying a little to the music but without enthusiasm. A reminiscent smile parted Sir Gregory's lips. He nodded cheerfully to Ordino and made his way downstairs.

CHAPTER VII

On his way across the crowded floor Gregory Fawsitt was stopped by many acquaintances—even some of the dancing couples leaned towards him to shake hands. All of them he greeted courteously, but he showed no desire to linger. Just as he was reaching the shelter of his own table he was accosted in the crush by a young man from whom he found it impossible to escape.

“You remember me, I hope, Sir Gregory?” the former said in a pleasant, rather drawling voice. “Granderson my name is. I was in the Dragoons with your cousin.”

“I remember you perfectly,” Gregory admitted. “I’m surprised to find you alive, though, if you spend many nights in an atmosphere like this. Too many people.”

The young man smiled.

“We hadn’t that complaint to make the last time we met,” he remarked.

“The last time?”

“You didn’t seem to remember me so I didn’t intrude,” Granderson went on. “It was in the suburbs of Basra. You seemed to have just come in from the desert.”

Gregory shook his head.

"We all look alike out there in pith helmets and white riding suits," he remarked. "I started my diplomatic career at Teheran, which isn't so very far away, but I've never been back."

"An odd resemblance," Granderson observed quietly.

"What were you doing in those parts?" Gregory asked, managing to squeeze along another foot or two.

"I was on a sort of Government commission," Granderson explained. "I suppose because I was the only person they could get hold of who could speak a little Persian. I was one of the under-intermediaries between the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the Shah."

"Interesting job, I should think," was the other's polite comment. "You will excuse me, won't you? This is my table and I expect my friends are getting impatient."

Gregory reached his chair with a little grunt of content. He ordered a whisky from the *sommelier* and mixed himself a drink in a long crystal tumbler. Lady Judith leaned towards him curiously.

"That was Major Granderson with you, wasn't it?" she asked.

Gregory nodded. He glanced casually around. His late companion had passed out of sight and the table next to them was vacated by a couple who were dancing.

"That was Granderson all right," he confided. "Rather took my breath away the fellow did, too. It appears he saw me at Basra

two months ago. I must have been on my way back from Teheran with that last haul."

"What on earth was he doing there?" Lady Judith inquired.

"It seems he speaks Persian," Gregory explained, "and he was acting for the Government in this Oil Company business. Damn' bad luck. Fancy meeting a man in Basra."

"Did he see me too?" Lady Judith asked.

"He didn't mention it if he did. I shouldn't think so. You were in the caravan, you know."

"Why didn't he speak to you then?"

"Perhaps he thought I was on the same sort of job as himself and wanted to be left alone," Gregory reflected. "It's a queer entrance to the city, too, you know. The road's about half a mile wide."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that he was mistaken. It saves a lot of trouble. No one could prove that I was there. I needn't tell you that I didn't leave a card on the British Minister."

Lady Judith fanned herself for a moment thoughtfully.

"Of all men in the world," she reflected, "it seems odd that it should have been Granderson."

"I shall have a few enquiries made about that fellow," Gregory

promised. “Ordino seems to have found him a trifle inquisitive once or twice. This is not the sort of establishment where one likes to hear of overcurious people.”

“What about the finances?” Judith enquired. “I have a perfect shoal of dressmakers’ bills.”

“Finances are all right,” he assured her. “The news is good. Everything has been safely stored away and is selling like hot cakes. Ordino has an idea, I believe, that it’s because they can get the stuff safely here that there’s such a run on the place. He says it’s the same at luncheon, dinner, and supper—every table is taken. There are eight hundred names up now for election. He decided to wait for my return before he did anything about it. The dummy committee are all for electing them.”

“There’s just one point to be considered,” Judith meditated. “People will begin to wonder before long, I think, if there isn’t some special reason for the popularity of the place.”

Gregory shook his head.

“I don’t think so,” he objected. “It’s always the same in London and Paris. A restaurant or a club becomes the vogue and while it lasts it is filled to overflowing. Ours won’t be merely a vogue, because we have a solid reason for attracting the people. There is only one risk in the world and that is the discretion of the members themselves.”

“Ordino,” Judith murmured, “has an amazing vein of secrecy in his composition.”

Gregory nodded acquiescence.

"He has the most ingenious lot of rules, too—unprinted, of course, but thoroughly understood by our six barmen and four of the selected maîtres d'hôtel. . . . What about the next few months?" he went on, changing the subject a little abruptly. "Have you made any plans, Judith?"

"I thought of going down to Dorset and playing the dutiful," she told him. "Afterwards I shall make my way to Cannes. What about you, Gregory?"

"I must put in a week or two at the University," he replied, after some hesitation. "Afterwards I shall have to stay on here for some little time. I feel that I must get into touch with the whole organisation again, especially as Ordino wants us to start on our travels again so soon. I may get down to the Riviera later."

"So that after all we may probably meet," Lady Judith observed a little wistfully. "Queer world, isn't it?"

"We get what we can out of it," Gregory remarked, with a touch of cynicism in his tone.

"Be a perfect philosopher and say that we get as much out of it as we put in, anyway," Judith sighed. "What's your idea, Gregory?"

"I suppose," he reflected, "it depends upon ourselves and our capacity for happiness. We heap up the bonfire all right. There are no other two people in our world, I should think, who keep the fires of excitement burning as we do. We live on the edge of a volcano. We haven't a moment of stagnation."

"You are content?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Seems to me it’s as worth-while as anything could be. Gunrunning down at Uruguay or Ecuador was all right whilst it lasted, but you lose your money at that if you don’t mind because those excitable countries are always likely to make peace just as one arrives with a fine cargo of Mausers! Happened to me once and cost me over five thousand pounds.”

“After all, didn’t you find it rather an impersonal sort of excitement?” she ventured.

“There’s no going over the top these days,” he reminded her. “Wars, even in the Foreign Legion, have become tedious, mechanical affairs. You can’t feel the rush of the wind around you and go galloping down a grass field on a hard-mouthed horse, and see the wire a few seconds too late more than once in a season. The world is short of thrills, you know, Judith. Our enterprise may have its ugly side but to my mind the risks we run kill the sordidness. With the whole of the police of several nations combing the earth for us, we don’t really have a moment of absolute safety.”

“I sometimes wish,” Lady Judith sighed, with a faraway look in her eyes, “that I had not this accursed plague of temperament, this furious craving for excitement, or mind wanderlust, or whatever you like to call it.”

“How should you replace it?” he asked.

“There are times,” she confessed, “when I think it would be wonderful to settle down, say at the Dower House at home, with a husband, and have babies, and watch for the

spring flowers, and loll about in the perfume of the summer ones. I should like to look forward to that for my old age, only then, of course, I could not have babies. . . .”

Ordino, who seemed to have the gift of passing through the crowd with more ease and success than any other person, arrived at their table and bowed. He handed a sealed packet to Lady Judith.

“Your ladyship will please to accept,” he begged. “It is a small offering from the *établissement*—a little offering to prove that we are happy to have you back again.”

“You wonderful man!” Lady Judith murmured. “If you knew how I adored presents.”

“If your ladyship would be so kind as to open it when you reach home,” Ordino suggested, as he saw her fingers playing with the silk ribbon. “Alas, I have wonderful patronesses here, all, alas, with jealous dispositions—”

“I understand,” she interrupted. “But I warn you that I shall look at it in the taxi.”

“Your ladyship will stay in London?”

“One week. I shall give a dinner party one night—twelve people. Your extension is still Thursday, I suppose?”

Ordino bowed.

“Is it you or I who order the dinner?”

“You, by all means.”

“Shall I be a guest?” Sir Gregory enquired.

“Placed in such an awkward position I can only say yes. One other whom I shall invite might perhaps surprise you.”

“Woman or man?”

“Man. I’m thinking of asking Major Granderson.”

“Why?”

“I do not understand him. I am interested in anyone whom I do not understand.”

“You have suspicions?” Gregory queried. “If your suspicions have any truth in them you are simply offering him an opportunity to investigate.”

“On the contrary,” she smiled, “I am creating an opportunity to discover whether he is dangerous or not.”

“You’re backing your wits against his.”

She smiled cryptically. It was distinctly a smile but it possessed a significance which had no kinship with humour.

“If it comes to that I shall win.”

He glanced around at the thinning room.

“Supposing you dance with me once,” he invited, “a sort of tribute to our return to civilisation.”

“I shall love to,” she answered.

Gregory was a better dancer than the Honourable Algernon Veasey. He and his partner were moving to the music even as they stood up. They made their way in and out of the little crowd gracefully and easily.

“Why do I ever dance with anyone else?” she murmured. “You make a different thing of it, Gregory.”

“Why do we waste our time with other people and other occupations?” he rejoined. “Why don’t you invite me to share your Dower House and all the terrible results?”

There was a gleam in her eyes, a marvellous softening of her mouth.

“Ah, my dear, how long should we be content?” she sighed. “It was born in our blood, this passion for adventure.”

“We might exercise it,” he suggested.

“It seems queer that we should spend such tragic hours together,” she murmured, “that we should feel death near and all sorts of terrible things pressing upon us; then we come back to this for a brief respite and you talk for a moment as if you cared. If I could only believe you!”

“If I could only trust myself,” he whispered. “And yet I don’t know why I hesitate, Judith. I’m tired of this business with its

hateful associations. There's danger enough in it but it's ugly danger. It is not conscience, mind. It is a sort of disgust. There is a hideous side to our work. We are too good for it, really. Shall we shock the world? Shall we march into a registry office tomorrow morning?"

She laughed happily.

"Gregory, my dear, you're wonderful. I shall never grow old while you are near. Ten years ago we could have done that very thing."

"And ten years hence it will be too late," he lamented.

There was an abrupt change in this woman whom lately, with the fierce thrill of danger always round them, he had come to think of as just the companion of his adventures. He felt suddenly in his arms the warm pulsating body of one of the most beautiful women in the world. Her fingers had tightened a little around his coat sleeve. It had become a critical moment. She had drawn closer to him, but her head was thrown back as though to read what she might find in his face. It might have seemed as though she were not wholly satisfied. As he led her back to the table he put into plain words some part of his own sense of confusion.

"Judith," he said, and he held her fingers half under the tablecloth, as one of the clumsiest beginners in the art of flirtation might have done. "Perhaps we can yet find the way out. I never thought it possible before. Now I believe that we might."

"We must learn to feel once more," she declared feverishly, her

eyes shining, a throb in her voice. “We were fools to think that the life of ordinary man and woman was finished because we had plunged into this mad adventure. Feel my fingers, Gregory. They are burning. If I have seemed hard lately it has been repressed fear that has turned me into an icicle. To-night I feel that there is a new passion eating me up. Do you remember when we really loved simple things before the world grew tragic—the first time you kissed me, for instance?”

“Perfectly well,” he answered. “We were on the balcony of Grantley House. I believe that it was my twenty-first birthday.”

“Amazing man. If you look at me like that I shall begin to be frightened. I do not think I shall drive home alone with you.”

There was a note of bitterness in his voice.

“We have drunk too deep of the waters of sophistication,” he said. “I shall not rumple your hair or crush your dress.”

“Then I don’t think I want to be kissed,” she pouted.

He touched a passing maître d’hôtel on the arm.

“I should like to sign my bill, if you please,” he demanded.

CHAPTER VIII

Just as Ordino, during that interval between the service of dinner and theatre suppers—an hour which he always devoted to that purpose—was sitting down to dinner in his private room, Fred, the barman at the Green Man, found his supper pushed through the hatch leading from the kitchen. Whilst Ordino, however, was in a very excellent temper, Fred was a little ruffled. There were strangers in the saloon bar that night, and strangers in that particular locality were never welcome. One, a tall, thin man in still-streaming oilskins and a sou' wester hat which he had never removed, was especially inquisitive. He sat in a retired corner and, though his questions had seemed harmless enough, they were unwelcome. He began again just as Fred pushed his steaming plate to a convenient shelf underneath the counter.

"And who," he enquired, "is this Judy of Bunter's Buildings I hear you all talking about so much?"

There was a moment's silence. Captain Jan Henderson scowled at the questioner. The others seemed inclined to adopt the same attitude. Sergeant Sanders, who had just dropped in for half a pint, stroked his chin but said nothing. Fred, the barman, pretended to be very much occupied.

"Sorry if I have offended in any way," the visitor went on in a slightly aggrieved tone. "I've been hearing so much from you all about the young lady that I naturally got a little curious. Fill these gentlemen's glasses up, barman, just to show

there's no ill feeling, and give me another tot of that whisky."

The captain, with some affected reluctance, allowed his tankard to be replenished. The others followed suit. The master of the *Henrietta Anne*, after a brief nod at the stranger, took a long drink and wiped the froth from his moustache.

"The young lady," he explained, "was one who used to drop in here sociable-like sometimes in the evening and give us a song and a dance. What's happened to her now we none of us know."

"I suppose there are other young ladies who oblige you now and then?"

"Maybe there are," the captain replied indifferently. "There's none of them like Judy, though."

"And you don't know what's become of her?" the man in the oilskins persisted.

"There's all sorts of tales," Captain Henderson confided, "but there's no one knows rightly."

The barman leaned over the counter.

"Sid Larkin swears he saw her dancing at Cintra's Bar in West Hartlepool," he declared. "He spoke to her, too. She remembered this place quite well and said she would be back some day. Someone had treated her a bit rough, I fancy."

Henderson moved uneasily in his chair.

"If you're aiming that remark at me, Fred," he said, "you'd

better be careful or I'll take your ugly face outside and bash it in."

The barman made no reply. The threat did not seem in any way to appall him.

"Did she live hereabouts?" the persistent stranger asked.

"She had a room in Bunter's Buildings," Fred replied. "According to all accounts she kept herself to herself there. Most respectable she was."

"I can tell you something more than that," the clerk from the Customs House declared. "When they found her room empty one morning everything was neatly piled up with a little package of her clothes and a note addressed to the collector containing ten weeks' rent. She asked that everything should be left as it was for that time and if she didn't return then they could let the room and destroy the clothes."

"Acted the real Queen of Sheba, she did," the captain grunted.

"Why shouldn't she?" her champion from behind the bar protested. "There's many as call themselves ladies never behaved themselves better than she did in here. She would go the limit sometimes when she was feeling in the humour but over the limit she never went—not that I knows on."

The sergeant, from his place in the corner, spoke for the first time.

"What was her idea living down here, coming in for a song and dance now and then and mooning about in her room for the

rest of the day? That's all they said she did. She even paid for her own drinks as often as not. Where did she get her money from if she didn't make friends with the millionaires of the place—like Captain Henderson here?"

"Listen to the sergeant," Jan Henderson sneered. "I'd back my screw against his any day."

"My screw isn't much but I live respectable," the sergeant declared good-humouredly. "As for the girl, I never heard her accepting one of those invitations of yours, Captain, to come and look over your ship."

"That ain't saying she didn't come," the captain muttered.

Someone threw a pint pot at him, just missing his head. He rose to his feet and peered through the cloud of smoke.

"Who threw that?" he shouted. "Come on and tell me. Who was it?"

"It was no more than you deserved, Captain," the barman declared stoutly. "Judy wouldn't have nothing to do with you and we all know it, and the man who pretends he has cottoned up with a girl when he hasn't deserves more than a pewter pot thrown at him."

"Gawd, I seem to have found my way into a drawing room!" the captain jeered. "I'll have to try the place in the next street. You're getting too refined for me here."

The captain was a good customer, so the barman held his tongue. The stranger in the corner, who was in a way

responsible for the disturbance, changed the conversation.

“Anyone know of a steamer going over to Amsterdam in a day or two?” he asked.

They all looked towards the master of the *Henrietta Anne*, who shook his head sullenly.

“I’m from Amsterdam, mister,” he admitted, “and I’m going back there as soon as I get my orders to sail, but I don’t carry passengers.”

“No reason why you shouldn’t now and then,” the other argued. “I shouldn’t be any trouble. I’d even bring my own food and drink if you liked. What’s your boat like?”

“It’s no business of yours what she’s like anyway,” was the sullen retort. “My owner’s orders are enough for me. Besides, we ain’t licensed to carry passengers. I couldn’t take you if you offered me a tenner.”

“What sort of cargo are you carrying?”

“Mind your own business,” was the curt reply.

“And you mind your manners, Captain Henderson,” the barman intervened. “Seems to me you’re spoiling for a bit of trouble to-night.”

“I seem to be disturbing the harmony of the evening here,” the stranger said, finishing up his drink with an air of regret. “I’ll be getting on. I haven’t meant any harm. If you want to know my job I’m a newspaperman doing a few riverside stunts. I’m game to

take a bottle of whisky along with me, Captain, if you'll show me over your boat."

"You can keep your bloody whisky," the captain answered savagely. "I'm lying out in the river anyway now and if I took you over in the dinghy I'd have you overboard before we got halfway there. I don't like you. The only sensible word you've spoken was when you said you was going. There's the door."

The barman came out from behind the counter to speed the parting guest.

"One of Jan's bad nights, sir," he apologised. "It isn't worth while getting him wrought up. The sergeant here would have to butt in and then there'd be the devil to pay. Look in and see us another evening."

"Certainly I will," the other promised. "You can't help having a few rough diamonds in a neighbourhood like this."

The barman accepted the coin which was pressed into his hand. His departing guest, however, still showed signs of lingering.

"You don't really know anything about this Judy of Bunter's Buildings?" he asked in a low tone.

"Not a thing, sir," was the confident reply. "There's others besides you have asked the same question. You see, there was queer things went on in Bunter's Buildings just before she left. I'm not saying that she was mixed up with them but she might very well have been scared away. Queer happenings they were and no mistake, even for this part of the world."

"As, for instance?" the man in the oilskins persisted, stepping a little farther back into the shadow of the doorway. 79

"Well, Bunter's Buildings is one of them old-fashioned tenement houses they talk so much about," Fred explained. "It's twelve storeys high with a lift for the first ten storeys. The rest of the way you've got to climb, and there's an out-of-door fire escape from the top floor. A man fell—or was thrown—from the top to the bottom one night there, not long ago, and was smashed to pulp so that his own mother couldn't have recognised him. Then, the only chap who lived on the top floor—no one knew anything about him, not even the police—he disappeared, and soon after Judy was gone, too. You noticed the cheerful-looking gentleman perhaps, with the bowler hat, in the corner of the saloon?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Well, he's Sergeant Sanders, attached to the police station in Amber Road. He's taken to coming round for his drop most evenings and it's my belief he's fairly on this Bunter's Buildings job. He's got something in his brain he don't talk about, but you'll see him mooning around the buildings and hanging around the wharves all the time. He listens and listens and listens, and it's my belief he's trying to put two and two together. . . . Now, good night, sir, if you'll excuse me. I don't want any more lip from the captain."

The man in the oilskins found himself suddenly alone with the door closed behind him and the sound of loud raucous voices within. Evidently the barman was in disgrace. The evicted guest, with a smile upon his lips, fastened his oilskins 80

more securely and pressed down his sou' wester. He walked to the bottom of the street and tried the handle of the gate leading to the wharf. As he had expected, it was locked. He took a penknife from his pocket and stooped down to examine the fastening. Suddenly he felt a strong clasp upon his shoulder. Before he had time even to struggle both arms were pinioned.

"I should like to know, mister, what you're up to?" Sergeant Sanders asked gruffly. "That wharf's private property anyway. What were you going to do with that penknife?"

"Pick the lock if I could," was the frank reply.

"I think you had better come along with me to the station," the sergeant decided. "Are you going to take it quietly?"

"I will come if you insist," the man in the oilskins answered. "I would rather not. It is simply a waste of time. What do you want to know? You can ask me anything here."

"Well, here's one question for you," Sanders demanded promptly. "What were you up to, trying to pick the lock of a private wharf?"

"I wanted to have a look at that steamer the captain refused me a passage in."

The sergeant slackened his grip slightly.

"Well, you can save yourself the trouble then," he said. "She's lying in the middle of the river waiting till there's news of her cargo."

“What sort of cargo does she carry?”

“God bless my soul—who’s doing this questioning—you or me?” the sergeant demanded. “Perhaps you don’t understand who I am, although I fancied that I heard Fred tell you. I’m Sergeant Sanders, and it’s my duty to keep an eye on any suspicious characters I may find round here.”

“Well, I’m not a suspicious character,” was the amiable response.

“All this would be much better done at the police station,” the sergeant declared, feeling in his pocket for his notebook. “Let’s have your name and address anyway.”

“You must have this first,” was the brusque reply.

The sergeant had once taken a half-hearted course in jiujitsu and dismissed it as being unworthy of his attention. What happened to him during the next few seconds, therefore, was beyond his understanding. He had released his grasp of the man he was questioning, and one hand was searching in his pocket for a pencil. Suddenly he was conscious of an excruciating pain in his back and a choking sensation in his throat. Before he had time to call out his feet had left the ground, he was seated in a puddle on the other side of the locked gate and his assailant, running in the shadow of the warehouses, was well away on the opposite side of the street.

“Hi, you there!” the sergeant shouted. “Stop him! Stop thief!”

The hackneyed cry rang out helplessly through the misty night.

There was no sound of a response, not a soul even in sight. The sergeant raised his voice again without result. Finally he rose to his feet, surprised to find himself without even a bruise, and devoted his attention to the gate. In a matter of a few minutes, with the blade of his favourite knife broken, he was able to force it open. There was an emergency police telephone box at the corner of the next street but, although the sergeant found his constable-in-charge alert and ready, although four men were scraped together and the whole of the immediate neighbourhood searched, nothing whatever was discovered of the tall, thin man in the long oilskins and the sou' wester hat.

CHAPTER IX

Captain Jan Henderson was awakened the following morning by two unpleasant circumstances. In the first place the midday sun —the captain was not an early riser—was pouring through his porthole, and during his brief sojourn in the Thames and its neighbourhood he preferred the rain and mist. Secondly, leaning over his bunk and shaking forcibly its metal sides was that extraordinarily unprepossessing youth, David, who formed part of the crew.

“Wake up, Captain, it’s most midday,” the latter enjoined.

The captain felt the cup of tea by his side. It had been cold for over two hours. He swung his formidable-looking legs out of bed, demonstrating the unlovely fact that he was still fully dressed so far as his lower extremities were concerned.

“What’s the time?” he demanded.

“Ten minutes past twelve,” the other replied.

The captain held his head for a moment.

“Did I tie up the dinghy all right when I came back?” he asked.

“The dinghy’s there,” the young man assured him. “It ain’t that. You told me to always let you know if anyone seemed to be taking an uncommon kind of interest in the ship.”

“Well?”

“There’s a cove in a small motorboat hanging round. He’s taken two photos and he’s got one of those land-measuring machines.”

The captain was already on the floor.

“Give me my boots, you saphead!” he shouted. “My coat, too. Quick. Where are they now?”

“It ain’t a ‘they,’ it’s one man alone,” the other replied. “He’s over to port side.”

“Wake Johnson and tell him to get the discharge refuse hose ready,” the captain enjoined.

The youth grinned and took his leave. The captain mounted the companionway, strode across the deck, and leaned over the port rail. His fury increased when he realised that the man who was seated in the small motorboat, within a yard or two of the steamer, was the stranger with whom he had had words in the Green Man the night before.

“What the hell are you doing here?” he bawled.

The unwelcome visitor touched his hat politely.

“I’m just having a look round your steamer, sir, in case you change your mind and offer to take me as far as Amsterdam,” he explained. “She’s more of a boat than she seems from a distance.”

“You go to hell and get away from here!” the captain shouted.

The man in the boat appeared hurt and surprised.

“I was just going to ask whether I might come on board,” he protested. “I have a bottle of whisky in the locker here.”

“Stay and choke yourself with it then,” the captain enjoined furiously. “I don’t take visitors on board. I’ve told you that before. I don’t take passengers either. I carry explosives and I have to pay my own crew double wages without mucking about with any blasted passengers. Sheer off, will you? We might be getting up steam at any moment and we’ll swamp you if we do.”

“Don’t you bother about me, Captain Henderson, and as for getting up steam, the tides are against you as you very well know, and you’ve not even a pilot yet, have you? There’s one or two questions, if you only cared to answer them, you might find it very well worth while.”

The skipper opened his mouth as though to indulge in a further course of obscenity. Instead, however, he became suddenly silent. He leaned a little farther over the rail.

“What kind of questions, mister?” he enquired.

“First of all, I should like to know the last time you were in the Persian Gulf?”

The captain gripped the rail of his steamer so tightly that his horned knuckles went white.

“And what should I be doing in the Persian Gulf,” he demanded, “with a craft like this? I’m not an oil tanker and I’m not fitted for grain carrying. Why do you suppose I might have been in the Persian Gulf?”

“I thought I saw you there—some time in July it was. Filthy hot. I was visiting the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Yes, I certainly thought I saw you, but I might have been mistaken.”

“You were mistaken,” Henderson declared, with a new note of sullenness in his tone. “And look here, mister: I’ve had enough of you. I had enough of you last night. I’ve had too much of you now. You just look out.”

The captain turned away and a stream of unintelligible orders were shouted down below. A torrent of refuse came pouring out of the waste pipes. The man in the boat stood up, started his engine, but kept out of gear. He watched the bilge, however.

“That won’t hurt me,” he called out. “But you’re a very rude man, captain. You are not hospitable. Just because I happen to be inquisitive about a few trifles that don’t really matter—oh, a few yards farther away won’t really make any difference. . . . I think I shall still be able to make myself heard.”

The unwanted guest slipped in his gear and, with a dexterous turn of the wrists, swung in a little circle farther away from the ship.

“Captain,” he protested reproachfully, “you shouldn’t do that. I’m a harmless journalist, here as much for your benefit as my own, with five hundred pounds in my pocket to spend on collecting material for my article. Why not treat me a little more

courteously?”

Captain Henderson remained for several moments an immovable figure. He stroked his unkempt beard. There was a covetous gleam in his watery eyes.

“Five hundred quid, did you say?”

“That was the sum,” the stranger agreed. “My paper never goes beyond that.”

“And what kind of information is it you want?”

“Oh, just a few notes about the way a British freighter goes about her business. A sketch of your interior, perhaps. A few photographs and a special reference as to what July feels like up the Persian Gulf. A few notes about your cargo, perhaps. That’s always interesting, you know.”

“What you want is an interview with me?” the captain queried. “That’s the slick term, isn’t it?”

“Precisely,” the other agreed, narrowing his circle a little and coming nearer to the steamer.

“I don’t see so much harm in that,” the captain ruminated. “There ain’t much that I can tell you, though, that’s worth five hundred quid.”

“I’ll take my chance. Shall I come aboard now?”

It was a bright sunny morning and there was an unusual amount of traffic in the river.

“I’d sooner it was night,” the captain proposed. “I’m expecting my owner aboard any time and he don’t like strangers. Make it eight o’clock next Wednesday evening.”

“You’re not by any chance sailing before then, are you?”

“I only ask you—do we look like it?” the other remonstrated. “Look at our water line. We shall be here for another month unless things look up. Can’t you see how we roll even with a bit of tide?”

“Yes, you’re light enough. Eight o’clock on Wednesday night then.”

The visitor bent over his engine. He shot off up-river leaving a long white streak of foam. The captain strolled to the bows and followed him with his eyes.

“I don’t like them nasty jobs,” he muttered to himself, “but he’s too curious, that gent is, much too curious. I’ll lay odds he’s no nark, either. That’s a gent’s voice, if ever I heard one. . . . Seems a pity, but he’s fair asking for it.”

CHAPTER X

The prince of restaurateurs was just completing a busy morning's work. His secretary's typewriter had ceased and a score of letters lay on his desk for signature. The chef, who had driven down a little late in his Bentley, had given his approval to a new consignment of caviar which Ordino had been anxious to buy. The wine steward had presented his cellar list—a more formidable affair—as, despite all his efforts with his less experienced clients, the old vintages of champagne were disappearing in alarming quantities. The place seemed quite a hive of industry when Gregory strolled in. Ordino rose at once to his feet. This was a very privileged visitor.

"Sir Gregory," he welcomed him, with a bow. "This is a great honour."

"Sure I am not disturbing you?" the latter asked. "You seem rather busy."

"My work, as a matter of fact, for the morning, is almost complete," Ordino confided. "It is as well, for I have been here since eight o'clock. Mr. Dumarchais, we are in agreement, I think. The special dinner the Duke is giving we will discuss after luncheon."

Monsieur Dumarchais bowed and took his leave. The wine steward, who had risen to his feet, still lingered.

"I have just arrived from the country," Gregory remarked,

seating himself in one of the high-backed chairs and accepting a cigarette. “Starting long before eight myself.”

“Ah, but I know what that means,” Ordino declared with a smile. “You wish to cheat this foolish law, yes?”

“I could have done it at my club, of course, but though everything else is first-class they have not learnt the art of making cocktails. I want one of those special Martinis after my journey which is one of your most amazing productions here—a Martini that is not a Martini—as soft as velvet and yet as dry as the finest Pommery.”

“Not another word, Sir Gregory,” the wine steward begged, rising to his feet. “It was I who taught Louis how to make that cocktail. I shall do myself the honour. Monsieur Ordino himself, after his long morning’s work, will probably be glad of one.”

“Excellent,” Ordino agreed. “But one moment first. Sir Gregory, you can help us. Our old vintages of champagne are disappearing—pooh! like the mist from a glass. What can we do? Soon we shall have nothing which is even fifteen years old. We are offered ninety cases of Number 151—your favourite wine, I think, Sir Gregory—but a fabulous price. Here is the offer.”

He passed a letter to Gregory who glanced it through.

“I should not hesitate,” was the latter’s prompt decision. “There is no more ’19 to be had, Ordino, I am sure of that. Buy these ninety cases and be sorry it is not more.”

“You hear Sir Gregory’s opinion?” Ordino said, turning to the

wine steward. “Telephone the order down directly you have seen about the cocktails. Serve the cocktails with some caviar sandwiches and smoked ham in my room.”

“Sounds good,” Gregory observed, with an anticipatory smile.

“If you would excuse me for two minutes while I scrawl my name at the bottom of these letters,” Ordino went on, “then I shall be perfectly free. There is a matter of hocks which we ought to discuss.”

“I am only an ordinary member of the wine committee, you know,” Gregory reminded the restaurateur.

“Lord Gleadow is content to leave all matters of choice in your hands,” the latter declared. “He has the highest opinion of your judgment.”

All the time his pen was scratching over the paper at lightning speed, yet one felt that every one of those letters was read. Twice he made slight alterations. One, after reading, he tore up.

“Changed my mind about that matter,” he explained briefly to his waiting secretary. “That will do. If anyone else wants me I am particularly engaged but you can telephone me.”

They passed through into the private sanctum. Ordino closed the door carefully.

“You will excuse my telephoning, Sir Gregory,” he begged.

“You had a reason, of course,” the latter remarked. “It really

didn't make any difference. I was coming to London to-morrow anyway. My brother is up in town, I understand, on leave, and I rather want to see him."

"It is the matter," Ordino confided, "of the *Henrietta Anne*. I think that she should leave the river for Amsterdam if possible."

There was a knock at the door. One of the maîtres d'hôtel appeared with a cocktail shaker and two goblets. He shook vigorously for a few moments with that quick jerky motion which a leading hotel proprietor once declared to be the only lesson worth receiving which New York had ever offered to London, and filled the two glasses to the brim without spilling a drop. The pale and delicious liquid was the color of yellow jade. Even as the two men took the glasses into their hands it began to clear. They drank solemnly.

"My compliments to Louis," Gregory declared, setting down his empty glass. "I feel like a spring lamb."

"Four hours of hard work are forgotten. Anxiety rolls from my mind," Ordino echoed enthusiastically.

They were alone again.

"About this matter of the *Henrietta Anne*?" Gregory asked.

The shadow of uneasiness returned to Ordino's features.

"I have had reports," he confided, "that she seems to have become an object of curiosity to several mysterious people."

"There are always mysterious people haunting the riversides,"

Gregory said a little impatiently.

“That’s true, without a doubt,” Ordino agreed, “but the curiosity of one, at any rate, of these people seems to be of a dangerous type. He has been trying to secure a passage to Amsterdam. Henderson found him taking photographs of the hull from a small motorboat. He would not be doing that sort of thing for nothing. There’s a lot of concealed space, of course, in the *Henrietta Anne* and a stranger who went into the hatches would find her a curious craft to understand.”

“How did this fellow explain his curiosity?”

“Said he was a journalist. Offered the captain a large sum of money to be interviewed.”

“This fellow Henderson himself is trustworthy, I suppose?” Gregory asked.

“He is the roughest, most uncouth, most brutal man ever in my life I have seen,” Ordino declared. “He would cheat anyone or murder anyone without hesitation. On the other hand he has the great quality of the man of the sea—he is entirely faithful to his employers.”

“I’m not at all sure,” Gregory reflected, “whether we are ready to get to work again so soon. The stuff is there, of course, but it needs a lot of manipulation. Lady Judith won’t be too keen about it, either.”

“Lady Judith might be dispensed with this time,” Ordino argued. “In any case the *Henrietta Anne* would be safer lying in Amsterdam Harbour than here.”

Gregory took a last sip of his cocktail. There was a shadow of distaste on his face. He was wearing his heavy glasses, which always gave to his features a dissatisfied expression.

"I'm getting rather bored with the Amsterdam business myself, Ordino," he said impressively.

"Think of the money you have made, Sir Gregory!" Ordino urged.

"One has never actually made the money in affairs of this sort," Gregory pointed out, "until the books are closed. When I was little more than a lad I did some gunrunning in South America. I could not keep out of it. I had to have adventure of some sort or another. We succeeded the first time. We succeeded the second. Then, I suppose I got beyond myself. I doubled the cargoes and chartered a larger steamer. The third time we failed and I lost more than all the profits of the first two attempts."

"It was without a doubt a lesson," Ordino conceded. "Yet, in this matter our interests are identical and I assure you that my suspicions go no further than that slight uneasiness about the visit of this supposed journalist. If the *Henrietta Anne* goes back at once to Amsterdam we can arrange a different port for her return visit."

Gregory considered for a moment or two.

"I shall have to consult Lady Judith," he said. "It would mean, you know, that we should have to start off almost at once to Macedonia and to Basra, and it would be a very bad time of the year for either place. If I could persuade her to stay at home for one trip I wouldn't hesitate for a moment."

“That Lady Judith should take a short rest is only natural,” Ordino pointed out, “but I beg that you will not alarm her. There is no necessity. Just put it that a tramp steamer lying in the Thames without any sign of a cargo is naturally an object of curiosity and that we think she would be better out of the way. We couldn’t move her to any other English port, as of course she would be reported at Lloyd’s.”

Gregory tapped a cigarette upon the table and lit it. He studied his companion for a moment curiously, took note of his well-fitting and well-chosen clothes, his elegant but expensive jewellery, the slight protuberance of his stomach which came from good living, the placid content of his face.

“You must be a pretty rich man yourself, Ordino,” he observed. “I almost wonder that you’re content to take the risk of this business.”

“If I had all the money in the world,” Ordino declared, drawing a deep breath, “I should still persist. If there were in my bank three million of your English pounds it would make no difference. Where would be the savour of life without this sweet passionate current of excitement and what excitement —I ask you, Sir Gregory, who have lived a man’s life, what excitement could there be without danger? None whatever. Take the curriculum of my daily life. My morning ride. My accounts. My greeting of my clients. The counting of the proceeds of the day. The week-ends sometimes at my country place. August at Deauville. A stolen holiday in January on the Riviera. All humdrum. Just the life every man with money leads. I venture to say, Sir Gregory,” he wound up, with a little tremor of passion in his tone and a gleam of fire in his eye, “that I am like you. I

do not care to walk upon the solid rock. I like to feel the earth tremble beneath my feet.”

“The longest speech I have ever heard you make, Ordino,” Sir Gregory remarked good-humouredly. “Alas, I am afraid that I am more than halfway in accord with you. Anyway, I will see Lady Judith—bring her here to-night, I expect—and she will probably agree.”

“If her ladyship is so gracious,” Ordino declared, as he walked to the door with his patron, “it would be a great joy to me. I have no fear—don’t think that for a moment—but when I have an instinct I love to follow it. I have been so all my life. Never once has that instinct failed me.”

Gregory patted the little man on the shoulder in friendly fashion. 97

“The historians all tell us that primeval man lived by instinct before his brain was developed,” he remarked, “so you are probably right.”

CHAPTER XI

The door of the saloon bar of the Green Man was pushed cautiously open. The face of that repulsive-looking cabin steward from the *Henrietta Anne*—pimpled, hare-lipped, with a mass of tousled hair and a wide-opened mouth displaying the most unpleasant teeth, was cautiously inserted. A few seconds later his shambling form followed.

"Captain here anywhere?" he called across to the barman through the mist of tobacco smoke and wisps of fog which had drifted in from outside every time the door had been opened.

The huge form of Captain Jan Henderson loomed uncertainly to his feet. He still held four or five playing cards in his hand, and it was apparent that he had been engaged in some game of chance.

"What's wrong now?" he demanded gruffly. "Didn't I tell you never to show your ugly mug in this place again?"

"But Captain," the youth protested, "you also told me if ever that slick-tongued, pale-faced sort of chap that brought his motorboat around the other day showed himself I was to let you know, wherever you were."

"Well?"

"He came around in that same little boat at eight o'clock. Said you had a date with him. He's been there on board an

hour, rummaging around."

The captain's language, as he clad himself in his shaggy overcoat and wrapped his muffler round his neck, was such that his three late companions paused in their game to listen with respectful envy.

"Coming on a night like this—and the night before we arranged," he thundered. "He's after no good, that chap ain't. He'll maybe get what he's asking for this very night. He wants a taste of the river."

Joe Havers, head of the wharf side Customs, withdrew his pipe from his mouth.

"You go steady, Captain," he advised. "If he's come a night before you expected him he ain't done no harm that I can see, and you'll get into trouble, a big chap like you, if you get knocking folks about."

"There's trouble brewing for someone," was the sullen reply, "but it ain't for me. . . . I'll be back and finish that game before closing, Fred."

Anyone accustomed to Captain Henderson's general demeanour would have been surprised at the change as he stepped out into the gusty night. There was no indecision about his gait, none of the uncertain movements of a half-drunken man. He walked straight as a line to the wharf, unfastened the rope of the dinghy himself, pushed his companion unceremoniously on one side and, taking the oars, sent her through the water so that her rowlocks bent and her frail timbers seemed to shiver with the driving force. Helping himself with the current he

encircled the dark hull of the ship, drifted to the ladder and, catching the rope, scrambled on board with the agility of a huge gorilla. Arrived there, he listened for a moment. There were no sounds below. No one to be seen. He moved aft and stood for a minute or two in one particular corner. He listened with his head turned downward. Then he sank onto his knees and listened again. Afterwards he rose to his feet, shook himself, and stumbled noisily to the gangway.

"Where did you leave this chap?" he asked David, who had just climbed on board.

"I left him down in the saloon. He's an inquisitive bloke, sir. He's been poking his nose into a lot of places."

"I'll give him something to be inquisitive about," the captain muttered.

"If you knock him up, mister, can I come down and see?" the youth demanded eagerly. "I'd like to see you do him in good and proper like you did that Dutch chap that got too inquisitive. My, there warn't much left of him when they took him to the hospital."

The captain grunted in the manner of one appreciating a compliment but his manner was none the more gracious.

"You stay on deck and keep a lookout," he ordered. "The other chaps may be coming back on board to-night."

He lumbered heavily down the stairs and flung open the door of the saloon. His visitor was seated in a corner smoking a cigarette and reading, a trifle listlessly, an old newspaper. The

captain, whose head very nearly touched the ceiling, came to a standstill a few yards past the threshold and stared at him inhospitably.

“You’re late,” the visitor said reproachfully. “I dare say your boy’s told you that I’ve been waiting here for over an hour.”

“That be damned for a tale,” the captain rejoined. “Our appointment was for to-morrow, Wednesday.”

The inquisitive journalist took a small diary from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it.

“Maybe you’re right,” he admitted. “It doesn’t make any difference, does it?”

“I’m not so sure about that,” was the surly reply. “It’s given you an hour on board to nose around by yourself. What the hell are you up to?”

“I’ll tell you as soon as we’ve had our talk. I’m here now, so we’d better get on with it.”

Henderson moved to a cupboard, produced a bottle of whisky and a syphon, two glasses and a box of Dutch cigars. He placed these upon the table, drew up a chair and seated himself.

“Come along, then, we’ll talk,” he proposed. “Help yourself. You’ve got a finnicky sort of air for a man who wanted to take a cruise on an old tub like this, but I dare say you’re not above a drink.”

“Considering I’ve had to wait for you for an hour,” the visitor

grumbled, “I rather expected it to be the first thing you would offer me.”

The captain filled his own glass half full and splashed a little soda water into it. He passed the bottle and syphon to his guest, who helped himself more moderately.

“Now, before we go any further,” the former said, taking a drink and filling his pipe, “what’s your blasted game? Have you anything to do with the police or the port authorities here? What do you mean by fussing round this steamer?”

“I didn’t come here to answer questions. I came to ask them,” was the brusque reply. “I have been a soldier, if that means anything to you, and soldiers and the police don’t often go together. I’m in the newspaper business now and, as I’ve told you before, I’m curious about this ship. I’m curious about what you’re doing lying here, what you’re waiting for, and I’m more curious still as to what you brought here and how you got rid of it. If you care to open your mouth, Captain Henderson, I’ll pay. Can I say more than that?”

“You’ll pay, eh?” the other repeated, smoking furiously. “Why don’t you draw your chair right up to the table?”

“Because I’ve been told that you’re a rough customer. I can take care of myself in any sort of a mix-up but I like space.”

The captain indulged in one of those unpleasant smiles which drew his lips apart but betrayed no gleam of humour.

“So you can take care of yourself, can you, Mr. Spy?” he jeered.

“You think you could hold your own against me if I decided to treat you as what I think you are?”

“I don’t want to boast,” was the cautious reply. “We will let actions count if they have to. As to being a spy, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve told you that I’m a newspaperman and it’s a newspaperman’s business to be curious. There’s a matter of five hundred pounds between you and me, Captain, if I get the information I’m looking for, and your photograph in the paper if you want it.”

“How do I earn that five hundred pounds?”

The lines in the face of the pseudo-newspaperman seemed to become deeper. He spoke tensely and with great deliberation.

“Simply enough. You have just come in from a voyage. You picked up cargo at several places—in the Persian Gulf, at Tikos on the Macedonian Coast, and I believe from a tanker in the Red Sea. You wound up at Amsterdam, of all places in the world, and after a month there you took on as cargo some six hundred sacks—a portion of which, at any rate, were delivered to two provision merchants in Tooley Street. I am just telling you this, Captain, so that you may know that I am not altogether ignorant concerning the *Henrietta Anne*. I want a little more information, though.”

“What’s at the back of your mind?” the captain asked, leaning farther across the table. “What sort of a cargo do you think I’ve been carrying?”

“Come to the last fence now, haven’t we?” the visitor remarked pleasantly. “It’s not for me to suggest. You might have me up for

libel, you know."

"So you think it's something dirty, eh?"

"I think you filled up with an awful lot of rubbish," was the candid reply. "I don't doubt that you brought a thousand cheeses or so from Amsterdam and five hundred boxes of eggs from Port Sudan, and bags of dates from Smyrna, but you carried something else as well. If you told me the whole truth I fancy that it would be quite an interesting story."

The captain was breathing heavily. He tossed off the remains of his tumblerful of whisky. He leaned across the table. His hairy enormous fists were clenched. His eyes were red.

"Say it, guv'nor," he invited.

"Why not?" the other answered. "My editor particularly wants a few sidelines on the drug traffic."

For one moment the captain stood upright, terrifying and enormous, blotting out the whole of the light from the globe above his head, then he half lurched, half sprang forward and his great fist shot out across the table. His selected victim, however, with no particular sign of haste, was already standing with his back to the wall half a dozen feet away, and something even more sinister than the captain's fist was the small revolver clenched tightly in his right hand.

"Captain Henderson," he said, "I think I could deal with you without this but, you see, I don't believe in risks when they are not necessary. If you come any closer to me you know what to expect. We have played at cross purposes long enough. Here's

the whole truth for you. My paper wants to expose a certain contraband traffic in which I believe you are engaged. If you want to give me all the information I require that five hundred pounds I offered you shall be a thousand, and your name shall be kept out of it. There's a fair offer for you. I have already picked up a few oddments of information. I could show you now the false spacing in your decks, where there's room to conceal a lot of stuff without mixing it up with the cargo. Tell me who's behind you in this traffic. Tell me all that I want to know and you shan't be touched."

The captain was breathing hard. The truculence had gone from his manner but there was danger in his eyes, danger in that stealthy watch he kept upon his opponent's weapon.

"If I told you all that you wanted to know, you mealy-faced spy," he shouted, "I should be where I deserved to be—in hell—by this time to-morrow night. Whatever our business may be, and whoever my masters are, we go about our job like men. I have nothing to tell you for your filthy newspaper. If you hadn't brought that plaything with you I would have beaten you up just for the pleasure of it. As it is—get off my boat!"

The intruder picked up his hat. He seemed entirely at his ease but he kept the revolver in his hand and his eyes watched the captain's every movement.

"My newspaper," he went on, "is also interested in suicides and murders when there's any mystery about them."

There was a queer silence. Through one of the open portholes came the sound of the faint sobbing of the tide, now running

more swiftly, and from somewhere on the other side of the river came the shrill whistle of a tug. The captain coughed and spat heedlessly upon the floor.

“What’s the new idea?” he demanded.

“Suicide or murder, it doesn’t matter which,” the other continued. “They are both interesting. Make jolly good headlines for the paper. A man was either thrown from the top of Bunter’s Buildings or threw himself over, a few weeks ago, whilst you were lying up alongside the wharf—soon after you arrived, in fact. Then there was a girl—Judy of Bunter’s Buildings—who used to sing and dance at the Green Man. She disappeared about the same time. Quite a lot of interesting things have happened round here lately. Couldn’t you let me have a little gossip about some of them?”

“What do you think I am—a blasted criminal?” the captain demanded, with a sudden return of his threatening manner. “First of all you want me to own up to carrying contraband and now you think, because these Buildings were only a hundred yards or so away, that I know something about the blooming mess that was picked up in the alley there. Even that ain’t enough for you. Because I’ve had a glass or two with her when we’ve been merry you’re beginning to ask me questions about Judy of Bunter’s Buildings. You and I ain’t going to be friends, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is. I don’t like you. I don’t trust you. I don’t want you on my ship again. That’s plain enough, ain’t it?”

The unwelcome visitor had reached the exit. Above him were patches of sky visible through the fog and, in one particular spot, a single star. Later in life he remembered those few seconds,

because they brought to him a queer premonition of danger, as swiftly contradicted by the apparent security of his position. The captain, three steps below, apparently resigned, was mixing himself another drink. There was not a sound on deck but the lapping of the water against the ship's side. He mounted two more steps. He heard the sizzling of the soda-water syphon, the gurgling of the drink in the captain's throat. After that nothing else. Something unearthly seemed to spring from the hatch. There was a crashing pain in his head. He was slipping down the steps again. Life seemed to have gone from his limbs. His last conscious vision was of the captain standing on the threshold of the saloon, with a beatific grin upon his face.

Captain Jan Henderson, an hour or so later, leaned back in his chair and threw the cards upon the table.

"Is there time for another deal, Fred?" he called out.

The barman glanced at the clock.

"Ten minutes only," he announced. "Any drinks wanted?"

"Serve 'em quick and don't ask such damn' silly questions," Joe Havers, the Customs House man, answered. "Captain, you ain't quite up to your ordinary."

"Give me a double one then, Fred," the latter bawled out. "That'll show you whether I ain't up to form."

"It's my belief," Joe remarked, with a wink at the others, "that the captain had company on board this evening."

“That newspaper bloke never waited for me,” was the surly retort. “He promised to bring down the money for his passage, provided I could get permission to take him. I got the permission all right from the owners and then whilst David was up here fetching me he sloped off. Not a sign of him when I got there.”

“Good job, I should think,” one of the other seafaring men remarked. “Them passengers is more trouble than they’re worth, I always say, and I’ve had a few in my time. They want to rough it for their ’ealth, they say, and they’re willing to lend a hand. Everything they touch they spoil. Whatever they try to do they do wrong, and they’re sick all over the place. No passengers for me. Not on your life!”

The captain finished his whisky with a grunt of assent. He was known as a heavy drinker but even his friends were surprised when, with his eyes glued upon the clock, he shouted for another.

“There’s two minutes, Fred. Give it into my hand and it’s down.”

The barman glanced at the clock and hastened anxiously across the room. His customer snatched the bottle from his hand and half filled the tumbler.

“There,” he grunted, draining its contents. “I reckon I’ve got to sleep to-night. Good night, all.”

He tumbled out into the darkness. Joe Havers stroked his beard thoughtfully.

“Something wrong with the old man to-night,” he remarked. “I reckon he must have quarrelled with that chap as was talking of going as a passenger.”

“He said he never turned up, though,” Fred reminded them from behind the bar.

“I ’eard ’im,” one of the others echoed.

“I seen that guy myself at nine o’clock,” Joe confided. “He was hanging round in a small motorboat as I came across.”

There was a moment’s silence. They all had the same idea.

“A foggy night,” someone growled. “You might easily have been mistook, Joe.”

CHAPTER XII

Judith, a cigarette in her mouth and a long slip of paper in her hand, glanced around at her guests happily assembled in the bar at Ordino's and mentally counted them.

"Of course," she exclaimed, "I know who's missing! It is Major Granderson."

Gregory glanced at his watch.

"He's ten minutes late," he remarked.

"He didn't strike me as the sort of man who would be likely to forget a dinner party."

"Mistaken the date perhaps," Gregory observed. "It doesn't make thirteen or any trouble of that sort, I hope, because if so I could ring up Ronnie. I haven't seen him yet."

"I shouldn't bother," she answered. "We are only ten anyway. As a matter of fact we were a man over. I will give Major Granderson another three minutes and then we will go upstairs."

Lady Judith's parties were always smart and generally interesting, but on this occasion there was a slight sprinkling of family. There was her sister, Lady Mary Gowan, with her husband, who was an exceedingly earnest member of the House of Commons and made a great fuss always about accepting an invitation in the middle of the session. There was Felix Jodrill,

the youngest Cabinet Minister, whose wife had disputed with Judith, a few years before, the position of the most beautiful débutante of the season. General Hartland James was quite the most important person at the War Office, and Sybil Elton was the young woman whose novels were the rage of the moment. There was another author—Sir Gervase Duke—who wrote one novel of a thousand pages every three years and whose meticulous corrections of every sheet of manuscript, in the opinion of his readers, took a great deal of the fire out of his writing. The young Duke of Perthshire was extraordinarily elegant with his perfectly fitting long coat, his marvellously tied white cravat and a gardenia which looked as though it had come five minutes before from the hothouse. He was reported to be looking for a second Duchess without that complete success which his immaculate appearance and entire absence of brain might have assured. Judith touched him on the arm and motioned to her eldest woman guest.

"We are one short but we won't wait. Ordino has prepared a *délice* of something or other with our vodka and I promised him we would not be more than ten minutes behind time."

"And who," his Grace asked, "is the delinquent?"

"A Major Granderson," Judith confided. "An agreeable man but very quiet. I don't suppose you know him."

"I think I do," the Duke replied. "Someone pointed him out to me once as a brainy sort of chap. I can't remember whether they called him a Staff College Professor or whether he was one of those new military policemen we hear about. Anyway I was told in confidence, so perhaps I had better

not try to remember."

Lady Judith was silent for a moment. Then she began to laugh.

"How conscientious you are," she murmured.

He dropped his eyeglass and looked down at her.

"I believe you are pulling my leg," he complained.

"I shouldn't dare," she answered, as they turned into the restaurant. "There, you see," she went on, pointing to a place at the brilliantly arranged round table, "you have to pay the penalty of your greatness and sit on my right. The name cards are so clear that I think everyone else will discover where they are. Lady Seymour, you are the other side of the Duke. General, you are on my left. Gregory, you are between Lilah and Sister Sue. Now, we're all right."

The Duke smiled.

"Sister Sue," he repeated. "That's great."

"Lady Susan, your sister, of course. We always call her Sister Sue," Judith confessed. "A trifle obvious, I am afraid, but we should not know her by any other name. Don't you think this place gets more wonderful every day?"

"Jolly good chophouse," the Duke agreed. "I always turn in about once a week. I am rather fond of the Marlborough, though, for a quiet meal."

"That doesn't mean that you are becoming a woman hater, I

hope?" Judith asked him.

"The boot is on the other foot," the young man declared, with a comic attempt at ruefulness. "On the contrary, the women are beginning to hate me."

"They will grow out of that," Judith encouraged him. "You see, it is always rather trying to be the youngest Duke. . . . Are you going to give us anything wonderful in the way of manœuvres this year, General?" she enquired, turning to her left-hand neighbour.

"It's early to decide that," was the very military-like response. "We may be at war, you know, before the manœuvres occur. The *Daily Express* thinks so, at any rate!"

"I didn't know that anyone read the papers nowadays," someone said, from across the table. "Wasn't it the Prime Minister who advised the country the other day to make up their own minds and listen no more to the sinister whisperings of the serpent or the bluster of the tinsel John Bull? I thought it rather good."

"I wonder whom he could have meant?" the Duke ruminated.

There was a general laugh. Then caviar appeared served in a mysterious form. Vodka was poured out. The business of the meal commenced. Lady Judith summoned Ordino.

"If Major Granderson should arrive," she said, "do beg him to come and take his place. If he is simply just late I am sure it is not through thoughtlessness."

"Granderson? I know him," the General declared. "Most

punctilious fellow. You may be sure if he was one of your guests he has some very good reason for not showing up. Brainy chap too. He did very well in Egypt. On my staff there. They took him over from Intelligence. Sir Gregory down there took his place for a month or so, I remember. Fine chap, Sir Gregory was, but the job was nearly finished when he came. He was all the time fretting to get back to the front."

"Been for a yachting cruise, haven't you, Lady Judith?" the Duke asked.

She nodded.

"We have," she admitted. "But let me warn you—we are not going to answer any questions about it! We found a few new places and we don't want them spoilt."

"But amongst your friends, my dear," Lady Seymour murmured.

"It is our friends we are always trying to get rid of," Judith reminded her. "Our enemies would not speak to us and the people we don't know would not matter. It is our friends we are afraid of."

"Can't follow Lady Judith sometimes," the Duke remarked to his right-hand neighbour.

"Dear Judith," Lady Seymour drawled, "she does wander off now and then, doesn't she? I am convinced that she and Gregory have some secret reason for keeping that yachting cruise to themselves. Mr. Cranage, who was supposed to have been on board some of the time, would have told me, I am sure, all about it, but he has gone to Capri. I had a note from him this

morning and a picture postcard. Such a charming picture card—all flowers and lemon trees. Not a pleasant thing to draw out of a post bag when you are listening to the wind blowing round the square! What have you done with your yacht, Judith?"

"Dry-docked her for the moment. Takes too many men to run, these hard times."

Lady Seymour sighed.

"I wish we could afford a yacht. I adore the sea."

"Should have been in the Navy myself if I hadn't been the eldest son," her neighbour volunteered. "Evidently your friend Granderson is not coming, Lady Judith," he went on. "Always rather an interesting speculation as to what has happened to a man, I mean a fellow with good manners like Granderson, when he doesn't turn up at a dinner party like this."

"It always used to be a motor-car breakdown," the General observed. "Nowadays such a thing doesn't happen and, if it does, there are so many garages with cars to hire, like mushrooms all over the place, that a fellow doesn't get a chance of a reasonable excuse if he wants one!"

"Curiosity begins to assail me," Judith remarked, beckoning to a hovering maître d'hôtel. "John, get the telephone boy to ring up Major Granderson's rooms. If he is there ask him if he has forgotten my dinner party. If not, find out where he is."

"Certainly, your ladyship," the man replied, hurrying away.

“Is that curiosity or interest?” Gregory asked from the other end of the table.

“Alas,” Judith regretted, “I don’t know Major Granderson well enough to be able to call it interest. It is sheer curiosity. As the General was pointing out, in these days of fool-proof motor cars, telephones and wireless, the old-fashioned stream of excuses has run out. The telephone answers almost every possibility from influenza to murder.”

The conversation drifted on to other subjects. It touched lightly but sincerely upon the exquisite character of Ordino’s cuisine.

“Paris can give you nothing like this now,” Sir Gervase Duke, whose brother was Ambassador there, pronounced. “I am over there every fortnight and, upon my word, if I were asked to take anyone out and give them a dinner like this I couldn’t do it.”

“Yet Dumarchais, the chef, is a Frenchman,” Gregory reminded them. “He was with one of the Rothschilds for years. This is the first ‘public institution,’ as he calls a restaurant or a club, in which he has ever worked. He hesitated for quite a time before he came to us; said he was afraid he might lose the fineness of his touch.”

“Artists are incomprehensible people,” Felix Jodrill murmured. “One can never tell whether they really feel a thing or whether they are being affected about it.”

“I only know,” Gregory observed, “that we had to do up the small private kitchen where Dumarchais himself works in pure white for him. He would not have the green stripes which made our original decoration.”

“Hence, perhaps,” the Cabinet Minister remarked, “the perfection of this sauce. Every man should be granted his foibles. I could not make a speech that satisfied even myself unless I had a glass of barley water by my side, and yet the first thing I do afterwards is to hurry to the smoke-room and drink a sound whisky-and-soda to get the taste of the barley water out of my mouth.”

The General, who had just finished his fish, leaned back in his chair.

“If the rest of the dinner continues in this marvellous fashion,” he proposed, “and I feel sure that it will, I think we should send a note of appreciation, signed by us all, to the chef. Naturally, being the guests of Lady Judith, we are a select company whose comments he might perhaps welcome.”

“It is a very nice idea,” Lady Judith agreed.

“I shall sign with pleasure,” the Duke announced.

The maître d’hôtel whom Judith had despatched on her errand returned with a telephone slip in his hand. Judith stared at it for a moment before she read it out.

“This sounds rather strange,” she remarked. “It appears to be from Major Granderson’s butler. He says that his master was expected home to dinner last night, that he did not arrive, nor has he communicated with his flat in any way whatsoever. They are entirely at a loss to know what has become of him and are on the point of communicating with the police.”

“A mystery in our midst,” Gregory exclaimed with a slightly

incredulous smile. “What a pity the world’s greatest novelist is not here to-night.”

CHAPTER XIII

Lady Judith's dinner party, although a complete success, was not one of those juvenile affairs which last all through the evening and spread into the supper hour. Mr. Gowan and Felix Jodrill were both obliged to leave at eleven on political affairs and their departure was the signal for the breaking-up of the party. Judith and Gregory alone lingered on, and they ordered some fresh coffee in a distant corner.

"Queer thing about Major Granderson," Judith remarked.

"Don't like it at all," Gregory confessed. "I hope he hasn't been fooling around the *Henrietta Anne*. Henderson is a nasty fellow to tackle if he gets suspicious."

"Have you ever formed any idea," she asked, "as to who the man was who was thrown, or fell, down from the fire escape at Bunter's Buildings?"

"Never," he answered. "To tell you the truth, when I have a little more time it is one of the matters I want to look into. He was a spy of some sort—that's certain."

"Rather a curious thing happened when I was down at home," she went on. "Neilson Forbes was one of the house party. He is a sort of distant connection of ours and we used to see quite a great deal of him."

"I know him," Gregory said. "Decent sort of fellow. High

up in the Home Office now, isn't he?"

"I think he's senior amongst the permanent officials," Judith confided. "One night at dinner the conversation somehow or other turned to unsolved crime. Well, of course, there's no certainty at all that the death of that man at Bunter's Buildings, whoever he may have been, was a crime. It might have been suicide or it might have been an accident, but Neilson referred to it."

"In what way?"

"He asked us if we remembered reading about a man having been found dead after a fall from a high tenement building down by the river. I remembered it, of course, and he told me that in a report from the office that morning they had sent him a copy of an anonymous letter giving the man's name correctly and hinting at some further particulars if a consideration was forthcoming."

"It's rather a coincidence," Gregory reflected. "I suppose he didn't become—more confidential?"

"I did all I could," she replied. "I think he felt that he ought not to have mentioned the matter at all, only it came into the conversation so naturally. He tried to evade my further questions. I could not help gathering the idea, however, that they were working upon the information they had received."

"It probably won't lead them anywhere," Gregory remarked.

"I dare say not," she agreed, "but, to return to the subject of Neilson Forbes, look at the third table from the left inside the door."

“By Jove, there the fellow sits!” Gregory exclaimed. “Had you seen him when you told me about this?”

“I had neither seen him nor had I the slightest idea that he was in the room,” she declared. “It is just one of those puzzling coincidences that always give me an uneasy feeling. What is he doing here, I wonder? I know that he hates all restaurants and clubs except his own, he doesn’t dance, and he cares nothing about food.”

“Do you know who it is with him?” Gregory asked. “His face seems familiar.”

She shook her head.

“I fancy I’ve seen him, too, before, but I can’t recall him,” she acknowledged.

“I know Neilson isn’t a member unless he’s been elected during the last few weeks,” Gregory meditated. “He’s a dry old stick to find his way into a place like this for supper. I wonder what they’re talking about. Whenever they’re at a loss for an idea they seem to look across at us.”

“I have a feeling,” she confided, “that they are talking about the Bunter’s Buildings mystery.”

Gregory’s dark eyes were for a moment troubled. He lit another cigarette and smoked thoughtfully.

“Things,” he observed, “are getting more and more mysterious. Look who’s talking to them!”

Ordino, on his way down the room, had been hailed by Neilson and beckoned to the table. He was standing now in a characteristic attitude, the attitude indeed of Sem's famous caricature—his hands behind his back, his urbane smile giving him an almost seraphic expression. He had evidently been introduced to the stranger who was now talking to him earnestly.

"Well, we shall know who Neilson's companion is anyway," Judith murmured.

Her curiosity, however, was not so immediately appeased. Ordino, after his brief conversation with the two men, made his way to the other end of the room without glancing towards Lady Judith or her companion. He remained talking there for several minutes and then returned to his office. Gregory looked after him with a puzzled frown.

"That's quaint," he remarked. "The first time in my life I've known Ordino show any inclination to avoid us. I think I shall send for him."

"Don't do anything of the sort," Judith begged earnestly. "There is no cleverer man in small matters than Ordino. He has some reason for keeping away from us without a doubt. I think that Neilson Forbes' guest asked who we were."

"Let's give him an opportunity for believing that we're professional dancers," Gregory suggested, pushing the table away.

Judith laughed as she followed his lead. They danced for about half-an-hour until, in fact, even the supper crowd began to diminish. On their way back to their places Neilson Forbes rose

to his feet and intercepted them. The conversation, for a moment or two, was trivial. Judith and Neilson Forbes spoke of their recent meeting at Bramber Castle, then the latter turned to his companion.

“May I present my friend, Mr. Harrison Glynde?” he asked. “Lady Judith Martellon. Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt. Glynde remains very much in the background,” his friend explained, “but he has been at Scotland Yard almost as long as I’ve been in the Home Office.”

“That sounds very interesting,” Gregory observed. “You must have a great deal of common ground to traverse.”

Neilson Forbes nodded indifferently.

“We certainly have,” he admitted. “We should have more except that I personally am not very much interested in the criminal side of our administration.”

Glynde, who had the air of being rather a heavy man, a little out of place amongst such gaiety, suddenly surprised them by his cultivated, almost musical voice.

“What my friend Forbes says is quite true,” he admitted, “but there are exceptions every now and then. We have just been talking about one case which interests us both exceedingly. I do not suppose you have even read about it, Lady Judith. It is the case of a man who either committed suicide or was thrown from the top of a fire escape down into an alley twelve or thirteen storeys below.”

Lady Judith shook her head a little languidly.

"I never read horrors," she confided. "Not that sort of horror, at any rate. Modern fiction tortures us enough mentally."

"I remember the affair quite well," Sir Gregory put in. "Not one of your people's most brilliant efforts, Mr. Glynde, if I may say so. If I remember rightly the story of the crime has never been made clear nor the identity of the dead man been disclosed."

"The case presented special difficulties," Glynde murmured. "By the way, may I compliment you upon your beautiful dancing, Lady Judith? It has been quite a treat to sit here and watch you and Sir Gregory. I am afraid if I could perform like that I should waste a good many evenings."

"Not he," his host remarked, with a smile. "He's too afraid, as it is, of letting a single criminal slip through his fingers. They call him the 'human bloodhound' round at the Criminal Department of my show."

Lady Judith laughed softly. She raised her beautiful eyes and looked Glynde in the face.

"Do you ever make mistakes?" she asked.

"Not often," he answered gravely. "Our methods nowadays don't allow of it. . . ."

There was a little crush round the table caused by some arriving guests, so Lady Judith and her companion passed on with a nod of farewell. Two or three waiters rushed to move their corner table for them. A maître d'hôtel eagerly suggested fresh coffee —a little *fine* perhaps. Lady Judith decided upon fresh coffee

and lit a cigarette.

“Well,” she observed, “it is an interesting world we live in. Why are you looking so thoughtful, Gregory?”

“I was wondering why on earth that fellow Glynde asked to be presented to you.”

She laughed at him gaily.

“A good many men in their times have gone as far as that,” she reminded him.

Gregory’s answering smile was slow in coming. He seemed still troubled.

“Then I was also wondering,” he confessed, “what on earth made them go out of their way to mention the Bunter’s Buildings affair to us.”

Judith was suddenly grave. She looked across the room to where the two men were still talking earnestly. Glynde was apparently making a design of something upon the tablecloth with the end of a fork. His companion was emphasising his remarks by tapping the palm of one hand with the forefinger of the other.

“The long arm of the law, Gregory,” she murmured.

The smile which parted his lips was one of genuine humour. His eyes flashed softly as he looked down at her. For a moment his face was reminiscent of some of the older prints of “The Laughing Cavalier.”

“Not quite long enough to ever reach us, dear Judith,” he assured her.

CHAPTER XIV

Sub-Commissioner Harrison Glynde, having asked for an interview on a matter of urgency, was ushered into his Chief's room on the following morning. General Sir Gerald Wolff took the unusual step of temporarily dismissing his secretary.

"Well, what is it, Glynde?" he asked.

"Bad news, sir," was the regretful reply. "They've got through again."

"A bad business?"

"I'm afraid so. I've come to the conclusion that within the last week or so one of the largest deliveries of drugs which has ever reached London has been passed through and safely distributed."

The Chief Commissioner was cold but angry.

"How have you arrived at that highly unpleasant conclusion?" he demanded.

Glynde touched the paper he was carrying.

"I have a list here," he pointed out, "of some eighty names. Every man or woman on this sheet we know to be a consumer of drugs. I have made it my business to track down as many of them as I could and have come across them personally during the last

fortnight."

"And you found them a pretty broken-down lot, eh?"

Harrison Glynde shook his head.

"Quite the contrary, sir. You have not studied the effect of these poisons as I have. Nearly every one of them seems to be in the best of health. Every one of them has the appearance of having just got back from a holiday. They seem to have escaped all this influenza and colds and to be at the top of their form."

"I'm damned if I understand you," was the Chief's comment.

"It is the normal action of nearly all well-known drugs, sir," the other replied. "The effect at first is completely stimulating. Three weeks ago Charlie Bream was talking of giving up his part at His Majesty's and going down into Cornwall for a six months' rest. The doctors all declared they could do nothing for him. His condition was entirely due to drug taking. The supply ran short, and he collapsed. Now he looks as well as any man in the world, the show seems to have taken on a new lease of life, and he has never acted more brilliantly. Then there is Masters."

"The M.P.?"

Glynde nodded.

"He has scarcely opened his mouth in the House for two months. Everyone was putting him down as a disappointment. Three times during this last week he has spoken brilliantly."

“There’s an article in the *Times* this morning,” Sir Gerald observed, frowning. “It declared that whenever there was a reshuffle of offices he was bound to go into the Cabinet.”

“Probably by that time he will be a complete wreck,” Glynde remarked. “These are only one or two instances, though. I have been visiting the fashionable resorts. Lady Glengowan, giving a great party last night at Ordino’s, looked marvellous. Two or three of Lady Judith Martellon’s guests on my list were the life and soul of the party. Charlie Brooks, who used to write those articles in the Sunday paper . . . They were becoming perfect drivel—now all of a sudden they have become just as brilliant as ever. He is underlined as an absolute certainty. Anyway, we have to face the fact that an enormous consignment of drugs has been delivered and distributed under our very noses.”

The Chief Commissioner had recovered from his first fit of anger. He leaned wearily back in his chair. For the moment he was less absorbed by the humiliating failure of the great forces under his control than by the psychical problem itself.

“To think,” he reflected, “that all these men and women, with each little burst of new life they gain from these foul drugs, are practically wiping themselves out of existence! One or two more relapses and they will be done for. Brilliant souls treading the path to perdition.”

“The whole world is suffering in a lesser degree, of course, from weakness of volition,” Glynde observed, as he took a cigarette from the box which his Chief had passed over. “Half the people one meets are unfit through overeating, or

overdrinking, or oversmoking; and all Harley Street knows it can only make a fortune and obtain a peerage, not by telling their patients the truth, but by helping them as much as possible to keep fit notwithstanding their excesses. This drug business is a step lower down, though. It's perfect hell to think what this little crowd of really brilliant people are doing to themselves."

"Oh, hang the moral side of it," Sir Gerald exclaimed savagely. "We have failed in our job. That's all we need to remember. We are up against brains which are outwitting ours. We have failed to discover how the stuff gets through into the country. We have failed to discover how it is distributed. Have you any ideas, Glynde?"

"I have ideas, sir," the other replied. "The trouble is that they are only half formed."

"In what direction?"

"We have been watching the wrong people, sir. That's what I think. We have concentrated upon the wrong places and the wrong class of society."

The Chief, who had been swinging himself back in his chair, suddenly sat still. He gazed at his companion from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Go on, Glynde," he invited.

"What I mean, sir, is this. Our Customs men are almost overzealous. Every known port is filled with them and their Secret Service shadowers, examination of all sorts of

merchandise is twice as careful as it was, and every criminal who seems to us too prosperous is watched and a dossier kept of his doings. We have vast machinery at work, but it brings us in nothing."

The Chief Commissioner glanced at the clock upon his table.

"Well?" he asked brusquely.

"I ask myself whether we are watching the right people. We have been rather inclined to take it for granted that a rotten business like the drug traffic and its distribution is naturally carried on by established criminals. It may be nothing of the sort. It may be done in quarters and by people who have never been under suspicion of a dishonourable action in their lives."

"The theory is approved," the Chief declared. "I am interested, Glynde. Move on a peg. Have you any glimmerings of an idea as to actual personalities?"

Glynde shook his head sadly.

"I have not one tittle of evidence against anyone," he confessed. "Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that all the polished and successful maîtres d'hôtel, managers of hotels and those sort of people, are foreigners. They get into the country and establish their reputations very easily. Even if their dossiers when they arrived were a little doubtful they soon build up clean records. And they have brains," Glynde went on softly. "Marvellous brains, some of these men. Tact enough for any position in life. Well-mannered enough for a court. They're a dangerous class, sir."

"I am duly impressed," Sir Gerald admitted, "but of course you know that all this is theorising."

"Absolutely," Glynde acknowledged. "And I may be imperilling my future by even the barest attempt to prove my theories. All the same, I am prepared to take my risk."

"Is there anything you want me to do?" the Chief demanded.

"Yes. I can conceive the fact that the people whom I dimly suspect may be succeeding chiefly through the swiftness of their actions and their unusual sources of information. I should like you to give me a blank search warrant which I can fill in and use at five minutes' notice."

"God bless my soul!" Sir Gerald exclaimed. "That's a dangerous business, Glynde."

"We've got to proceed on new lines," the other replied doggedly.

"A search warrant you could use at Buckingham Palace or at the Athenæum Club, eh?"

"Both of those places shall be out of bounds," Glynde promised.

"Can you give me an idea—"

"Not an idea," Glynde interrupted. "I want it in my pocket and a score of plain-clothes men, whom I should arrange for myself, within call. I will admit—if I make a false shot I'm broke. I am willing to take the risk, though."

The Chief Commissioner produced his fountain pen.

“I’ll sign,” he promised.

Glynde drew a blank form from his pocket and laid it upon the desk. Sir Gerald scrawled his name in the allotted space. Glynde blotted and folded up the document. 133

“Give me time to pack a bag when you make use of it,” Sir Gerald begged grimly.

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CHAPTER XV

Gregory, strolling down Grosvenor Street in the waning light of the afternoon, raised his eyebrows in surprise as he encountered his brother Ronald leaving the quiet but handsome premises of a recently opened club.

“Hello, Ronnie,” he greeted him. “What are you doing coming out of that place?”

There was a touch of defiance in the young man’s tone as he answered.

“That’s Louis’ new show,” he confided. “I went in to have a word with him but he’s out.”

“What on earth did you want to join a place like that for?” Gregory asked. “Surely Ordino’s is good enough for you?”

“Too good,” the young man replied, a little sulkily. “Ordino is beginning to put on airs.”

“Rubbish!” Gregory scoffed. “Let’s stroll down to the Ritz and have an early cocktail, and tell me about it.”

“I don’t feel much like a cocktail,” was the indifferent reply, “and there isn’t much to tell. However, I’ll come along. You remember that little girl in Bellamy’s show, kind of platinum hair she had and dark eyes? Sally Bennett her name is.”

“I think I remember her,” Gregory assented. “I remember someone telling me that you were going about a good deal with her. I was beginning to wonder, in fact, whether I should not have to come the heavy brother! I don’t see what she has to do with your joining Louis’, though.”

“Well, that ass Ordino wouldn’t let her in,” the young man explained. “He said the club was chock-a-block full and he had a waiting list of nearly five hundred. Apart from that he had evidently heard something about Sally. She’s rather thick sometimes, I know.”

“Get’s a little squiffy, doesn’t she?”

“I have seen her like that. That and the other thing.”

“Ordino is obliged to look after his show,” Gregory pointed out. “I was wondering why, though, with all the other clubs to choose from, you should decide upon Louis’?”

Ronald looked straight ahead of him. It struck his brother that, for a young guardsman who had won some distinction at athletics, he was not looking his best.

“Been hitting it up a bit lately, I should think, haven’t you, Ronnie?”

“Perhaps I have,” was the casual admission. “I feel devilish slack anyway. What with the rotten weather, and that filthy Grand National, and Sally being sulky with me about Ordino’s, life doesn’t seem all honey just now.”

“How much did you get stuck for on the Grand National?”

Gregory asked. “I might manage a reasonable amount for you.”

The young man flushed.

“Gregory,” he protested, “it’s not good enough. I know you’ve only about six thousand a year of your own and you allow mother and the girls nearly half of that and a thousand a year to me. You can’t have any money to spare. With your allowance and Uncle Fred’s money I should be in clover. Then, of course, I ought to have had place money on Cinnamon, but I thought she was such a cert.”

“Have you paid your bookie yet?”

“Not yet.”

“How much do you owe him?”

Ronald’s expression became gloomier than ever. It was several seconds before he replied.

“About eighteen hundred pounds.”

Gregory was silent for a moment. His tone when he spoke, however, was quite mild and friendly.

“That’s rather a lot in proportion to your income, young fellow, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is,” was the somewhat irritable admission. “Don’t I know it? Somehow or other just lately, though, I seem to be dead out of form. I can’t remember things. A couple of cocktails make me half tight and at times I feel like going and hanging

myself."

Gregory passed his arm through his brother's.

"I'll give you a cheque for the eighteen hundred if you'll come in and see me later on," he promised. "Now, if you don't want to go to the Ritz, let me ask you one other question. You decided to leave Ordino's because he wouldn't let in your little dancing lady. He had the soundest reasons in the world for not doing that, as you ought to know. You decided to join Louis' club. Decent place, I dare say, but not quite the same thing. Tell me the honest reason."

"You will put it across me if I do, Gregory," the young man declared miserably.

"I haven't often played the elder brother, have I?" Gregory replied. "I have a reason for asking you, Ronnie. Out with it, there's a good fellow."

"Well, here you are, then," the other confided. "I told you I had been rotten ever since that toss I took at Newbury. One of the lads put me onto some stuff that Ordino gets now and then—not really a drug but something like it, of course. It did me an awful lot of good at the time, but I seem to keep on wanting it. Now Ordino has got the wind up because you are my brother, I suppose, and you're the big noise there, and anyway I'm not a member any more. He won't let me have any more. I know Louis gets it—gets it cheaper too, and stronger—so I'm changing to his club. Now you know all about it."

Gregory, for several moments, remained absolutely silent. He seemed suddenly to have aged. The lines which had always

been in his face and which were, in their way, becoming, had suddenly deepened. There was a light in his eyes almost of horror. He had the air of one who had received a shock.

“I say, what’s wrong, Gregory?” Ronnie asked. “You’re not ill, are you?”

“I’m quite all right, Ronnie,” was the reassuring reply. “I somehow felt that our conversation was not exactly meant for the street. If you don’t want to go to the Ritz come to my rooms for a few minutes. We’ll take a taxi.”

He hailed a passing vehicle, gave the man the address, let down the window, but he still remained silent. In a few minutes they were in the Adelphi Terrace.

“Come in for a moment, Ronnie,” he invited as they descended. “I won’t keep you.”

The young man followed his brother to the lift and up to his very pleasant bachelor apartments on the second floor. Gregory gave a brief order to the butler who admitted them, then he threw himself into an easy chair and pushed a box of cigarettes across the table.

“How long have you been taking this stuff from Ordino?” he asked abruptly.

“Up till about six months ago. Since then I have been having it from Louis. You needn’t be so serious about it, Gregory. Half the chaps—and the girls, too—whom one meets nowadays take something of the sort. Bucks you up like anything.”

“And afterwards?”

Ronald leaned forward, his head between his hands.

“Who thinks of afterwards, now?” he muttered. “None of us. The girls who throw themselves at a fellow’s head! Fellows who stake their last shirt on a horse! All these financiers who have risked prison for a fortune! Who is there who can spare time to think of the future? We take what’s coming to us both ways.”

“It’s a foolish way to live,” Gregory said.

“Maybe,” the young man assented. “A matter of temperament, I suppose. You’re content with a simple life and a simple way of living. You like travel and going to odd places. I don’t. I love the racecourses of England, the London clubs, the theatres, and the little girls who play in them. I like people who do the same things as I do. I like meeting them day by day and doing the rounds. I hate my home soldiering and I only just get through with it. Of course, if there was another war it might be different. As it is, I am just what I am and I can’t change myself.”

“And if there was another war,” Gregory reminded him, “you would go into it with your nerves half cracked already.”

“I shouldn’t be the only one,” was the toneless rejoinder.

Gregory sat silently in his chair. It seemed to him that life had never been more intolerable. A crowd of hateful possibilities were flooding in upon him. There was a bitterness in his heart, a deep humiliation which he had never before realised.

“What’s the matter with you, Greg?” his brother asked curiously. “You’ve not been taking the stuff too, have you?”

Gregory shook his head.

“Not likely. I’m a chemist, you know, and I know too much about it.”

“Of course you haven’t,” Ronald continued in melancholy fashion. “You couldn’t have kept so hard and strong if you had. You couldn’t have been picked to play cricket for the Gentlemen still or ridden in the Grand National last year. You’ve nerves of iron, Greg. I wish I had never touched the blasted stuff myself. Seems to have knocked me all to bits without any warning during the last week or two.”

Gregory rose from his chair and paced the room. Life seemed tumbling to pieces around him. His standards had fallen away. It was as though someone had touched his eyes and he had been granted a new vision.

“Ronnie,” he said, seating himself at his desk. “I must admit that you have given me rather a shock. I have never realised what this drug-taking might mean to anyone of one’s own connections. Do you think there’s anything in the world I could offer you which would induce you to give me your word of honour never to touch the stuff again?”

The young man made no answer. Presently he shook his head.

“I don’t know, Greg,” he admitted. “Putting a chap on his honour is a big thing. If you knew how rotten I felt—”

“I’ll make this cheque two thousand five hundred, Ronnie,” his brother interrupted, “if you will stick it for seven days from to-day. Your word of honour—not a spot of it before you see me at midday to-day week.”

“One week,” the young man repeated. “A week of hell. . . . I’ll do it, Greg. I give you my word of honour. I won’t go near Louis’ or Ordino’s. I won’t touch a speck of the stuff, even if they try to shove it down my throat, for seven days. But I warn you that after that time I can’t promise. I feel as though I shall be in a Nursing Home anyway at the end of the week!”

“You won’t,” was the cheerful reply. “If it were not such a rotten time of the year we would go away somewhere. It’s just between seasons for everything: too late for hunting or shooting, too early for cricket. Never mind, let’s see more of one another, Ronnie. Here’s the cheque.”

The young man looked at it and a wan smile improved his appearance immensely. He thrust it into his pocket.

“I’ll go along to Sackville Street and pay those bounders at once,” he announced.

Gregory rested his hand upon the young man’s shoulder.

“I don’t pretend to be a Puritan myself, Ronnie,” he said, “but we have got to stop this thing whatever it costs. Stay and have a little lunch with Judith and me. You can go round to Sackville Street afterwards. There’s her ring now, I believe.”

The young man accepted with manifest hesitation. Judith came smiling into the room.

“Ronnie is lunching with us,” Gregory told her, as he kissed the fingers from which she had withdrawn her gloves. “We are leaving it to you to say where. We would both rather like a change.”

“Milan Grill,” Judith suggested enthusiastically. “I should love to go there. Ronnie, you’re looking better than when I saw you last. Keeping better hours, I hope?”

“Oh, I go to bed early enough,” Ronald replied. “It’s not being able to sleep when I get there that bothers me.”

The telephone bell rang. Gregory took up the receiver. He listened to a message and rang off.

“Ordino’s is packed,” he announced. “They are only too grateful to have our table. It’s the Milan Grill, then.”

“Anywhere does for me,” Ronnie agreed.

“I love the people one meets there,” Judith assented enthusiastically.

CHAPTER XVI

There was a certain amount of trouble with Ronnie in the small entrance lounge to the Grill Room. He refused a cocktail and looked in dismay at the crowds who were streaming in.

“I don’t like all these people,” he muttered. “I hate a squash like this is going to be. I don’t think I want any lunch, Greg. Do you mind?”

Gregory, although his heart ached, affected not to notice the strain in his brother’s face.

“Lunch is just what you want,” he declared cheerfully. “I know exactly how you’re feeling. No appetite lately, eh?”

“Haven’t been hungry for a month,” the young man confessed.

“How long leave are you on?” Judith enquired.

“Eight days,” was the dreary reply. “I’m not at all sure that I shall go back at all, though.”

“What do you mean—you don’t think you’ll go back?” Gregory repeated sternly. “Here, drink this.”

The waiter had brought a small goblet full of yellow liquid. The glass, on the outside, was frosted and there was a thin slice of lemon twined over the rim. The young man looked at it in distaste.

“I don’t feel up to a cocktail,” he protested.

“There’s something in that one you’ll like,” his brother assured him confidently. “To oblige me, young fellow. Come on.”

Ronnie raised the glass to his lips and drained the contents.

“Queer taste about it,” he grumbled as he put the glass down empty. “That’s the trouble with me lately,” he went on, a slight flush creeping into his cheeks. “I can’t taste anything. I don’t know whether I’m drinking or whether I’m eating, really. Everything seems the same.”

They found their way to a retired table in the restaurant. Gregory pointed out good-humouredly their absence of neighbours.

“I’ve ordered grilled Dover soles and *entrecôte*,” he announced. “Not quite your luncheon, I’m afraid, Judith, but we’ll atone for it at dinner-time.”

Ronald, however, continued to fidget.

“It’s a quiet table all right,” he admitted, “but I don’t like all these people around. They stare so.”

“They’re not staring at you, you young idiot,” Gregory scoffed. “If you will come out to lunch with a famous beauty—”

“And a renowned explorer,” Lady Judith interpolated.

“Well, there you are,” Gregory finished. “People are always coming here sight-seeing. When they get two semi-lions like

Lady Judith and me, of course they stare."

"Can I have another of those queer cocktails?" Ronnie asked abruptly.

"Rather you didn't," was the pleasant reply. "I have ordered something simpler for our plebeian meal."

The waiter arrived with a carafe of light clear beer. Judith laughed heartily.

"What trick is this you are playing on us, Gregory?" she demanded. "Are you trying to revise our digestions, to drag us back to the simple life? I don't think I can drink beer. Think of my complexion!"

"I know it will make me ill," Ronnie muttered, gazing at the jug, however, a little wistfully. "Everything makes me feel ill."

"Just a rotten trick of the imagination," Gregory declared, watching his glass being filled. "Did you ever taste a sole like that? I agree with Ordino. It's not that we are learning to cook in England but we have such magnificent raw material. Don't you find it good, Ronnie?"

"It tastes all right," the young man agreed listlessly. "I have almost given up eating, though. I haven't any appetite."

He took a long draught of the beer.

"Good stuff," he went on meditatively. "Wish I could get more of a kick out of it. . . . Look who's come in," he exclaimed, with a sudden note of peevishness in his tone. "There's the whole

crowd from the theatre. Sarah is there, too, curse her. She told me she was engaged for luncheon to-day but she never said she was coming here. That brute Rosenberg is in the party, too. Can't think why they any of them encourage a fellow like that."

"There must be someone to put the money up," Gregory pointed out. "I remember backing a show myself in my young days. We were all terribly happy for a week."

"Why only a week?" Ronnie asked.

"That was as long as the show lasted," was the grim rejoinder. "The leading lady went off with a millionaire and the show went to pot, of course."

Judith leaned forward and touched her host on the shoulder. The gaiety had left her expression. Her eyebrows were puckered and she was looking harassed.

"That's a queer trio, Gregory, over there in the window—the three men. I know one of them, of course. I wonder who the other two are."

"One is Glynde of Scotland Yard," Gregory observed. "The other I don't recognise. But the third—"

"The third chap looks like a Dutchman," Ronnie, who was picking up a little, declared. "He is dressed like one, too. Violet tie and long morning coat."

There was a sudden shadow on Gregory's face.

“You’re quite right, as it happens,” he assented. “I recognise him myself.”

“Who is he?” Judith asked.

“Adlers, the Chief of the Amsterdam police. I wonder what he’s doing over in this country? I think I can guess.”

Ronnie was curious. He, too, looked at the three men with interest.

“You see a lot of the world in your way, Gregory,” he remarked. “Can’t think why you don’t write a book or something. Our Colonel was talking about you the other day. The papers announced that you were in the Persian Gulf one week, in Athens the next and a fortnight later in Port Sudan. I never asked you about your trip, Greg. You were one of the party too, weren’t you, Lady Judith?”

She nodded, but her thoughts were evidently elsewhere.

“You were going to tell us, weren’t you, Gregory, who that other man is?”

“I saw him last in some queer sort of uniform,” Gregory announced. “He was in attendance upon the President at the unveiling of some statue or other whilst we were in Marseilles.”

“*Chef de la Sûreté* for certain,” Ronnie chuckled, signalling to the sommelier to refill his glass. “There you are, Greg. Something to puzzle your brains about. Glynde is one of the bosses at Scotland Yard, isn’t he? The man opposite him is

evidently a French official, and Adlers, as you say, is the Chief of the Dutch police. What's up? Stolen diamonds, I expect. Isn't Amsterdam the place where all the stolen jewels go to be broken up?"

"They say so," Gregory assented indifferently.

Judith seemed determined to force issues.

"It is also," she reminded them, "one of the great dope centres of the world."

There was a strained silence for a moment or two.

"I thought all the dope came from farther East," the younger man muttered.

"Amsterdam, I believe," Gregory told them, "is only used as a distributing centre. There is a great traffic between there and the Dutch East Indies, and the small trading steamers are able to pick it up easily."

"It's a rotten business," Ronnie suddenly exclaimed, a strange harsh note in his tone. "The people who are bringing it into this country ought to be the ones to rot from it. I don't mean barmen and the waiters who peddle you twenty pounds' worth or something of that sort. I mean the people who ship it in large quantities and make perhaps a thousand per cent. profit."

Judith held her neighbour's hand for a moment under the tablecloth. She avoided looking into his face.

"Let's talk about something more pleasant," she proposed. "I'm

trying to admire your little musical comedy star, Ronnie, but I don't think I do. I thought it was out of date for you young men of fashion to go round with danseuses and musical comedy stars nowadays. I thought you chose the *déclassées* members of our own order. They talk the same language and I should think they are easier to get on with. Heavens, look at what's arriving!"

Glynde had risen from his table and was making his way a little diffidently to where the three were seated. He bowed to Judith and addressed Gregory.

"Sir Gregory," he apologised, "forgive me for intruding. You remember me, perhaps—Glynde—I see you sometimes at Ordino's."

"I remember you quite well."

"I'm taking rather a liberty, of course," the intruder continued, "but I have two rather interesting guests—Mynheer Ernst Adlers of the Dutch police and General Castelline, who is conducting some special investigations at Marseilles. We have been talking about different branches of our profession and Adlers claims that he never forgets a face. He insists upon it that he saw you, Sir Gregory, down in the business quarter of Amsterdam on the wharves, in fact coming out of a small warehouse, about seven weeks ago."

Gregory shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he observed, "that Mynheer Ernst Adlers is not infallible. I have only visited Amsterdam a few times and not at all of late years."

"I hate to presume upon your good nature," Glynde continued, "but the fact of the matter is we went so far as to have a small bet. It seemed to me so unlikely that you would be in such a place that I ventured ten guilders."

"Then you can collect your money," Gregory assured him.

"I suppose it would be too great a tax upon your good nature," Glynde went on, "to ask you to just assure our friend of the fact? These Dutchmen are very hard at parting and I never saw a man so positive in my life. To tell you the truth we have both found him a little irritating. He could not dispute a flat denial from you."

Gregory rose to his feet—an impressive figure of a man in his well-cut tweeds, with his careless but dignified carriage, his lean, drawn face and slightly cynical smile.

"Lead me to him," he enjoined pleasantly. "Unless the man is a defaulter the ten guilders are in your pocket."

They made their way to the table in the window. The Dutchman and the Frenchman rose to their feet and acknowledged the introduction with ceremony.

"I am afraid, sir," Gregory told the former, "that you will have to part with your money. I have visited your beautiful city more than once but not for a very long time—certainly not within the last five years."

The Dutchman's round eyes seemed to become rounder than ever. His brows puckered. He stared at the speaker. His tone was more incredulous than polite.

“You assure me, sir,” he said, “that you were not on the Nieuwe Singel Wharf one evening some six or seven weeks ago coming out of a warehouse—a cheese emporium, I believe?”

Sir Gregory shook his head.

“I buy my cheeses, when I buy them myself, at Cadbury and Pratt’s in Bond Street,” he confided. “I can assure you that it was not I whom you saw in your city.”

Mynheer Ernst Adlers bowed. He solemnly produced some silver and counted it out upon the table. His manners were certainly on the verge of the uncouth. He returned Gregory’s nod with a stiff and unsmiling bow. Gregory walked back to his table and resumed his chair. He found his brother staring at him with wide-opened eyes.

“I say, Gregory!” the latter exclaimed.

“What is it, young fellow?”

“The first time in my life I have ever seen you look as though you had been telling a lie!”

Gregory remained unmoved. He delayed his answer for a moment whilst he gave an order to the waiter.

“Probably the first time in my life,” he said, “that the necessity has arisen.”

On their way back westwards Lady Judith held her companion’s hand for a moment. It was so seldom that she indulged in

caresses that the action gave him an unaccustomed thrill of pleasure.

“What’s the matter with Ronnie, dear?” she asked.

“He’s out of sorts,” Gregory replied. “I’m afraid we shall have to look after him for a few days.”

She drew even a little closer. He felt her shivering.

“Gregory,” she whispered, “he looked like a man who had been taking drugs.”

“That’s just what’s the matter with him.”

Judith said no more. They were driving through crowded traffic and Gregory’s hands were upon the wheel. He drove as usual with the unswerving perfection of a professional but she was conscious all the time of the strain beneath.

“Could you do something for me, Judith?” he asked, as they turned into the park.

“Of course,” she answered.

“Two nights,” he begged. “No more. Just two nights. There is likely to be trouble down there.”

If anything she went a little paler. Her beautiful eyes seemed to have caught some of the mistiness of the grey afternoon. The fingers which were laid for a moment upon his wrist were cold.

“Of course,” she assented.

CHAPTER XVII

Chief Commissioner General Sir Gerald Wolff glanced at the chit which his uniformed assistant had handed him and nodded. The light of battle had flamed in his eyes for a moment as he read the name of his visitor, but it passed at once.

“I will see Mr. Neilson Forbes,” he decided.

The official from the Home Office, dignified, urbane yet serious, was ushered in almost immediately. He shook hands with the Chief and accepted a chair.

“I understood from Glynde that you were likely to be looking me up,” Sir Gerald observed. “I am really rather glad to have a chance of expressing my views on a certain subject.”

“That subject being, I presume, the disappearance of Major Granderson?”

“Precisely.”

Neilson Forbes frowned.

“For some reason or other which we do not understand,” he said, “I gather that there are objections on your part to anything in the nature of an intensive search for him.”

“There are,” the Chief acknowledged.

“I have come to ask for your confidence in the matter,” Neilson Forbes announced.

“To begin with, then, Granderson has disobeyed orders.”

“That sounds very unlike the behaviour of a military man of good standing,” the visitor said gravely.

“It was the sort of thing I was afraid of from the start,” the Chief Commissioner declared. “Listen to me, Mr. Neilson Forbes,” he went on. “When we introduced a certain number of ex-military men into several of our departments here we did so under definite conditions. We laid down the law that they were on no account to consider themselves as free lances. Scotland Yard is a machine, not a headquarters under the shelter of which amateurs can come and work on cases of their own selection.”

“Are you suggesting that Granderson has done this?”

“I am.”

“This is news to me,” the visitor confessed.

“I imagined it might be,” the Chief Commissioner rejoined.

“Can I hear a little more?”

Sir Gerald leaned back in his seat.

“Briefly, the facts are these,” he confided. “You know as well as I do the greatest problem we have to face just now—this enormous increase in the importation and distribution of drugs.”

“Doesn’t my Chief know that?” Neilson Forbes observed, moving uneasily in his chair. “There have already been three questions in the House and notice given of two others.”

“I’m bound to admit,” Sir Gerald went on, “that we are up against an amazing organisation. With the help of a good deal of assumption, however, we have elaborated very possible theories as to what may be happening. The foundations upon which it is built up are very delicate, and the people concerned in it acutely intelligent and exceedingly difficult to reach. Nevertheless, things were looking well for us. Now Granderson comes along. He stumbles against one or two of the loose strings which have excited our own suspicions and he gets to work on his own.”

“It was always understood,” Neilson Forbes pointed out, “that this new leaven of officials were to have a very wide scope.”

General Sir Gerald Wolff had very heavy eyebrows and for a moment they almost met. He was very angry indeed and in a quiet way he looked it.

“Wide scope certainly,” he assented, “but under the legitimate and absolute authority of—myself.”

“Am I to understand,” the visitor asked, “that he has ignored that fact?”

“You certainly may,” was the curt reply. “Granderson has been working in a most mysterious fashion and has failed to report here upon several occasions.”

“It isn’t like the man,” Neilson Forbes persisted.

“It is nevertheless a fact. My reason for feeling so acutely upon the subject is that the whole pyramid of evidence which we have been building up is exceedingly sensitive and the entire result of several months’ work might disappear at a moment’s notice if the principals whom we were watching had any idea that they were under suspicion. There is evidence that this is what has happened.”

“That sounds very serious.”

“It is serious. I will be fair to the man,” the Chief Commissioner went on after a moment’s pause. “I was not able to take him into my confidence as regards my reasons for handicapping his work, and without those reasons I suppose he was tempted to proceed. Well, there it is. He went on with the work on his own lines and I understood that he has disappeared.”

“That is so,” Neilson Forbes admitted eagerly. “He may have been too impetuous, Sir Gerald, and it may be necessary to reprimand him. You may even feel that he should lose his job. No one would question your judgment. But, on the other hand, the poor fellow has disappeared in one of the worst quarters of London and—well, to put the matter briefly, the Home Secretary thinks that the usual police enquiry should be made and a vigorous search pushed forward.”

“When you have put my view of the matter to Sir Henry,” the Chief Commissioner remarked, “he may perhaps change his mind.”

Neilson Forbes remained silent for a few moments. The position was, beyond a doubt, delicate.

"Supposing he does not?" he ventured. 157

The Chief Commissioner shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "if you ask me to have the district in which I understand Granderson disappeared combed out and to turn my best brains loose upon the subject of his disappearance, using the information I have acquired to assist me in the matter, I must tell you frankly that I shall not do it. I need not remind you that in warfare a spy often loses his life and those who despatched him upon his errand do not raise a finger to help him. It is all in the game. We have to treat this matter in the same fashion."

The visitor leaned back in his chair and smoked thoughtfully for a moment the cigarette which his host had offered him.

"I must say, Sir Gerald," he admitted, "you have put the matter with extraordinary lucidity. No one could fail to appreciate your point of view. Still, it does seem as though we ought to be doing something about it. The discovery of Granderson's abductors, or murderers, might even help in your main investigation."

"I doubt it," was the firm reply. "As I look upon it at present there are three or four cycles, working one within the other, in this damnable business. I dare say I could get at the outer cycle and, by getting at it, find out what has become of Granderson, but if I did I should never get at the inner cycle. I should never penetrate the real mystery. The chance of a lifetime for 158
smashing this atrocious drug business would be ruined."

A commissionaire entered with a somewhat lengthy chit. Sir Gerald, with a brief apology to his visitor, studied it carefully for some minutes. Afterwards he stretched it out upon his desk

and secured it with a paperweight.

“These notes I have just received,” he confided, “may help us.”

“Any news of Granderson?”

“None whatever. I had better, perhaps, repeat at once, Mr. Forbes, that with the utmost respect to your Chief—who is in a sense my Chief also—I cannot make use of this organisation for the moment in any attempt to discover the whereabouts of Major Granderson.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” his visitor acknowledged gravely.

“Granderson acted on his own initiative and against my wishes,” Sir Gerald continued, “and if trouble has come to him he asked for it. I shall not risk the scheme which we have been preparing in any belated attempt to help him.”

“I don’t think that Sir Henry will approve of your decision—” Neilson Forbes began.

“Stop!” the other interrupted. “I have not finished yet. There is another quite obvious course which has been suggested to me by this chit. The local police in the neighbourhood where Granderson disappeared are a very able body of men and the sergeant himself, a man named Sanders, is exceptionally intelligent. The disappearance of Granderson comes entirely within his jurisdiction and I will see that he gets to work upon it. In that way the more subtle elements of the affair will not be disturbed and Sanders is just as likely to stumble upon the truth as any man I could send from here.”

Neilson Forbes smiled in some relief.

“Well, that sounds more reasonable,” he declared. “I shall just report to the Chief that you think it best to let the local police proceed with their investigations in the usual way, and if any intervention from Scotland Yard is advisable it must be agreed upon later.”

“You might also,” the Chief Commissioner continued, “ask for an interview with the Home Secretary on my behalf, or beg that he will lunch with me in the private room at the Club. I will give him a hint then as to the direction in which we are working.”

Neilson Forbes rose to his feet with a sigh of relief.

“I like the look of things better,” he confessed. “After all, Sir Henry is really a very reasonable man if he understands.”

The Chief Commissioner touched the bell. He was looking a little weary.

“Sorry if I’ve seemed obstinate,” he said, as the two men shook hands. “After all, you know, this drug business is the most serious thing we’ve had to contend with for years. There is one man whom we want. If we can lay our hands upon him I’m convinced that the whole organisation will collapse.”

“One man,” Neilson Forbes muttered as he made his way down the stairs. “I wonder!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Sergeant Sanders rattled the handle of the locked gate leading onto Bunter's Wharf and grunted his disappointment as he found it securely fastened. He drew a whistle from his pocket and blew it three times. Presently a tousled head, followed by David's long, lanky form, crawled up onto the deck of the steamer which was still lying in the middle of the river.

"*Henrietta Anne!*" the sergeant bellowed.

"Aye, aye," came the answer.

"Sanders here. Want to speak to captain. Gate locked."

The figure disappeared. There was a brief delay, then the captain, in shirt sleeves, took the place of his subordinate.

"What do you want?" he demanded unamiably.

"Just a word or two, Captain," Sanders shouted back. "Send the key across with your boy in the dinghy and I'll come aboard."

"I'm coming ashore myself," was the gruff reply.

The captain disappeared. Soon he crawled round the stern of the steamer in the dinghy and paddled to the dock. He tied up the boat and came over to where the sergeant was waiting.

"What's your trouble?" he enquired.

“Just a few questions, my friend,” was the cheerful rejoinder. “Nothing to keep you more than a minute or two.”

The captain drew out a huge silver watch from his waistcoat pocket and studied the hour. He replaced it with a grin of satisfaction.

“They will be opening by the time we get there,” he said, unlocking the gate and issuing.

His companion coughed.

“I’m not sure, Captain, whether it is quite official my asking you questions in a public house. It’s a bit of a serious job I’ve got on.”

“Well, ask your questions as we walk along there,” was the surly reply. “There’s no sense in my rowing you over to the *Henrietta Anne*. I should think you’ve seen enough of the old hulk this time. You’ve ransacked her all over as though she were a treasure ship.”

“All according to instructions, Captain,” he reminded him, as they fell into step.

“Instructions from whom?” the former asked suspiciously. “I thought you were the boss of your own little show down here.”

“So I may be,” the sergeant agreed. “All the same, you must remember that I am only divisional—divisional,” he went on, rather liking the word. “Headquarters can step in whenever they like and give me advice, even orders if they want to.”

“To think of that,” Captain Jan Henderson remarked sarcastically. “It would be a brave man who dared to give orders to you, Sergeant.”

“It’s not a usual happening,” the other admitted, “but it has taken place sometimes. I have been questioned very closely about this lanky, pale-faced newspaper chap—Granderson his name was. You remember? He sat in a corner of the Green Man in oilskins and a sou’ wester that covered his head.”

“I remember the bloke,” the captain assented, gazing steadily into the gloom. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Seems that he’s lost himself,” the sergeant explained. “In police lingo, he has disappeared.”

“Done a bunk, eh?”

“Either done a bunk or been done away with,” was the portentous reply. “Left his rooms for an evening stroll and has not been heard of since.”

“How long ago?”

“Over a week.”

“Well, I ain’t seen anything of him, if that’s the question you are wanting to ask,” the master of the *Henrietta Anne* declared. “He came to me once—wanted to book a passage to Amsterdam. I told him I didn’t care about passengers and I never knew when I was going to sail. He hung on so that I showed him over the ship one day, and that was all. He seemed to be plaguey curious

about nothing."

The two men had reached the entrance to the saloon bar of the Green Man, whose doors were now happily and hospitably opened. Their actions were almost automatic. They entered, chose a comfortable place upon one of the leather-covered couches, and made cryptic signs to the barman, who was given thereby to understand that the sergeant was standing treat.

"Kind of newspaper chap, they say," the latter went on softly. "There used to be a lot of them down this way once upon a time."

"I've seen 'em," the captain grunted. "The place was alive with 'em like beetles the day that that chap was picked up in Bunter's Alley."

"What sort of a memory have you got?" Sanders enquired, raising his tankard in salutation.

"As good as yours, I reckon," was the cautious reply.

"I'm asking," the sergeant went on, "because I kind of remember your being fetched away by David to see some bloke who was waiting on board for you about a week ago and I had a kind of idea that it was the chap I'm looking for."

"Part of that's the truth," the captain acknowledged, "and part of it ain't. David came to tell me that a chap as wanted to see me, as might have been him, was pulling himself about in a small dinghy close to the *Henrietta Anne*, but when I got there he were gone. Seemingly he hadn't wanted to wait."

The sergeant stroked his chin and considered the matter.

"What I thought at the time was," his companion continued, "that the tides are something cruel about that hour in the evening and he might easily have been a drownded man by the time I got back, him no river man and in a borrowed dinghy too."

"What about the dinghy, though?" the sergeant asked.

The captain filled his pipe and spat with unerring aim into a distant spittoon.

"There's too many of 'em here along the riverside; if they got a chance of picking up an overturned dinghy they wouldn't go to the police about it," he confided. "Going to the police might mean questions and a dinghy is a dinghy to a river rat."

"That's maybe what's happened to him," the sergeant reflected.

"Maybe," the captain assented indifferently. "Anyway I've told you all I know about the bloke. I'm going to stand you a pint in return for that there one that you have stood me and then I'll thank you to leave the subject of this hatchet-faced fellow alone. I never cottoned on to him. I'm sorry for any man as has gone off the payroll, especially if he were drownded in that foul strip of river with its mudholes and currents, but them's things it ain't worth while dwelling on. I would rather talk about women. Now, this place it don't seem the same without Judy."

"We shan't see her back again, I reckon," the sergeant pronounced. "Knocking 'em endways up at Hartlepool, I hear. I always said she was good enough for a music hall."

"We ought to have taken up a collection for her now and then," the captain declared. "All that she got out of us was a few odd drinks—all that we knows of, that is to say," he went on. "She was a queer piece of goods and no mistake. She would talk as free as you like and then the chap that had a fancy to spend a half an hour with her got only laughed at for his pains. I guess she had her favorites. I warn't one of them, though." 166

The sergeant sighed.

"If all the young women in these parts were as decent and well-behaved as she was," he observed, "we shouldn't have half the trouble we do have. We cops could pretty well go out of business. However, I don't want to get thinking of Judy. I've got to look for that chap Granderson. Them's my orders and as such they must be carried out. You not being able to tell me any more than you have done about him, my friend, all I can do is to finish this tankard and bid you good evening."

"Where are you going?" the captain asked suspiciously.

"Oh, around Bunter's Alley and a few places," the other replied. "I should like to have a few words with that youth of yours, if you have no objection."

"What the hell's the use of that?" the captain grunted, with a sudden darkening of his expression. "He's half-witted—a regular loon. He don't remember nothing. He would very likely make you up some sort of fairy story that it would take you a week to find out was nought but lies." 167

"Bad as that, eh?" Sanders meditated. "Well, we must see.

Anyway I'll just finish this drink and be getting along."

The sergeant carried out his threat. The captain, with a scowl on his face, waited for a moment after his departure, then opened the swing door and looked cautiously out. The street was deserted. So was the little wharf with its locked gate. The sergeant was evidently pursuing his enquiries in some other direction. The captain grunted, re-entered the Green Man and resumed his place. He had the air of a man confused with much thought. He sat for some time with his elbows upon the table and his hairy face between his hands. Things were stirring in the world around him which his muddled brain failed to grasp.

CHAPTER XIX

Sergeant Sanders had engaged upon a strange pilgrimage. With a passkey in his pocket he crossed the gloomy portals of Bunter's Buildings, mounted in the automatic lift as far as it went, and slowly climbed the remaining stairs to the attics. Arrived there, he paused for breath. Leaning over the banister he could see the closed door of the room which had once been occupied by Judy. The card was still there, a little twisted on one side and soiled.

"Hartlepool," the sergeant murmured softly to himself. "I wonder."

He made his way to the end of the corridor and opened the door of the room on which was still painted in white letters the name of Loman. As was the custom of the place, he had been told, the effects of the dead man had been left until another tenant might apply. They were scattered about very much in the same disorder as when he had visited the place six weeks before. He threw open the window to let in a breath of fresh air, then he lit his pipe and sat down upon a dilapidated wooden chest. The main incidents of that night he had already reconstructed in his mind. Notwithstanding Judy's evidence someone had crawled up the stairs who had been following Loman, had caught Loman with the telegram, dragged him across those few yards of landing, and sent him tumbling over into chaos. Why? What was in the telegram? Who was the murderer? Had the affair anything to do with Granderson's disappearance? Who was Loman? What was his business? Looking back upon his various cases he came to the conclusion that he had never come

across one where the clues were so scanty, where the bridges between the facts had been destroyed so completely. A man, strong enough to take Loman up and throw him into the space below, could surely have taken the telegram away without having to resort to murder. And Loman himself—a harmless little lonely gentleman. Where did he come into touch with affairs so great that a single telegram concerning them should have cost him his life, and what were those affairs? The sergeant indulged in a familiar habit. He stroked his chin. If only Scotland Yard would treat him with a little more confidence. . . .

Then history seemed as though it were about to repeat itself. The sergeant's hand suddenly closed over the bowl of his pipe. He rose noiselessly to his feet. Coming slowly upwards, there were steps upon the stone stairs, steps as faint and muffled as might have been those of the murderer who had come to visit Loman. What could anyone want up here? he asked himself. Then he felt a little thrill. Anyone who had stolen up to visit the room of the murdered man, or to look down into the gulf of death into which he had been thrown, must be someone dimly connected with the mystery which he was trying to solve, and someone definitely connected with that mystery was just the person whom Sergeant Sanders wanted more than anyone on earth to meet. . . .

The footsteps ceased. They started again—more of a shuffle than a man's movement, however stealthy. Then probably Sergeant Sanders received the shock of his life. Very cautiously gazing, almost peeping round the corner, looking into the room in which he stood, came a woman, the familiar figure of a woman—Judy of Bunter's Buildings!

Sanders was neither eloquent nor polite.

“Well, I’m damned!” he exclaimed.

Judy’s laugh seemed more musical than ever.

“Did you think it was my ghost haunting the place?” she asked. “So this is how you waste your time, Sergeant, sitting in an empty room brooding over your failures!”

“And you, Judy,” he retorted, “you spend your time crawling up these steps on tiptoe to look into a room from which a man was dragged and murdered. A trifle morbid, eh?”

“I don’t know what you mean by morbid,” Judy declared with a flash in her eyes. “As for my coming up here, that was simple enough. I can’t get enough air in my room. I wondered whether I dared face moving up here, provided I decided to come back again. Do you think I should be safe, Sergeant? I shouldn’t think, with you not a hundred miles away, anyone would dare to molest me, would they?”

Sanders knocked the ashes from his pipe.

“I don’t remember an instance,” he admitted, “in which two murders have been committed in the same place.”

She lounged across the threshold, her arms folded, her back leaning against the sash of the door.

“Why do you keep on saying ‘murder’?” she asked. “I thought everyone believed that the poor fellow committed suicide. It sounds far more likely anyway.”

“People generally require a reason before they commit suicide,” the sergeant rejoined.

“You’re not modern,” Judy mocked him. “Don’t you know that half the suicides of the world, especially from high places and lofty bridges, are not planned at all? They come from some irresistible impulse. Sometimes the very happiest people, who have not a care in the world, find their knees trembling until they feel themselves impelled to take that plunge into eternity.”

“For no reason?”

“For no reason at all. It is a sheer, diabolical impulse. I have felt it myself when I have leaned a little too far over the side of a steamer. Ugh, give me a drink quick.”

“I am afraid,” the other replied, “that the effects of the late Mr. Loman do not comprise anything in the way of alcoholic refreshments. . . . So you were coming up here to see whether you thought you dared take this room?”

“Partly,” she confided, “and partly, old dear, because I heard you come up and I was curious to know what anyone was wanting up on this top storey. I was not at all sure I should not drop upon Mr. Loman’s ghost or something like that. That’s why I came on tiptoe—and see what I’ve found,” she wound up, extending her arms.

“You found me,” the sergeant observed. “No great catch, either.”

“And why are you here?”

He looked at her thoughtfully.

“Judy,” he enquired, “why have you been away for all this time?”

“That’s my business,” she answered sharply. “I asked you a question. I’m good-natured but I can’t always be answering them and not have a dig in, myself, sometimes.”

“Quite right,” he agreed. “You know, Miss Judy—I say this in all respect—I should like to be more friendly with you.”

“There’s many a one would,” she laughed.

“I mean,” he went on, “I should like to win your confidence.”

“I never knew a detective yet who didn’t want to win the confidence of someone who he thought might help him on a difficult case.”

“Help me on this one, Judy,” he begged. “It will pay you all right.”

“What’s your special difficulty?”

“I want to find out who murdered Loman and why.”

“You’re sure he was murdered then?”

“Pretty well,” was the sergeant’s confident reply. “You see, the inquest having been adjourned, there are a good many things which haven’t been cleared up yet. For instance, we found distinct signs of a struggle—both in the room, on the landing, and even outside round the rail over which he must have been flung. Someone entered the building and chucked Loman down

into eternity all right. What we want to find out is who it was and what was the significance of that missing telegram."

"A clever man like you will soon discover all he wants to," Judy assured him with a bantering smile.

"Well, I've not been too quick about it, have I?" the sergeant grunted. "There's no feather coming into my cap over this Bunter's Building business, and to make things worse we have another disappearance to deal with now—this man Granderson."

"Never heard of the fellow," Judy declared. "I'm more interested in Mr. Loman. Do you mean to say that you have not succeeded in tracing who he was or where he came from?"

"Oh yes, we know something of his past," the sergeant admitted.

"Doesn't that help you a little?"

"It ought to, but as a matter of fact it doesn't."

"Was he as poor as he looked?" Judy asked curiously.

"I should say not," was the cautious answer. "He had a job anyway."

"Had he really been on a journey?" she persisted.

"We believe that he came straight from the Continent to these buildings, was followed by someone when he received his telegram and was murdered by that person for fear he would

disclose its contents. There—you see, Miss Judy, I am a good deal more open with you than you have been with me."

"You have only made me more curious than ever," she declared. "Tell me about him. It can't do you any harm."

He shook his head slowly.

"I can't get talking about a case until we are on the way to wind it up," he regretted. "I will tell you this, though. I shouldn't say he was a criminal. I should say he was what we call a crank and he was connected with a society of cranks. When you can wake up and remember a little more about those footsteps that must have sneaked past your door that night, then I may remember a few more little details about the fellow. . . . Going to give us a turn now and then at the Green Man, Judy?"

"What else do you suppose I'm here for?" she answered.

"I haven't an idea," he confessed. "It isn't everyone who could guess just what you are thinking, you know, Miss Judy. It's my belief you are not one of the simple sort. I don't see exactly what you can get out of coming to the Green Man, either," he added, looking at her with curiosity shining out of his keen eyes.

She laughed softly.

"What a clever man you are, Mr. Sanders!" she exclaimed. "What do you suppose there could be down here in this part of the world to occupy oneself with except jollying the sailors a little and getting free drinks?"

"Oh, this is not such a humdrum corner of the world, after all,"

the sergeant continued. “We police who are a bit behind the scenes, you know, Miss Judy, we see a good deal here we can’t repeat. I can tell you this, though. There’s things goes on in these parts that wants watching. Some day there may be a big to-do, and then maybe we shall know who murdered Loman. Shall I arm you to the Green Man, young lady? That will make me popular for the evening if I take you in.”

“And you a married man!” she laughed. “What would your wife say if she knew you had been seen arm in arm with Judy of Bunter’s Buildings?”

The sergeant closed the door and stood on one side to allow Judy to precede him down the stairs.

“If it was some of the others,” he observed, “there would be hell to pay, all right. I don’t think the Missus would worry so much about you, Judy.”

She tossed her head. Her footsteps grew lighter as they passed the closed door of her room.

“Perhaps that’s because she doesn’t know my real feelings towards you, Sergeant,” Judy mocked, with a flirtatious backward glance.

CHAPTER XX

Captain Jan Henderson stepped back from the mirror in his cabin and regarded himself with satisfaction. With clean linen, a respectable tie, his beard and hair trimmed, his face and hands scrubbed, in his best captain's outfit and brightly polished boots, he really presented a very creditable appearance. Nothing could do away with that heavy underlip, or the brutal ferocity which lurked in his eyes and about his mouth, but he was nevertheless a fine figure of a man. David, looking more unkempt than ever—collarless, and clad in filthy raiment—gaped at him as he stepped up on deck.

"You're too late, Captain," he declared.

"Too late for what?" the latter demanded gruffly.

"They don't marry no one around these parts after three o'clock," David confided. "You'd better go and take off those swell togs."

"Don't you give me any of your lip," the captain growled. "Get the dinghy round and take me across."

"I'll take you across when I've spoke a word or two with you," was the reply, and David's shrill treble voice was suddenly very earnest indeed. "Captain, I'm tired of acting the scarecrow on 'ere. You don't give me enough money. I ain't down for enough money in the book, and you don't give me 'alf that."

“And what in hell do you want money for?”

“That’s my business. I want some of what’s owing to me. All the others have been paid. I ain’t ’ad a bob.”

“Well, ask me to-morrow morning,” the captain replied. “I’m in a hurry now. Judy’s back and I’m for the Green Man.”

“Our Judy? Judy of Bunter’s Buildings?” David exclaimed, with a sudden change in his expression.

“That’s she, my lad. Now, do as I tell you and get the dinghy out.”

David folded his arms. He leaned against the rail and looked as though he had never felt the touch of a rope end or known what fear meant.

“I want my money or a part of it,” he persisted. “You’ve got to give it me before you go ashore.”

“Hoity toity,” the captain jeered. “Have you gone out of your senses, David?”

“Perhaps I ’ave. The things I’ve seen ’ere and round about ’ere are enough to drive a man out of his senses. So Judy’s back, eh? Well, why shouldn’t I see her dance and watch her just like you others do? I want ten quid.”

“You won’t get it, you monkey’s spawn,” was the vicious reply. “And if you show your ugly snout in the saloon bar whilst Judy’s there you’ll get chucked into the street pretty quick. The saloon bar’s for your betters.”

A sudden calm seemed to have come to the young man David. He folded his arms once more and showed no signs of moving. 179

"Captain," he said, "I ain't threatening, mind you, but what I know, I knows, and every man has a right to the money he earns. I want ten quid. I'm going to buy clothes as good as your'n and if I don't go into the saloon bar at the Green Man—well, there's nothing you can't see and 'ear from the counter. Sergeant Sanders might be there to-night, perhaps."

"What if he is?" Henderson demanded suspiciously.

David looked up at the sky. His voice seemed to have gone shriller than ever.

"Nothing—nothing—nothing," he replied. "He's a mighty inquisitive man these days, is Sergeant Sanders. He does his best to squeeze odd words out of me. I want ten quid. Captain. I reckon you owe me thirty."

The captain turned on his heel and descended the companion way. In a sense he was dazed. This was the first time in his life that David had not cowered before him like a mongrel dog expecting the switch. He suddenly remembered . . . and the thoughts that passed through his mind with the advent of memory would have brought the sweat of fear to David's forehead if he could have guessed at them! Nevertheless, a few minutes later ten crumpled-up and none-too-clean pound notes were passed into the filthy outstretched fingers.

"I want to treat you fair, David," the captain said. "I ain't denying that I owe you a bit of money. There's the ten 180

pounds that you asked for. And listen—"

"I'm listening," David replied, as he pushed the notes down into some strange receptacle at the back of his trousers.

"Keep away from that Sanders. Our business is nobody else's business, and don't you forget it. You're a good lad at times, Dave, and you've been useful not so long ago, but you're none too strong in the head. A clever man, he would soon get you to talk, and if anyone that has a job on this boat talks—well," Jan Henderson concluded, his voice suddenly swelling, "it's the mud of the river for him as sure as a Dutchman hates thin women."

David smiled. He disclosed his broken row of dirty yellow teeth and there was a cunning glint in his eyes.

"I was useful when I cracked on the head that white-faced sneak who came poking about the ship, wasn't I?" he chuckled.

"Can't think what you did it for," the captain remarked airily. "Pleasant chap he was. If you talk about that to Sanders . . ." He made a very suggestive circle of the neck.

David, for once, was not afraid.

"Go on," he jeered. "You can't fool me, Captain. You know jolly well that you would have put him out fast enough. It was what you worried him aboard for, but he had you covered and you had to let him go. I saw the gun. My, it was some gun too! You was just as helpless as a milch cow. Where he told you to stand you stood, and up the stairs he came. It was Davy as had to do the trick."

“Well, don’t go talking about it, that’s all,” his chief ordered. “And bring that dinghy around now.”

This time the youth obeyed orders. He disappeared, brought round the dinghy, and paddled the captain safely to the wooden landing stage. He secured the boat to a staple and followed his superior out through the gate to the street.

“Where are you off to?” the latter asked him suspiciously.

“To buy some new kit. I ain’t going about in rags no longer. I earn my money and I’m going to have it. As to that, I ought to have another twenty quid for bashing that chap’s head in.”

The captain looked uneasily around.

“What you’ll get if you go talking about it, young fellow,” he told him savagely, “will be a rope round your neck.”

David swaggered off.

“I ain’t afraid,” he called across the street to his employer.

The captain was a little ruffled when he entered the Green Man. There all was hilarity. Judy was seated upon a stool before the bar, surrounded by admirers. Fred’s face was beaming. Martin himself had come out to shake hands. Mrs. Martin, in shiny black silk and black ringletted hair, had also accorded a gracious welcome.

“And my, how smart the captain looks to-night!” she added, beaming across at him in genuine admiration. “That’s because

you're back, Judy. He was here in his shirt sleeves last night, and not much of a shirt, either."

The captain smiled sheepishly.

"We were all working hard last night," he declared. "Getting ready to sail, we were. There's word of cargo waiting for us at Amsterdam. Shouldn't be surprised if there wasn't an empty spot in the river to-morrow."

Joe Havers removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Can't think how it pays your people, Captain," he remarked, "this cargo-one-way business."

"That ain't my lookout," was the blunt retort. "Mrs. Martin, you'll join us to-night in a glass? Haven't seen you behind the bar for some time. Fred, take the orders. These are on me. Come and sit in your usual corner when you're ready, Judy. There isn't one of them stools I would trust to bear my weight."

Judy seemed in devilish mood. She smiled across the room at Tom Bowles, the motorboat agent.

"Come along and sit here," she invited, patting the vacant stool. "The captain's afraid of falling if he sits near me."

The young man sprang to his feet and hurried across the room.

"I would fall all right, Judy, if it were any use," he declared, as he swung himself on. "We all fall for you. We've been like a lot of deaf-mutes at a funeral here night after night while you've been away. Then some chap turned up and

told us you were knocking spots off the crowd at Hartlepool."

She smiled.

"So they told you that, did they?"

"Yes," the captain growled from his corner. "And I says to Martin here that something ought to be done about it. There's no call for you to amuse us for nothing."

She shook her head.

"Nothing can be done about it, Captain," she declared. "You wouldn't get Mr. Martin into trouble, would you? He hasn't got a licence for singing or dancing here. Even when I do a turn he runs a bit of a risk. If it was not that the sergeant is a friend of the house he might get into trouble, as it is. We'll let him know, when he comes in later on, that the captain's thinking of moving, and maybe he'll let me do a turn for the last night."

Martin removed his pipe from his mouth.

"You must think we Britishers are in a devil of a hurry for your Dutch cheeses, Captain," he remarked. "You unloaded about a thousand of them last week."

"What's a thousand in London?" the captain replied scornfully. "They would eat more than a thousand a day in the restaurants alone, to say nothing of the private houses and nothing of the wholesale trade. Next time I deliver goods on the quay for Joe there he'll probably have five thousand to play football with."

The Customs House man winked good-humouredly.

“I’ll drop ’em a line up in the ’ouse of Commons,” he said. “I’ll tell ’em those Dutch cheeses could stand a bit more duty.”

“Fat lot of good that would do,” the captain scoffed.

“Well, I say the thing ain’t fair,” Martin put in from across the bar. “’Ere ’e says ’e’s going to bring five thousand Dutch cheeses in and ’e’s just brought three thousand. ’E went back empty last time and ’e’s going back empty this time. Why don’t ’e take goods to Holland when we take their blasted cheeses?”

“It isn’t the way the English politicians like to arrange things,” Tom Bowles pointed out scornfully. “Don’t I know in my job? That’s why we don’t make any money, no matter how hard we works. I’m free to admit, though, that a bit of good Dutch cheese with a glass of beer is up to anything we can turn out.”

“I’m for the home stuff myself,” Martin declared, “when I can afford it. You chaps are so close with your money lately or I would give you real homemade Cheddar.”

“There’s more money spent in this pub,” Joseph declared solemnly, “than any other place round about.”

“Let’s spend a little more now,” the captain proposed. “I’m making a night of it. I don’t know about you others but I’m going to have a bottle of the usual stuff—Scotch, Fred. And, Judy,” he went on, raising his voice, “it’s time you left off letting that chap hang round as though he were the only pebble on the beach. Draw up, all of you, and be sociable. Make a kind of circle here and get a song out of the lass.”

Judy shrugged her shoulders and slid down to the floor with a liberal display of silk-clad legs. Her companion hesitated for a moment but finally followed her example. Somehow or other, though not one of the men was a coward and Joseph himself was a bit of a boxer, they none of them liked to see the captain ugly. Mrs. Martin came out mincingly and, though she refused to accept a chair, she drank a glass of port standing up.

"Harry's quite right, I think," she said. "He doesn't like me to sit down this side of the bar. There would be no end of a to-do afterwards if I were to stay, though he's got to be amiable now, so Captain and gentlemen all, I hope you will have a pleasant evening. I shan't be far away."

She lifted her skirts coquettishly and crossed the sawdusted floor as though it were a muddy street. Joe and the captain exchanged winks. Judy sank into a chair between the two men.

"The first time," she declared, "I ever heard what your cargo really was, Captain. Put a cheese in for me next time."

The glasses were filled. Someone passed cigars round. The buzz of conversation grew louder. It was evidently going to be one of the old nights at the Green Man. Then the door swung open. The one person whose advent was half welcomed and half feared stood on the threshold looking round at them.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the sergeant greeted them.

CHAPTER XXI

The blank silence which followed the sergeant's entrance was only momentary. A dozen brisk invitations were issued to join the little circle. The newcomer, however, shook his head.

"I'm with you in spirit," he said. "A whisky if you please, Fred. But I've got to prove that I'm only an onlooker here. Might have to run any of you in any moment, though you none of you look like trouble to-night. Never saw the captain looking so smart. They did you pretty well, too, up at Hartlepool, Miss Judy. New frock and hat, isn't it?"

"What a man to take notice!" Judy exclaimed. "And what are you going to run any of us in for, Mr. Sanders? That's a pleasant threat to start a cheerful evening with."

"Young lady," was the earnest reply, "whomever I take under my paternal charge this evening I'll lay long odds it's not you nor the captain there, nor anyone in your circle. It's quite true," he went on, sipping his whisky, "that I have a job on, but the person I'm looking for is not in this crowd. I have half-an-hour before I'm on serious duty again. Give me a cigar, Fred."

"With me," the captain bawled out. "All cigars to-night are on me."

"Good news," the sergeant observed. "Well," he continued, a moment or two later, "with my cigar lit and my glass in my hand here's my very best wishes to you, Miss

Judy, and welcome back. The place isn't quite the same without you. I can tell you that."

There was a chorus of assents. Judy looked across the room at the speaker. Suddenly she slipped from her chair, crossed the floor and stood before him with her arms akimbo.

"Do you know any French, Sergeant?" she asked.

"A few odd words," he admitted. "Nothing to speak of."

"Do you know the meaning of the phrase *double entendre*?" she asked, pronouncing the words with apparent difficulty.

He smiled.

"I do," he admitted.

"Then, was there anything of it in your remark?"

The noise had recommenced at the farther end of the room. Sanders leaned forward. Judy often puzzled him, especially when she was serious. It seemed to him that there were two women there. Her gift of mimicry perhaps. . . .

"There may have been," he confessed. "There are times when you puzzle me, Miss Judy."

"A simple child of nature like me!" she murmured.

"H'm," he grunted. "Call round at the Police Station some time, Judy, and I'll show you your dossier."

“What have I got a dossier for?” she asked. “I’ve never been in prison.”

“It isn’t only the people who’ve been in prison we have to keep note of,” he assured her.

“I thought that sort of thing only went on in Russia,” she remarked. “Keeping an account of people’s private lives who are not even suspected of crime! You don’t think I’m a decoy for a gangster’s club or anything of that sort, do you?”

“Miss Judy,” the sergeant replied, “I think of you very often but I have never thought of you as being connected with anything of that sort. What ideas I may have about you run in another direction altogether.”

“Tell me your ideas about me,” she begged, with a smile which seemed somehow oddly at variance with her thickly painted lips.

He shook his head.

“Judy,” he confided, “in the Bible there was a chap called Samson and there was a woman who wanted something from him and she was called Delilah. I like women, Judy, and if I were one of these lads here I would make off with you for good if I could, but if you ask me whether I trust you or not—I don’t. There. That’s not how a policeman ought to talk but, you see, I believe in plain speaking sometimes. I shall be on to you some day and then you’ll remember what I’ve just told you.”

Judy left him with an audacious grimace. She resumed her seat between the captain and Tom Bowles.

“He’s a queer sort, the sergeant,” she confided to them both.

“He’s one of the best of that breed I ever knew,” Tom Bowles volunteered. “Cops, I mean. But what he wants coming here so often is more than I can rightly make out. He’s a moderate drinker and I’ve seen times when he’s forgotten to order anything at all, but he makes a second home of this place.”

“He’s always welcome,” Fred, who was serving drinks, declared. “He keeps the real rough ’uns out. I think myself,” he added, dropping his voice a little, “he’s had a tip from up West to keep his eye on this place. Let ’im do it, I say. The toughs never did fancy it much.”

Tom Bowles glanced around the room to where the sergeant was exchanging gossip with one of the night watchmen of an adjacent wharf.

“That’s all right,” he agreed. “This is not the place they come to for brawls and fights. There ain’t women enough. They hurry up to the main street, the sailors do, when they arrive. They find the women there, and where there’s women there’s trouble. All the same, to me there’s always been a creepy sort of air about this corner.”

“What do you mean?” the master of the *Henrietta Anne* demanded. “Mine’s the only steamer that comes into this blasted hole. What do you mean—a creepy sort of air? You don’t mean I unload gangsters, white slaves or whatever they call ’em here?”

“Don’t mean anything of the sort,” Tom declared hastily. “But I do say that for some reason or other this corner always gives me

the impression of being watched and, after all, things do happen. There was that poor chap chucked down the fire escape at Bunter's Buildings—"

"Might 'ave suicided," the captain put in.

"Ask the sergeant what he thinks," Tom Bowles went on. "Then there's a chap they're looking for—they was dragging the river two days for 'im—a journalist what disappeared down here, and I know, because I get my orders regular. We do a sharper lookout on the small craft who might do a bit of smuggling than anywhere along the river. Caught a few in our time, too."

The captain had the air of one who wished to be truculent.

"I call it a respectable neighbourhood," he insisted.

"So it is," Mr. Martin asserted soothingly, from behind the bar. "Me and the Missus is beginning to wonder whether Judy is going to oblige this evening?"

Judy danced, and no one watched her with more appreciation than Mr. Sanders. The captain followed her every movement with a glassy stare. The applause when she had finished was tremendous. She gave them an encore and the door was opened so that the crowd in the public bar could get a glimpse of her. After the second encore, amidst a storm of applause, she glided down the room and stood in front of the sergeant's chair.

"Mr. Sanders," she said.

“Wonderful, Judy!” he exclaimed. “I should like to watch you dance like that every night of my life.”

“Fraud,” she laughed. “Listen. You brought the Bible out at me just now. I know a bit about the Bible, too, and what I didn’t know I seen one night on the stage. A chap named Herod, an ancient king—did you ever hear of him?”

“Sounds familiar,” the sergeant admitted guardedly.

“Well, he was a king all right, and he had a niece or a daughter —Lord knows who she was, for they mixed up their relations anyhow in those days—and she had spots knocked off the whole world for dancing. There was one day she didn’t want to dance and he promised her anything that she liked to ask for if she would give him just one turn. Anything she asked for, mind you. Couldn’t feel that way yourself, could you, Mr. Sanders?”

He smiled.

“I might feel that way, Judy,” he confessed. “But,” striking his chest—“Duty! I don’t think I should succumb.”

She swayed a little on her feet. It was a different measure to anything she had danced before—a trifle more sinuous, a touch of passion even in its restraint.

“I could dance better even than I danced to those men,” she said, “all for you in this little corner.”

“If my memory serves me,” he ruminated, “there was a question of a man’s head on a dish.”

“Quite right,” she agreed. “Well?”

“I’m not that sort of bloodthirsty fellow,” he assured her.

“I don’t want a man’s head on a dish,” Judy told him. “What I want is to see a little way farther into the back of your brain.”

“Well, that don’t seem difficult,” the sergeant observed. “They’re telling me up at the Yard that I haven’t got much just now.”

“Because you’re not succeeding down here?” she asked quickly.

Metaphorically the sergeant bit his lip. Actually he stamped out his cigar with a frown.

“I’m a local man, I am,” he said. “I’ve only got to watch over my own crowd in the regular way. There are just two affairs down here I’m in the cart for and I know no more about them than the whole world knows.”

She swayed on her feet again, humming gently to herself.

“This,” she confided softly, “is to keep the others quiet. What I want to know is—why did you come and interview me to-day? Why do you mistrust me? What was Loman’s business? Why is his murderer so important? Doesn’t it form part of something else in your mind? What about this man Granderson who disappeared? Is he in it too?”

“All this on a dish?” the sergeant asked.

“But such a dance,” she murmured, half closing her eyes, as she

swayed to the music from her own lips.

Sanders rose to his feet and glanced at the clock. He mopped his forehead on which drops of perspiration were already appearing.

“When I’ve had two drinks and feel my head beginning to spin,” he said, “I know where safety lies, and that’s out of doors. Good night to you, Judy, young woman. Good night to you all,” he called out, with a wave of the hand. “Drink steady and turn out to the hour. Good night.”

He took dignified leave of the little company. Judy returned meditatively to her place. The captain scowled at her.

“Making eyes at that damned policeman,” he muttered, “and you so particular!”

“I like policemen,” Judy declared innocently. “Besides, I want him to tell me something.”

“If you get anything out of old Sanders you’ll be lucky,” the captain growled. “He’s ready enough to talk about your business but he never has much to say about his own.”

“Look who’s here!” Fred suddenly exclaimed, with a broad grin.

The saloon door had swung open. Half defiantly, half timorously, David slouched in. He was wearing a new suit, a blue serge double-breasted coat, which hung like the garb on a scarecrow from his narrow shoulders. He had neglected to provide himself with a seafaring hat and his black bowler, a

little too large for him, which seemed to be standing on the tips of his extending ears, gave him rather the appearance of a music-hall turn. His large, ill-kept hands stuck out awkwardly. His soft linen collar was already crumpled. The fact that for the first time within the memory of anyone there he had had his hair cut gave him a strangely unfamiliar appearance. He looked round truculently yet with obvious nervousness and made for a vacant chair.

"Damn my eyes if it isn't David!" the captain gasped.

Judy, who had recognised the fact some few seconds before, leaned forward and buried her face in her hands. The rest of the company, however, made no effort to conceal their mirth. The young man shot a resentful glance at them from his weak unpleasant-looking eyes.

"Glass of beer, Fred," he ordered, abandoning his idea of a chair and climbing onto a stool.

"You get out of this, young fellow," the captain ordered him. "This ain't any place for you."

"What do you mean?" David rejoined, with feeble truculence. "This is a public house, ain't it? I've got as much right to be here as anybody else. I've got the money to pay for my drink—and earned it," he added, with a sinister attempt to give meaning to his words.

The captain looked him up and down and grinned.

"Where did you get that outfit?" he enquired.

“No business of yours,” was the sullen answer. “I don’t ask where you get your clothes, do I?”

He took up the tankard of beer which Fred had handed to him. The captain rose to his feet.

“Out of here you go, me lad!” he ordered.

“Why?” the young man demanded.

The captain was not oversteady upon his legs but he remained standing behind the table.

“Because it ain’t etiquette to come to the same house of entertainment as your captain and superior officer,” he declared. “And if you do come, the saloon bar ain’t the place for you anyway. You take your mug along with you and find your way to the public bar through that door.”

The young man made no movement.

“I’ve come to see Judy dance,” he insisted doggedly.

“Is that what you bought your new rig-out for?” the captain jeered.

There was an ugly flush in David’s cheeks. His mouth was mirthlessly open. The teeth which he disclosed, yellow and uneven, were more like the fangs of an old bulldog than those of a human being.

“That ain’t your business,” he answered. “I’ve come to see Judy dance.”

“You get to hell out of here,” Jan Henderson shouted. “That door leads into the public bar and through it you get. You can see Miss Judy dance by looking round the corner of the counter—quite near enough for you. Do you hear, me lad? ’op it.”

David hesitated for a matter of seconds, then he slowly unwound his legs and slithered to the ground. He cast one look at the captain,—a look full of malice restrained only by cowardice,—then he crossed the floor slowly towards the entrance to the larger room. There was something sinister in his silence. He had returned to his old lopping stride. The touch of bravado that had inspired him for a moment was gone. He only raised his head once, and that was to glance furtively towards Judy. He caught an expression in her eyes in which there was at least a gleam of pity. He looked away quickly and passed through the door.

“Like his blasted cheek,” the captain muttered, as he resumed his seat.

There was a somewhat strained silence. David’s entrance had provoked nothing but mirth. His silent disappearance left, somehow or other, a different emotion. Tom Bowles expressed it as he pushed the tobacco lower in his pipe and lit it.

“He ain’t a pleasant sight to look on, that young man of yours, Captain,” he remarked. “Looked like some sort of snail crawling across the floor.”

Judy shivered.

“What a horrid thought!” she exclaimed.

The captain banged upon the table.

“One more dance,” he shouted. “Drink up, lads. We’ll all have one to Judy’s coming back.”

The stir of the place recommenced. Fred hurried forward with the glasses. Everyone began to talk at once. Judy rose from her chair and threw off her scarf.

CHAPTER XXII

According to her usual custom Judy, at a few minutes before closing time, slipped away with the excuse of saying “Good night” to Mrs. Martin and disappeared. The captain, who had been engaged in a heated argument with Tom Bowles, turned back to find her gone.

“Blast that Judy, if she ain’t sneaked again,” he exclaimed.

There was a ripple of laughter.

“No good getting excited about it, Captain,” his companion remarked. “She serves us all alike.”

The master of the *Henrietta Anne* stooped for his cap, and rose to his feet—six foot three of fiery, half-drunken bully.

“It’s no odds to me,” he declared, “how Judy treats any of you others but there’s no woman going to fool Jan Henderson.”

He turned towards the door. There was an uneasy murmur throughout the room.

“Look here, Captain,” Fred remonstrated from behind the bar, “Judy’s all right by me and most of us here. If she don’t want men and she’s got enough to live on she ought to be left alone.”

The captain roared defiance at them all.

"You're a lot of snipes, not men," he shouted. "To hell with the lot of you! I go my own way and the one who dares to interfere with Jan Henderson is going to get a crack on the head and a bed in the river. Anyone going to stop me?"

No one moved. There wasn't a man there who could have stood up for thirty seconds against him. Amidst the unfriendly silence he strode out into the night.

Judith sped on her way home through the thick mist by a slightly roundabout route, but one by means of which she had many a time been able to evade a pursuer. To-night, however, she was to receive a shock. At the first corner she came face to face with a man standing in the middle of the pavement. Even in the obscurity there was no mistaking his identity. It was David, his bowler hat on the back of his head, smoking furiously the end of a fag, his unpleasant face sinister and repellent.

"What do you want?" she asked sharply. "Please let me go by."

He swung round.

"I'll see you home, Judy," he said.

"I don't wish anyone to see me home," she declared. "How dare you follow me?"

"I didn't follow you," he replied with a chuckle. "I cut in ahead of you. I knew which way you went. I've watched you many a time."

She walked on breathlessly. He kept his place by her side.

“Judy,” he pleaded, “I ain’t so bad. Look at me—and look at this.”

She turned her head and glanced downwards. He was holding a little wad of treasury notes in his hand.

“Ten pounds, Judy,” he said hoarsely. “I’ve been a long time saving that there money, and it was hard work to squeeze it out of the captain, I can tell you! Here—take it.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” she cried. “I don’t want your money. I don’t want you near me. How dared you think of such a thing?”

She could catch nothing of his expression in the dim light. Perhaps that was as well. She heard, however, a faint disagreeable sound in his throat like a stifled chuckle.

“I’m not so bad, Judy,” he repeated. “I’ve been thinking about you day and night ever since you first came to the Green Man. I’ve been saving up for you. There’s ten pounds here and I’ve paid for me new togs. I’ll never bother you again, but I’m coming home with you to-night. You couldn’t get away from me, Judy, if you was to run faster than you’ve ever run in your life. I’m strong in the arm too. I can hold you. I’ve got a flask in my pocket with a drink. Come along cheerful, Judy. I shan’t hurt you.”

She stamped her foot upon the pavement.

“Let me alone, you horror!” she cried.

She took a sudden spring forward and dashed round the last corner. It was only about forty yards to the entrance

to the building but she was suddenly conscious that her knees were trembling. She felt his long arms round her neck, his hot noxious breath on her cheek.

"You couldn't run away from me, Judy," he said triumphantly. "Not if you was to run ever so hard. You can call out again if you want to. There's nothing but empty wharves and the river to hear you."

Judy swayed upon her feet. There was something awful about the lopping stride, the strained but confident voice of the creature by her side. She looked about her wildly. It was an utterly deserted neighbourhood at nighttime. There was scarcely a light even in the murky windows of the tenement house.

"I'll give you more than ten pounds," she pleaded, "to go away and leave me alone. Do you hear? I'll give you fifty pounds—to-morrow—if you'll go now and leave me. You don't know what you're doing. Go up and find a woman on the Broadway. There's plenty of them there. Listen—fifty pounds! More if you want it."

There was something horrible in the finality of his rejoinder. He had leaned towards her and those weak, watery eyes of his seemed like spots of steely fire.

"You could offer me all hell or all heaven, Judy," he answered, "and I wouldn't want them. I want you. And as sure as that's the river flowing yonder I'm going to have you if I swing for it! I'm going to have you to-night."

Suddenly the breath seemed to stop in her body. They were almost at the entrance to Bunter's Buildings and, straining

through the gloom, her eyes made out something standing on the bottom step—something that looked like a human figure. It moved. She was so terrified it might go away that she screamed out loud.

“Help!” she cried. “Help! Police!”

David’s fierce hand had closed over her mouth. She struck him a furious blow, from which he never winced. Suddenly, however, the form of the newcomer was revealed. It was Captain Jan Henderson whose bulky figure was suddenly towering above them. He thrust his head forward through the gloom.

“David,” he yelled. “What in hell’s name are you doing here?”

“I’m terrified,” Judy shrieked. “Send him away!”

The captain lurched forward. David flew at his throat like a wildcat. Judy stole up the steps. Some hideous instinct of curiosity made her turn her head as she readied the last one. She was just in time to see the captain lift David bodily from the ground and send him, with a sobbing scream in his throat, through the air to disappear in the mist. She heard the sound of his fall, the crunch of his bones, as it seemed, upon the stones. Afterwards she only knew that there was something black lying there, something which never moved.

“Serve him right if I broke his bloody neck,” Henderson grunted.

Captain Jan Henderson in his new rôle of rescuer was in a dangerous mood. His blood was fired with drink but he was not

drunk. A sort of bestialism which took the place of passion was hot in his veins. Thick-skinned though he was, he was no fool, and times without number Judy, by a movement of her skirt when he had come a little too close to her, a contemptuous curl of the lips when he had made anything in the nature of an amatory advance, had been driving him mad. He knew her trick of slipping away and arriving at the river front by a longer route, and to-night he had circumvented it. The luck was certainty with him. He had arrived there in time to be her rescuer from his miserable lout of a cabin steward.

"Thank God you were here!" she exclaimed, with the shadow of an even greater fear upon her. "But why? What do you want?"

"You know," he answered, trying to possess himself of her arm.

She shrank back. Nothing but the river bank behind and a mist hanging over the deserted thoroughfare on either side. The terror of the last few minutes seemed as nothing compared with the chill dread which had settled upon her.

"Leave me alone, if you please," she insisted, trying to keep the revulsion from her tone. "If I had wanted an escort home I should have asked for one. I'm going to my room."

"And I'm going with you," Henderson chuckled. "You see what happens to you through being too independent. Pawed about by my steward! I'm going to teach you that men like me can't be treated like dummies night after night."

"Go to your own women," she ordered. "I'm not one of them and never could be. If you lay a hand on me you'll regret it all your life."

“Shall I?” he answered thickly. “I’m thinking it would be a pleasant memory. Come on! No good squabbling here. You’ve stood me off long enough, Judy. You’re for it now, my dear. I’m going to start by giving you a kiss.”

He seized her in his arms. She struck him fiercely across the face so that for a moment he staggered back.

“You’ll pay for that, my lady!” he cried furiously. “Chuck it, I tell you. You might as well hit a lamppost with your little fists as me. Look you here—”

He caught her up in his arms as though she had been a child. Then, even as she felt his hot breath on her cheeks, she was conscious of a yell of pain from his thick lips. She heard a queer uncomfortable sound, the scrunching progress of a knife driven through cloth and flesh. That shapeless blob in the middle of the street had disappeared, but behind Henderson some grotesque object was sprawling against him, breathing hard but remaining speechless. . . . Judy fled up the first flight of stairs, panting and sobbing like a creature possessed. On the first landing her brain worked. She pressed her thumb against the button for the automatic lift. The ropes moved. To her joy it ascended. It stopped in front of her. She crawled in, touched another button and mounted. Up on the tenth floor where it stopped she got out. She listened intently. Not a sound. Picking up her skirts she ran up the next flight. Again she listened. Not a sound. She made her way to her own door, drew the key from her pocket, opened it and passed in. The click of the spring lock behind her seemed to spell safety, but it was not until she had drawn out the small revolver from underneath one of her dresses and dropped in the cartridges that the tense look really left her

face.

CHAPTER XXIII

Towards three o'clock the next morning a light breeze came stealing up the river from the sea so that the mists parted and rolled away towards the Essex swamps. Judy felt the increasing freshness of the air and, rising from the seat which she had occupied for the last three hours, crossed over to the window. She looked downwards into the narrow street. There was no sign of that ugly blob lying on the cobbles, no sign of anything in any way unusual. There were lights upon the river. Once a police boat went honking by. A passing tug blew a blast upon its siren and a few still half-drunken seamen stretched on a seat below rose blaspheming to their feet. Judy yawned, lit a fresh cigarette and threw herself back in her chair which she had placed exactly opposite the door. On the table by her side was a further supply of cigarettes, a cup of coffee, and a small but deadly-looking revolver fully charged. She had completely recovered her composure, but she had never been able to rid herself of an apprehension that the troubles of the night were not yet over. With the revolver by her side she was prepared to meet them almost equably. The only thing she feared was sleep. She took up her book and began to read. Barely ten minutes later she threw it down with a start and sprang to her feet. This time there was no race of hurried footsteps. There was something which seemed to her to spell danger more acutely—the stealthy pad of soft feet mounting the last flight of stairs. Her senses throughout this terrible night had become so acute that she found herself taking note of a profound weariness in those dragging footsteps, as though her approaching visitor were a

sick or a tired man. She lowered her revolver a little when she heard them pause outside the door. There was a brief silence, then a feeble tap.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“Let me in,” a weak voice begged.

“Certainly not,” she replied. “It’s three o’clock in the morning. Whoever you are—go away.”

“It’s David speaking,” the voice outside groaned. “I saved your life to-night, Judy, but the captain he treated me cruel. I’ve been lying down in the passage hoping someone would come.”

“Go home,” she ordered. “That’s the best thing you can do.”

“The captain’s got took there on an ambulance,” he went on. “Warn’t no good, though. ’E’s dead.”

“Dead!” she exclaimed.

The voice outside became tiredly triumphant.

“I killed ’im. I never thought it would reach ’is ’eart, but it did. I ’eard them saying so. They ain’t been long gone by with the stretcher. I know what they’ve done—they’ve gone for the police.”

She shivered.

“Well, you can’t come in here,” she insisted. “Please go away.”

“I’m most done in,” David pleaded. “Give me a glass of water or a drop of brandy if you’ve got it.”

Judy hesitated. The voice had the same quality as the footsteps, the quality of intense tiredness.

“Will you promise to go away if I give you something?” she asked.

“Honour bright.”

She poured out some brandy from a flask and added a little water to it, then she turned the key and opened the door. David almost fell across the threshold. He was a terrible sight. There was blood on his face and his new trousers were soiled and torn. His coat had gone altogether and his shirt was bloodstained. He grabbed the glass from her and drank.

“You must go to a hospital,” she urged. “They will dress your wounds for you properly.”

He set down the glass empty.

“Couldn’t I stay a little time?” he begged. “There’s no call for you to be afeared. I ache all over and my ’eart ain’t going properly. I’ve still got that ten pounds. Let me stay a bit, Judy.”

Judy remembered for long afterwards, with a shudder, that single second during which she hesitated. She was not particularly sympathetic by nature. She felt nothing but a sick loathing for this ghastly-looking youth, and charity was not strong enough in her heart to help her to forget it. Nevertheless the fear of doing an inhuman thing which

might cost him his life was responsible for a second's hesitation. It flashed away as quickly as it had come. She became suddenly inspired. She realised what was threatening her. She snatched up the revolver from her table just as his fingers were in the act of closing over the butt, just as he made that forward lunge which was to have been her undoing.

"You filthy coward!" she cried, taking a quick step backwards. "You're shamming, you know you are. I don't believe you have killed Captain Henderson. Get out of my room!"

He stood quite still. His features were working pitiably, but he said nothing.

"Do you hear?" she repeated. "Get out of my room! Can't you understand that I find you loathsome? I'm sick to death of you and the captain. I don't know which I hate the most."

He retreated a pace towards the door. The springs of anger were not in him. He could only whine and beg for forgiveness and crumbs.

"You're hard on me, Judy," he muttered, shuffling farther backwards, however. "I stabbed the captain mortal hard. I risked it all even if he ain't dead. I did it for your sake. I did it all for you."

"Then do this for me," she ordered. "Leave this room."

His face twitched.

"You may be sorry for it, miss," he whined. "I've been finding out things here and things there. The captain

knows it. He'd sack me if he dared—and he daren't. You'd like to get rid of me—"

"Stop!" she cried abruptly. "Another shuffle forward and I'm going to shoot you. You're all the time pushing yourself an inch or two nearer. I'm not going to take any risks. Step back that yard or I'm going to shoot now. Do you hear? Step back."

He remained motionless. Judy aimed well over his head and pulled the trigger. There was a crash. David yelled and threw up his arms.

"I shan't aim over your head next time," she threatened.

David hesitated. There was something of the hero, something of the fatalist, and a great deal of the beast in that hesitation. She played her last card and won.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "There's someone coming up the stairs. They've heard the shot. If you hurry off and hide I'll say it was an accident. If not you'll go to prison. You won't like prison, David. Listen! They're only two storeys below."

David heard nothing, but his ear was twice its natural size from one of the captain's blows, and for once his cunning failed him. He pushed open the door and leaned over the threshold to listen. She flung herself against him with all her strength and sent him staggering as far as the banisters. Then she slammed the door and locked it. She held her breath and listened. Silence reigned throughout Bunter's Buildings.

There was an angry sunrise that morning over the Thames. A rim

of lurid red seemed to force itself through a tumbled chaos of magenta-coloured clouds, and on either side, driven by the east wind, came rolling masses of black vapour. Soon the whole sky was dark and rain began to fall. The early trams were packed. Men and women forced to go afoot ran, bent double, to their tasks. The electric lights of night shone out to lighten the menacing gloom. Captain Henderson, fresh from the night First Aid of the nearest hospital, stepped groaning out of a taxicab onto the wharf and blew his whistle from the shelter of the vehicle. He blew it three times before there was any reply. Then the boatswain himself appeared with the dinghy. He looked curiously at the captain, who seemed to have shrunken to half his usual size and held one arm perfectly stiff.

"Where's David?" the latter asked.

"Dunno, Captain. He may be aboard or he may be in 'orspital. Reckon he was in the wars last night."

The captain paid the driver and stepped with difficulty into the dinghy. His boatswain looked at him in some consternation.

"Reckon the sailing orders came last night, Captain," he said. "There was a message came on board at two o'clock."

The captain nodded but said nothing. He pulled himself on deck with difficulty and made his way down to his cabin. The despatch was there lying upon his table. He read it and blew his whistle.

"Send the chief mate aft," he ordered the man who answered it.

The chief mate presently arrived pulling on his jersey.

“Blow the siren and send round for the chaps,” the captain ordered. “Tell Jim to get in the rest of the stores and telephone down for Captain Haslam to the pilot’s lodge. We go out on this evening’s tide.”

“No cargo, Captain?” the man asked.

“Devil a case,” was the gruff answer. “There’s plenty waiting the other side. We can’t hang on for ever.”

The man hesitated.

“She’ll ride light round the Ness, sir,” he observed.

“She can ride to the bottom for anything I care,” was the captain’s indifferent reply. “Obey orders, that’s all we’ve got to do.”

The man withdrew with a clumsy salute. The captain sank wearily onto the lounge. He looked up at the sound of footsteps and his mouth opened as he recognised the disreputable newcomer.

“God bless my soul!” he exclaimed. “Do you mean to say you dare to show your ugly snout on board?”

“Haven’t any other home,” was the sullen reply.

“Left me lying out for dead,” the captain growled.

“That’s a stinker,” David declared, with a fine show of indignation. “I give that cop two bob to telephone for the ambulance for you.”

Jan Henderson struggled to remember. An ambulance of some sort had certainly arrived, although he fancied that he himself had been the one who had attracted the attention of a policeman. However, it was all very hazy in his mind.

“Do you mean, then, that you’re going to stay on board?” he demanded.

“I’ve got to,” David answered. “I got nowhere else to go to.”

“Where have you been to last night?” his chief continued with sudden suspicion.

“Collins’ in Broadway,” David answered. “Got a bed for a tanner. I paid a district nurse I met in the street a half-a-crown to look over some of the places where you’d ’it me.”

“If you come along,” Henderson growled, “I shall chuck you overboard before we get clear of the river.”

David’s lips parted. It was a wicked grin. He was staring hard at the captain’s straight arm.

“I don’t reckon you’ll be throwing anyone into the river this voyage,” he chuckled.

“What have you done with your money?” the captain asked, with another flash of suspicion.

David dragged out his wad of treasury notes.

“I’ve got ’em all,” he declared weakly. “I tell you what, Captain. It’s that there Judy. She’s a witch, that young

woman is. I offered her the lot and she wouldn't 'ave me."

The captain leaned forward.

"Gimme your money to take care of, you blasted idiot. There isn't a trollop on the riverside that's worth more than five bob."

"Maybe," David admitted thickly. "But you're in the same boat as me, Captain. She's like one of them witches in books. You'd give 'er all you've got, and I'd give 'er all I've got. And there's another thing," David went on. "If I weren't a beaten-up, broken-boned mess after what you done to me last night I'd black your eye for calling 'er a trollop."

"These bloody women," the captain muttered. "Bring me some coffee."

CHAPTER XXIV

There was visible disappointment in Sergeant Sanders' eyes as he glanced round the half-deserted saloon bar of the Green Man. It was close upon the popular hour but there was a marked absence of the habitués.

"Hello, hello!" he exclaimed, sinking into his accustomed chair. "Fred, my whisky. Where's everybody?"

"Looks kind of empty, doesn't it?" the barman replied, as he reached up for a bottle. "Mr. Havers, he'll probably be in directly—and Mr. Bowles from the motor-boat garage."

"Where's Captain Henderson?" Sanders asked. The barman poured out the whisky and placed a jug of water upon the table.

"The *Henrietta Anne* went out on this evening's tide," he announced. "Such a to-do there was this morning blowing sirens and collecting his men—he's left two of 'em behind now, they say."

"Well, I'm hanged," the sergeant exclaimed. "I thought the captain would have been here for another month. Where's his cargo?"

"Didn't take any," a seafaring man from the corner growled. "She's bobbed off like a bit of cork. She ain't got enough ballast to travel empty. Reckon she'll have a bad time if she meets a nor' easter."

“And Judy?” the newcomer enquired.

“She doesn’t usually come before this time,” Fred replied, glancing at the clock.

“Well, live and learn, they say,” the sergeant remarked good-humouredly. “I never knew that it paid a good-sized steamer like the *Henrietta Anne* to come over here from Holland with a cargo of cheeses and go back empty.”

“No more it don’t pay,” the seafaring man declared emphatically. “Any ’prentice could tell you that. Captain Henderson, he reckoned they’d big freight waiting for them in Amsterdam and they were willing to pay a little extra if he got back without delay.”

“Ah well, everyone knows their own business best,” the sergeant observed.

“I ain’t so sure about that either,” the other objected. “You ought to know, Joe,” he went on, turning to the Customs man, who had just arrived. “What sort of cargo does the *Henrietta Anne* bring over?”

“Mostly Dutch cheeses, butter, and liqueurs,” was the prompt reply. “There’s a pretty useful bit of trade done between Holland and here, but there ain’t what I should call reciprocation. There’s always a difficulty about cargoes from here to Amsterdam. The captain ain’t been the first one to hang around the wharves and then go back empty.”

“Well, it’s none of my business anyway,” the sergeant decided cheerfully. “I was thinking about asking Jan Henderson a

question, though, if he'd been here. Do any of you mind a tall lanky fellow who came in here one wet night and sat dripping in that corner in oilskins and a sou' wester?"

"I remember him," Fred declared. "He was after a passage to Amsterdam but the captain wasn't having any. Don't see why neither."

"Perhaps he changed his mind," the sergeant suggested. "Someone told me they saw him in a motorboat going round the *Henrietta Anne*."

"He did that more than once and the captain didn't like it," Fred confided. "He's as sensitive as a girl about anyone peering round his ship. Got a few plates out of place, I expect."

"She's a watertight craft all right," Tom Bowles observed. "I wouldn't mind a trip in her myself."

"To go back to that chap in the oilskins," Fred went on, turning to the sergeant. "He did have a date with the captain on board the *Henrietta Anne*. Don't you remember that scarecrow David came and fetched the old man away one night? That was because this bloke was there waiting to see him."

"Perhaps he got his passage and sailed this morning after all," Joe Havers put in.

"As likely as not," Fred agreed. "Captain Henderson was free-handed enough when he'd a drop of liquor inside him, but he wasn't a man to neglect a ten-pound note."

"It never occurred to any of you as strange, I suppose,"

the sergeant propounded, knocking out his pipe, “that the captain was kind of particular whom he let on board; didn’t seem to care about visitors at all?”

“He’d nothing to be shy about,” Joe Havers observed. “I’ve been over every inch of her and I’ll say this for the old cap’: He’s a nasty fellow when he’s in liquor but he’s a straight man on his job. In six years I’ve never known him try a bit of contraband. Some of these captains of small freighters, they’re up to any monkey trick to make a bit on the side.”

The sergeant rose to his feet and buttoned on his coat. He laid down the money for his drink and waved his hand.

“Good evening, all,” he said. “I’ve got a telephone call to put through. Maybe I’ll be back later on.”

It was a black, squally night and the salty wind was blowing with a tang to it when the *Henrietta Anne* slowed down to drop her pilot. The captain, who was standing on the bridge, scowled as he saw another light bobbing about as well as the pilot boat. The pilot, who was halfway down the ladder, turned back and shouted.

“Police patrol boat wants a word with you, Captain.”

A voice came from the smaller craft.

“Inspector Warden here. I’m coming on board for a moment. Give her a point or two more to the starboard. There’s a bad swell here.”

The captain patted his hip pocket and took up his megaphone.

“Make it lively, Warden,” he shouted. “There’s a wind in the channel and I’m light. Been hanging about for fog all the afternoon.”

The steamer veered a point or two. The police boat was cleverly manœuvred to the sheltered side. The inspector, dripping from head to foot, came nimbly up the rope ladder and stepped on deck. He hastened onto the bridge where the captain was staring anxiously ahead.

“Dirty weather outside,” the latter said. “What can I do for you, Warden?”

“I won’t keep you a moment longer than I can help,” the inspector promised. “I want to know whether you have a passenger on board.”

“I wish I had a hundred,” the captain replied. “We’d ride easy then.”

“I shouldn’t be interested in a hundred. It’s one man I want. I don’t think there’s much chance of his being with you but we’ve got to find out.”

Henderson was gazing ahead with the air of a man who has heard nothing. He touched an electric knob and spoke down a tube.

“What is it you’re after, Inspector?” he asked, swinging suddenly round. “See that green light there? If I don’t move a point or two she’ll get me amidships.”

“Don’t let me interfere,” the inspector replied. “I’m here to find out what I came to find out, but take your own time. My men can beat about for home and we can signal any incoming craft to take me back.”

The captain shouted more orders. The boat swung away. The incoming steamer passed within a few yards and there was a very creditable interchange of blasphemy. The captain, who had had rather the worst of the encounter, turned to his unwelcome visitor irritably.

“There’s one man on board,” he confessed. “He was took ill directly he arrived but he was too bad to put off. Writes for papers or something. If it’s him you’re bothering about you’ll find him below in Number Seven cabin.”

The Inspector of River Police turned abruptly towards the companionway.

“Sounds as though it might be the man I’m looking for,” he declared hopefully.

The inspector made his way below and, after striking half a dozen matches, he discovered cabin Number Seven. There was no answer to his knock. He entered, found a switch and turned it on. A little exclamation broke from his lips.

“Who are you?” he enquired.

The man on the bed made a feeble effort to sit up but immediately collapsed. The inspector leaned over him. He was unconscious, unrecognisable.

The master of the *Henrietta Anne* was sitting in the saloon, a bottle of spirits and a half-empty tumbler before him, when the inspector presented himself about an hour later. The latter wasted few words.

"We've hailed a lighter and I'm going to take your passenger off," he announced curtly.

"You can do what you bloody well like with him," was the uncivil reply. "He came on this ship without invitation and he's welcome to leave it when he chooses."

"Perhaps you'll explain how he got here?" the inspector invited.

"He came on without permission," the captain said surlily. "Wanted a passage to Amsterdam. So far as I know he was properly treated until he began to want to go over the ship by himself. No one's allowed to do that on any boat. He might have had a bomb with him or anything. He got into trouble with my men and they gave him a hiding. Serve him right!"

"How long has he been on board?"

"Not more than a couple of days."

"Why didn't you land him before you left?"

"Why should I bother about the fellow?" the captain demanded. "I had to make the tide, and if you want to know I forgot all about him. If he's still set on going to Amsterdam we shall be there sometime to-morrow or the next day with luck."

"Ring up your bosun," the inspector ordered, "and let

him unsling a dinghy for me. I'm going to take your passenger ashore."

The captain rang the bell.

"Your risk, not mine," he observed. "I don't care what becomes of him."

"How did he meet with his injuries?" the inspector asked once more.

"I told you, he trespassed and stayed where he didn't belong and he got his from the crew. I wasn't aboard myself, as anyone can tell you. Here's the bosun. Tell him what you want and get on with it quick, for heaven's sake. If you keep me lumbering about here much longer I shall have the Rotterdam mail running into me. Taking some risk, you know, Inspector, when you come the policeman over me commanding a vessel in a narrow waterway like this. Hear that siren? That's another boat that'll be scraping our paint."

"You look after your job and I'll look after mine," the inspector enjoined. "Mine is to get that man off this boat. Yours is to get on the bridge and see that I do it safely."

The captain blundered to his feet.

"If there's anything I hate in this stinking world," he declared bitterly, "it's a policeman."

"Shouldn't be surprised if you didn't have good cause to before you've finished," was the stern reply.

CHAPTER XXV

Lady Judith drew a long breath of relief as she literally shook herself free from the crowds in Burlington House and stepped out into the fresh spring air. Her relief turned to amazement as she found herself confronted almost on the steps with Gregory.

“A miracle!” she exclaimed, holding out both her hands.

“Nothing of the sort,” he answered. “I generally make a mess of it when I try any of my Sherlock Holmes stuff, but this time I made no mistake.”

“You make one if you think you’re going in to see the pictures,” she assured him. “You’re going to give me lunch. I’m starving.”

He drew her hand through his arm and they threaded their way amongst the vehicles.

“Explain the miracle,” she ordered.

“Simple enough,” he smiled. “I called round at your Mews hutch, your maid asked me in to see if you had left any message, and on the top of your correspondence I found the large square envelope which I knew had contained the invitation to the private view. The card was gone, the envelope remained. I followed the card.”

“Clever dear,” she murmured, waving her hand to some acquaintances. “Any news?”

"Coming by degrees," he answered. "Ronnie is back at Ordino's and much better. Playing tennis at Queen's this afternoon. I played a game of squash with him last evening and he beat me hollow. I was down at Oxford on Tuesday at a meeting of learned men but no one had anything fresh to say. We barked the old dogmatic stuff at one another and considered a lengthy document from Scheidheim, the German, who still declares he is on the point of splitting the atom. Nothing interesting in my line."

"Did you do anything?" she asked.

"I read a paper upon the fallacy of some modern antidotes which didn't meet with a very warm reception. I think they look upon me as too unconventional for a real scientific man. I was rather fed up so when I got back I tried an antidote of my own. I looked in late at Phoebe Markham's cocktail party."

"The old gang there, I suppose?" she asked.

"Every one and a few newcomers. I've missed you, Judith."

"Have you really?" she asked softly, a light even more beautiful than the May sunshine gleaming for a moment in her eyes. "That's lovely to hear."

"And Ordino has some plovers' eggs."

"In a moment," she declared, "I shall be hysterical."

"I ordered them for dinner. For luncheon they will be far more suitable. And Judith."

“Well?”

“Did you read the papers this morning?”

“I haven’t even glanced at them.”

“Nathaniel Ben Dixon died in New York yesterday. Eighty-two years old, and died in his office.”

“Marvellous old man,” she exclaimed. “Will it make much difference to you, Gregory?”

“Apparently it is going to make a great deal of difference,” he replied. “I had a four-paged cable this morning. From what I gather, I shan’t need to make any further allowances to anybody.”

“Do you mean that he has left you money?” she gasped breathlessly.

“Every one of us,” Gregory replied. “I ought to be wearing a black tie, I suppose, but the dear old fellow would have hated it.”

“And you?”

“He left me more than anyone. They’re guessing at values, of course, but they say that a conservative estimate of the residue, which is left to me, is eight million dollars. Mother gets two, Ronnie one. The rest is all in the family.”

“Shall you have to go over?” she asked.

“I can’t just now, can I? I have cabled that I have important work on hand and am sending Hardy.”

They walked on in silence for a few moments. There was a faint mist of tears in her eyes.

“After all these years,” she murmured.

“After all these years be hanged!” he replied. “Forty-two and thirty-five. Nothing was ever more suitable. Over the plovers’ eggs you can decide on what day we are to be married.”

She drew a little breath. There was a slight shower falling. The sun was shining and the raindrops seemed to glitter like gold.

“Do you really want to marry me, Gregory?”

He took her gently by the arm.

“What a ridiculous question! Haven’t I been wanting to all my life? Thank goodness we both had sense enough to remain pals. I’ll tell you what I suggest over our cocktail and we can work it out over the plovers’ eggs.”

“What a heavenly morning!” she sighed.

At the luncheon table Ordino came to them, his face wreathed in smiles.

“Lady Judith,” he exclaimed with a bow, “you are the mascot of my restaurant. You go away and business droops. You come

back and the world comes with you. We have refused fifty people tables for dinner to-night. And for luncheon—look! I keep away. People—especially some of these new members—are so unreasonable. They think that I keep tables in my pocket!"

"All goes well, then, Ordino?" she asked, smiling.

"There is not a rift in the sky, milady," he answered. "I am happy because of great things and I am happy because of small things. Amongst the latter is the fact that I am able to offer you a new hors d'œuvre. Believe me, Sir Gregory, it is worthy of your attention. Wild rice from the hills of Burma with the most delicate preparation of chopped Chutney. It should follow your plovers' eggs. It should anticipate the luncheon which I have prepared for you."

"Ordino," Judith declared, "your eloquence is wasted in a mere restaurant."

"How could I employ it to better service than in offering delicacies to my favourite clients?" he argued.

"I am now entering the battlefield," Gregory declared. "Ordino, if I remember rightly, there are in the cellar still four bottles of the Veuve Clicquot Rosé 1904."

Ordino bowed reverently.

"Never have you seen me drink champagne for lunch," Gregory continued, "but this is not champagne in the ordinary sense of the word. It is the wine of the gods. It is fit for a great occasion. A great occasion has arisen. We shall ask you too, Ordino, to drink to it. Lady Judith and I are to be married early next

month.”

Ordino’s face was a study. He came from that sturdy, beauty-loving race of the south to whom romance means strength. He was the exemplification of silent joy. His expression was beatific. Of words he had few to utter.

“I go myself to the cellar with José,” he announced, turning away.

Judith let her hand rest lightly upon her companion’s for a moment.

“Life is very wonderful to-day, Gregory,” she said. “Oh, I hope —I hope so much that nothing will happen to spoil it! For the first time in my life I am beginning to feel that adventure, dangerous adventure, is not worth the risk. There is something else in my blood now. Gregory—you won’t—you won’t want to go on after we are married?”

“Not immediately,” he promised. “We can’t let Ordino down altogether. I may have to make two more visits to Amsterdam.”

“One,” she pleaded. “Isn’t it true that there is a tremendous consignment accumulating there?”

He nodded: “We’ll try and make one do.”

“You’ll never need the money,” she reminded him.

He laughed at the idea.

“We didn’t commence it altogether for money,” he declared. “It

was the adventure of it that appealed. It has paid better than the guns of my youth. I suppose I've gained a larger experience, even, of wrongdoing."

Ordino was approaching them, followed by the sommelier reverently carrying a cradle in front of him. The wires of the dust-covered bottle were carefully cut. The strings followed suit. The cork yielded to the gentle pressure of the fingers. The wine came out in a steady stream. Ordino breathed a sigh of relief. His underling beamed.

"Thirty years," the High Priest of the place murmured, "and not ullaged. Feel the cork, Sir Gregory. Feel it, your ladyship. As hard as a piece of oak."

Gregory signed to the sommelier to fill the third glass. Ordino raised it reverently to his lips.

"I am more honoured than I can say," he declared. "I drink to the happiness of the most distinguished and most gallant gentleman I have ever known, and to the most beautiful and world-loved lady. It is very fit that you two should marry."

He drank his wine slowly and reverently. For the moment, in the stern light which flooded down from the small panes of glass above, his appearance was almost sacerdotal. He was a priest inaugurating a ceremony. Then, with a low bow, he handed the empty glass to the sommelier and turned abruptly away.

"A marvellous fellow," Gregory reflected. "I really believe that he was overcome."

"I feel rather like that myself," Judith whispered.

Buffeting his way into the North Sea, Jan Henderson, a man again now that the sweeping wind was lashing and churning the sea, fought the storm with one perpetual grin upon his face. In the ward of a Poplar hospital the inspector of the Deptford depot of River Police and Sergeant Sanders stood side by side looking down at one of the patients. The former was thoroughly discomposed. His companion was endeavouring to express a mild sympathy with his colleague.

"There's not the slightest doubt about the matter, all the same, Inspector," he said. "That is no more the man we're in search of than the late Sultan of Turkey. I can even tell you who he is. I saw him every day when the *Henrietta Anne* was in dock. That's a lad named David, who was a sort of a steward on the ship. There were rumours going round that the captain and this lad had nearly killed one another the night before the *Henrietta Anne* sailed. Someone at the hospital told our police surgeon that the captain was knifed within a quarter of an inch of his heart. As for this poor devil here, there's scarcely a whole spot on him."

The inspector turned from the bedside in disgust.

"I ought to have had a proper description of this fellow Granderson," he said. "Even then that mess upon the bed might have been anything."

"I reckon we've saved its life," Sanders observed. "Somehow I don't think the captain ever meant him to reach Amsterdam."

CHAPTER XXVI

David's first impressions of a life of cleanliness, sanity, and comparative freedom from pain were a little bewildering. He seemed to have become one of a multitude. There were an endless number of bedsteads ranged against the dazzling tiled walls. He was just a unit in one of them. White-gowned women, who looked to him like Sisters of Mercy, were flitting noiselessly about, some of them bending over the beds, some of them carrying what seemed to be very succulent refreshments, giving medicines, studying charts, taking temperatures—all those mysterious occupations strange to the newcomer to hospital life. He was in clean night-clothes. He felt clean all over. That horrible growth of beard, to which he had become accustomed, had been removed. There were impulses of returning strength to his body, still sore from the lacerations of that night of terror. One of the nurses, seeing his opened eyes, hurried up to his side.

"Well, how are you feeling?" she asked cheerfully. "You're looking a little more lively."

He passed his hand through his still-tangled growth of hair.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"In hospital. You've been here for nearly a fortnight."

"Last time I remember anything," he reflected, "I was on the boat."

“You were too ill to go for the voyage,” she told him. “They brought you here instead.”

“Someone seems to have been taking a bit of interest in me,” he observed.

“They certainly have,” she answered. “You have had visitors most days. The doctor has not allowed you to be disturbed yet, though.”

“Visitors?” he repeated. “Well, that’s queer.”

“Is there anything you would like?”

“Like? I’d like to eat and go on eating until to-morrow. Then I’d like to begin to drink and drink until the day after.”

“So that’s how you are feeling,” she observed, smiling. “Well, I think we could manage a little meal for you.”

Propped up with pillows David did himself very well, so far as the hospital food was concerned, for the next half-hour. All the time he was struggling to remember. In the forefront of all his thoughts there was Judy. Behind her the lowering sinister figure of the captain. He tried to fit the pieces together. He had murdered the captain; that was certain. After that, somehow or other, Judy came back again. There had been nightmare after nightmare through the hours, when he had fancied himself in a furnace, tearing with his bony fingers at the hot air, striving to reach his enemy, with the blood leaping in his veins and the dry heat tormenting his body. Somehow or other he had lost. There was a strange progress along that muddy way by the side of the river. Crash against a seat. Crash against a wall.

A policeman taking his arm, the words *Henrietta Anne* always on his lips. Then there was the gurgling of the river in his ears, Grogan the mate—not a bad fellow—scared at his coming, hiding him from the captain, locking him up in one of the three passengers' berths. He shook his head. It was impossible to piece it together. He must wait for help.

"When I get my next visitor can I see him?" he asked.

"I should think so," the nurse answered. "The doctors have to decide that. Lie down now. You are going to be washed and afterwards I shall take your temperature and pulse."

David submitted patiently to many incomprehensible attentions. Finally he found himself dozing quite naturally. When he woke up again a man was standing over him—a stranger—a doctor, to judge by his appearance and the respect with which the nurse was treating him.

"Feel yourself again, my man?" his visitor asked.

"I'm feeling a sight better," David admitted.

"You have been nursed back to life," the doctor told him. "You should always remember that. You'll be fit enough directly. Anything you want?"

"I want to see whoever has been wanting to see me," David confided confusedly.

The doctor smiled.

"No objection to visitors," he said. "Good day."

There were no more stupors for David. He read with some difficulty half a page of a newspaper, the date of which astonished him. Then he dozed very lightly. When he opened his eyes there was a man seated by the side of his bed, a man who welcomed him with a cheerful grin, a man with blue eyes which twinkled as they met his as though this were really a humorous episode, a man whose face seemed somehow familiar and yet to whom he was unable to give a name.

"Well, young fellow? Glad to hear you are pulling yourself round again all right," the newcomer said pleasantly.

"I'm better," David acknowledged. "Who are you? I can't seem to reckon you up."

"Well, you ought to," the other replied, watching him keenly. "We had a drink together once or twice in the Green Man. I'm often in there."

"Oh, you belong to that mob, do you?" David remarked.

"That's right. My name's Sanders, but I don't know as you have ever heard of it. Charles Sanders. I've been visiting a pal who is in here and thought I'd stop and enquire about you."

"Know these parts well?" David enquired, with a gleam of curiosity in his cunning eyes.

"I should say I do."

"Where's the *Henrietta Anne*?"

"Loading up her cargo at Amsterdam by this time. She

left Bunter's Wharf a fortnight ago."

"Strike me lucky!" David exclaimed. "'Ave I been in 'ere all that time?"

"Shouldn't be surprised," the other remarked. "It was the night after she sailed, I believe, that you were brought in. One drink over the line and there's no end of trouble to be found on the riverside, you know. You had been having a fight or something, I think."

"Yes," David reflected. "I had a fight all right. Who took the *Henrietta Anne* out?"

"How the dickens should I know?" Sanders replied. "I'm not a seafaring man. The captain, I should think."

"The captain—I don't tumble to that," David said perplexedly. "Thought the captain was badly knocked about in a fight or something."

"It would take a hundred fights to hurt Jan Henderson," the other declared. "I did hear that he had been in a night brawl and got wounded. Anyhow he was able to stand up and take the *Henrietta Anne* down the river."

David scowled. A pleasant sense of satisfaction of which he had been conscious during the last few hours had disappeared. He had been firmly convinced that he had killed the captain. The swine was still alive! Anyway, he reflected with a gleam of cheerfulness, if the captain was on the *Henrietta Anne* and at Amsterdam he was well away from Judy. Another thing, too: there was no fear of that rope around David's neck about which

he had had several grisly visions! 237

"Any other of your pals you want to ask about?" Sanders enquired good-naturedly.

"Judy?" was the quick response. "You know, the girl who used to dance sometimes and have a sing-song with the fellows at the Green Man. Judy of Bunter's Buildings."

"I know her," Sanders replied regretfully. "She's gone, my lad. She disappeared just about the time you were brought in here and the *Henrietta Anne* sailed. She just disappeared, that's what she did, and not for the first time. I'm a kind of a friend and, being a family man and not likely to be misunderstood, I knocked at her door one day last week in Bunter's Buildings. No sign of her. Card torn down—room to let. Looks as though the Green Man had lost Judy."

David lay still for some time. Sanders broke in at last upon what seemed to be a profound reverie.

"You don't happen to remember a chap named—bless my soul, what was the fellow's name? A fellow who used to come in, sit in a corner at the Green Man—pleasant enough, but not too sociable. Last time anyone saw him he was in dripping oilskins and a sou' wester on a filthy evening."

David turned his head slowly. His small inquisitive eyes searched his visitor's face. There was a twist to his lips.

"Yes, I remember him," he admitted. "I remember you now. You're Sergeant Sanders. Used to come down to pump the river folk there sometimes." 238

Sanders laughed heartily.

“What did I need to pump them about?” he demanded. “Don’t you get ideas into your head, young fellow. I used to come down there for a drink and a smoke and a rest when I was tired of seeing everyone around behaving themselves. I never came on the job to the Green Man. You can’t say you ever saw me interfering with any of them.”

“That’s right,” David conceded. “I wasn’t there often myself, though. The captain, blast him! didn’t like me in the saloon bar.”

“About the hottest tike I ever knew, that captain,” Sanders reflected. “How did you get on with him, David?”

“We didn’t always get on,” was the toneless reply.

There was another brief silence. Sanders stroked his chin.

“You’ve not answered my question yet,” he reminded David. “You seemed to have been mixed up in some sort of rough doings the night you got knocked about. You didn’t come across this fellow I was asking about, I suppose?”

“The man who said he wrote for newspapers and wanted a berth to Amsterdam?”

“That’s the chap,” the sergeant replied, trying to keep the eagerness from his tone. “I’m looking for news about him.”

David remained very motionless and very silent. He was watching a small spot on the ceiling. Just as eagerly Sanders

was watching him, but there was nothing to be learnt from the lad's face.

"That chap," Sanders went on confidentially, "has been giving me a lot of trouble. Seems he had rooms somewhere down near Boulter's Wharf and what did he take it into his head to do but just disappear. His folks come clamouring and bothering us to find out what's become of him. We don't know. How should we? No more than we know where Judy's gone to."

There was a sudden gleam in David's face.

"Look here," he said. "You tell me where Judy's gone to and I'll try to remember what I can about your chap in the sou' wester."

The sergeant roared with laughter. He chuckled knowingly at David.

"So that's how the land lies? You're after the skirt, eh? You're no bad judge, young fellow, for a young 'un. Judy might have been any man's choice."

There was not the slightest flicker of any responsive smile upon David's face. His long scraggy fingers were clutching the bedclothes.

"Do you know where she is?" he asked.

"To be frank with you, my lad," Sanders replied, "I don't. We've never had any cause to try and find out. If I knew I'd tell you. Just the same as I hope that if you know where my man is you'll tell me."

David failed to respond.

“What I might do if I knew I can’t say,” he declared. “I don’t care one pen’orth of periwinkles where your man is. He may be dead and he may be alive. Myself, I should think he’s dead. But I’ve got ten pounds stowed away there—I had when I came here—and I’d give half of it to anyone as would tell me where to find Judy.”

The sergeant scratched his head.

“You help me, my lad, and I’ll see what can be done about your bit of skirt. Set your mind upon asking yourself just where this chap I want to get hold of is. You’ll do yourself no harm, I can promise you.”

David reflected for some time.

“There’s a lot of more important things than that I could tell you, Mr. Sanders,” he said. “Queer doings there have been down at Bunter’s Wharf. Queer doings the night that rat of a Loman threw himself off the fire escape into Bunter’s Alley. No wonder you came to the Green Man and sat in your corner and watched. They ought to have sent one of them smart chaps—the snipes, you know—from Scotland Yard. He might have tumbled to what was going on. You never knew, did you, Sergeant?”

“I’m afraid I was not overbright,” Sanders confessed. “Never mind, you can tell me a bit more about it.”

The nurse tapped him on the shoulder.

“Sergeant, I have just had a message from the doctor,” she

announced. “He insists upon it that the patient is not allowed to talk any more. Look for yourself at his colour.”

She leaned over and laid her finger upon David’s pulse. Then she pointed to the door. The sergeant rose miserably to his feet.

“When are the next visiting hours?” he asked.

“There are no special ones for you,” she answered. “You can telephone to-morrow. I’ll tell the doctor it is urgent and he will let you come if it is possible.”

Sanders turned back to the patient.

“Anything you would like me to bring you, young chap?” he asked.

David turned his head and looked at him. There was a bright spot of colour on each of his cheeks and a gleam of fever in his unpleasant eyes.

“Judy,” he replied hoarsely. “Just bring me Judy.”

The sergeant, not being able to put his hand upon Judy, brought fruit and cigarettes on the morrow. David grabbed at the latter greedily, but the nurse shook her head.

“In an hour’s time you shall smoke one if the doctor gives his permission,” she promised. “Let me take care of them for you. Fruit you can have at any time.”

David munched an apple and drew his feet up in bed.

“Well, Sergeant,” he asked, looking at his visitor craftily. “Made up your mind to tell me where Judy is, eh?”

“Made up your mind to tell me what became of my man?” was the cheerful retort.

David took another bite of his apple.

“That chap was cleverer than you, Sergeant,” he said. “He didn’t spend so much time in the Green Man but he got an inkling of the goings-on at Bunter’s Wharf.”

“He doesn’t seem to have done himself much good by it then,” Sanders pointed out. “They’ve been dragging the river for his body.”

“Maybe they’ll find it,” David remarked.

“You think so?”

“I ain’t interested in the cove and that’s flat,” David confided. “I don’t care what became of him, and I shan’t try to remember—till I get news of Judy.”

“I’m trying all I can,” the sergeant assured him. “My men are telephoning to Hartlepool this afternoon.”

“’Artlepool? Where’s that?”

“Up in the north of England somewhere.”

“What makes you think she’s there?”

“Because that’s where she went the last time she left the Green Man.”

“Is it a long journey?” David asked anxiously.

“Middling long.”

David put his hand under his pillow.

“I’ve only got ten pounds,” he muttered.

The sergeant looked at him speculatively.

“You’ve only got ten pounds,” he repeated. “Then, what the devil would you do when you found Judy? I know nothing about her but I should think she’s an expensive bit of skirt. What would you do if she said to you, ‘Here I am, David. What do you want with me?’”

“I don’t know,” David murmured. “I just don’t know. I’d see her, though.”

“Look here,” the sergeant said, leaning a little forward. “What do you suppose would happen if you went to her with a hundred pounds in your hand in crisp Bank of England notes? What do you think she’d say to that?”

David drew a sharp breath and moistened his dry lips with his tongue. His eyes were fixed upon his visitor’s.

“A hundred pounds,” he repeated. “Where’s a hundred quid coming from?”

“There’s a hundred pounds’ reward for the finding of that man in the sou’ wester and the oilskins who wanted a passage to Amsterdam,” the sergeant confided. “You give me the straight news about him and I’ll get you the hundred pounds.”

The ecstatic thought of this vast fortune seemed to linger with David. He repeated the amount to himself three or four times, then he turned uneasily in his bed. He turned his face away from his visitor.

“My Gawd!” the latter heard him mutter to himself. “A hundred quid!”

“There are very few women nowadays who wouldn’t give you the right answer,” Sanders observed, “for a sum like that—or half of it. There should be a trifle left for yourself, David, to do the thing slap up for a few days. I’ll find her for you if she’s to be found. I’ll do that for nothing.”

“’Ave you ’eard of her up at ’artlepool?” David asked eagerly.

“Not yet,” was the grudging reply. “We have heard this much, at any rate: She’s not there. Since we’re getting a bit pally, David, I’ll tell you something. I don’t believe she ever was there. I don’t believe she was ever a real, thoroughgoing tart. I believe she had a game of her own.”

There was a shadow of anxiety on David’s face.

“Maybe that will make it harder,” he groaned. “Maybe that’s why she wouldn’t look at my ten quid.”

“I shouldn’t worry about that, my lad,” the sergeant said. “A

riverside tart has to mix with a lot of nasty stuff down our way. Much better to find she's a respectable girl out for a bit of fun or something of that sort."

David shook his head dolefully.

"That sort wouldn't look at me," he muttered. "I'd sooner she was bad. I'd sooner she hadn't a bob. I'd sooner she had to pawn her clothes and hadn't a rag. Then I'd give her all I had and maybe I'd get her."

"Well, whether she's a respectable girl or whatever she is," Sanders said encouragingly, "with a hundred pounds you'd be right there. Now then, young fellow, out with it."

"I must think," David muttered. "I can't remember. You see, it all 'appened when the captain and me was kind of friendly-like. . . . I would have done anything for him in those days."

"What all happened?" Sanders asked, trying to keep the eagerness from his tone.

"There was a bit of trouble," David admitted. "I can't bring it to mind clearly. Come in another day, Mr. Sanders, when you 'ave news about Judy. I'd be a different man then."

The sergeant was a man who seldom lost his temper but at that moment it was sorely tried.

"You're not very wise, David," he warned him. "At any moment a waterman or anybody might come along with information about the man we're looking for, and earn the hundred quid. Bang would go your chance of Judy, then."

“There’s things about that fellow that’s hard to explain,” David confided, with a troubled look upon his face.

“Was he ever really on board the *Henrietta Anne*?” Sanders asked.

“Now you’re beginning to ask me questions,” David declared pettishly. “I’m not feeling strong to-day, Sergeant. Come again and see me when you’ve news of Judy. Nurse!” he called out. “I’m tired. I want to sleep.”

The nurse wheeled round.

“I’m afraid, that being so, you will have to go away, sir. The patient had rather a restless night, and as for that Judy, whether she’s a girl or a monkey, I wish you’d bring her along. He was caterwauling for her all the time!”

The sergeant heaved a heavy sigh.

“I’ll let you know if I have any news, young fellow,” he promised, rising to his feet.

“It might clear my memory, perhaps,” David observed, with a cunning gleam in his eyes, “if I ’ad news of Judy.”

CHAPTER XXVII

Along the dreary platform of the dreariest of the great London termini the boat train from Harwich, with what seemed an utterly unnecessary tumult of snorting, and groaning, and hissing of escaping steam, came slowly to a standstill. There was a rush of porters. Taxicab drivers awoke from their seemingly drugged slumbers and an increasing crowd of descending passengers soon thronged the station. Gregory, one of the first to alight, almost walked into Judith's arms.

"You darling!" he exclaimed. "How sweet of you to come and meet me. Here, too, of all places."

She laughed happily and thrust her arm through his.

"Have you a porter?" she asked.

"Two or three," he answered. "I had quite a lot of things to bring away from the factory. We shall want a pantechnicon to get everything back."

"Everything all right?" she enquired anxiously.

"Not a hitch anywhere," he assured her.

"And down at the wharves?" she asked. "Any trouble?"

"Not the slightest. I think the Dutchmen there all love us, for they know that for every steamer load filled with their butter and

marvellous cheeses they are going to get good English credits. We are the most popular firm on the waterside. I don't know what the manufacturers will say when they find there are no more orders for them."

"They couldn't expect a man who has inherited more than a million pounds to go on trading in cheeses," she laughed.

They filled a taxi with small luggage and Gregory handed his servant the registration tickets for his heavier impedimenta. They were just going to step into the waiting limousine when Judith felt her arm suddenly seized. She swung round indignantly. Staring up into her face with a wild incredulous light in his eyes was a young man whom at first she failed to recognise.

"What on earth are you doing?" she exclaimed. "Gregory!"

Gregory, who had been feeing the porters, turned angrily towards the intruder.

"What on earth are you up to?" he demanded.

"Judy!" her assailant cried. "Judy! You know me . . . ? Hi, you let me alone!"

David, fresh from hospital, with his nautical coat brushed, comparatively clean linen, and hair trimmed, was probably as little repulsive-looking as ever before in his life, but even then he was an unpleasant sight. Gregory knocked up his arm and swung him by the collar away from Judith.

"How dare you lay your hands on that lady?" he demanded.

"She ain't a lady," David cried. "It's Judy—our Judy of Bunter's Buildings. I've been lying in 'ospital, thinking and thinking of nothing but her. You ask her. She knows me. . . . It's David, Judy. You 'aven't forgotten me?"

Judith drew up her skirts and put one foot upon the step of the limousine. Save for one moment's instinctive repulsion she was unruffled and unmoved.

"He's a lunatic, my dear," she said to her companion. "Don't be rough with him. I never heard of the person he takes me for."

David was speechless. Gregory still retained his grip upon his collar. One of the station police was already hurrying up.

"You heard what the lady said," Gregory told him severely. "She never saw you before. Who's taking care of you? It doesn't seem to me you're fit to be out alone."

"But she knows me—quite well," David persisted. "I want to talk to her. I must! I'm David. I was steward on the *Henrietta Anne*. She knew the captain—the brute—Henderson. I saved her from him. Let me go—you're hurting!"

Judith leaned a little forward.

"Perhaps he really takes me for someone else," she said with an effort of kindness. "I think the best thing would be to let the police take care of him."

"Police?" David stuttered.

The policeman was already at hand. He looked at Gregory. He

caught a glimpse of Lady Judith. He caught sight of the coronet on the family car she had borrowed for the evening, and his attitude towards the situation was in no way indeterminate. He saluted Gregory respectfully.

“Is this young man annoying you, sir?” he asked.

“I can’t say that he was going so far as that,” Gregory replied. “He was rather rude to the lady in the car, but I fancy he mistook her for someone else.”

“You wouldn’t mistake your mother if you was to see her, or your sister,” David exclaimed excitedly. “I couldn’t mistake ’er. She’s Judy that used to sing down at the Green Man. She knows me well enough. Judy,” he pleaded, “let me talk to you for a few minutes.”

“Don’t you see you’re annoying the lady and gentleman?” the policeman warned him sternly.

“Well, we won’t go so far as that,” Gregory said mildly. “Just remove him, constable, until we are out of the way. I fancy I heard him say that he was just out of hospital. The lady whom he seems to mistake for an acquaintance is Lady Judith Martellon. I am Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt. We have neither of us ever seen him before in our lives until he came up and addressed us in this mad fashion.”

The man saluted. Gregory stepped into the limousine. David, who seemed quite dumb, remained in the policeman’s grasp. They drove off and the incident was closed.

Judith’s head was upon her companion’s shoulder before

they had passed under the arches. Gregory was laughing softly in his corner. “My dear,” he remonstrated, “I told you that some day you would be found out.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now anyway, does it? But oh, how I detest the sight of that young man and loathe the thought of that captain!”

“You rather asked for trouble going into the neighbourhood,” he reminded her.

“Someone had to do it,” she expostulated. “It was you yourself who sent me back the last time. You weren’t sure of the captain. You certainly wanted to know about Granderson. The gossip of the Green Man kept us out of danger many times.”

Gregory nodded.

“I was wrong,” he admitted. “I didn’t realise what a tough lot they must have been. That’s a bad patch in our records, Judith. Let’s close it.”

She sighed contentedly.

“I’m glad it’s all over,” she said. “Gregory, do you know, I’ll tell you a funny thing. You remember Captain Henderson, of course?”

“Civil sort of chap when he was sober,” Gregory observed, “but one of the foulest and most dangerous brutes in the world when he had had something to drink.”

“I’ll tell you something,” Judith whispered. “I’ve seen both

those men—the captain drunk—the other isn't human. I was once—not so long ago—a great deal more afraid of that miserable little reptile who accosted us on the platform than I have been of Captain Henderson. They are both loathsome brutes. Thank God they belong to the past!"

"So far as you are concerned," Gregory said. "As for your little friend, he doesn't come into the picture. I don't remember that I ever saw him before and evidently Henderson must have dismissed him, or he wouldn't have been over here now. Henderson himself, however, I shall have to have a final reckoning with. He has done his work well but I feel that these men want watching until the last moment. He will be up the river next Thursday with the largest cargo he has ever had."

"And when it is safely stored away," Judith exclaimed eagerly, "we've finished!"

He nodded and patted her hand.

"Losing your nerve, dear?"

"I don't think so," she answered. "I just haven't felt so happy about it all lately."

"Ordino is all right, I suppose?" Gregory enquired.

"So far as I know. Nothing but beaming smiles every time I've seen him. He won't admit that there's a shadow of risk from any possible direction. He may be right. I don't care. I'm glad we're finishing. Ordino ought to be happy. He admitted to me that he had made a fortune. Well, if he wants to go on with it he can. It won't be the same thing, though."

“We’ll go in and see the old boy to-morrow,” Gregory suggested. “To-night—”

“To-night is arranged for,” she interrupted. “We have scarcely spent a single night together as an engaged couple, Gregory. To-night Sara has scoured the markets for delicacies for your Royal Highness. I have borrowed Williams from home to look after the cocktails and wait on us. Mother would like us round there, of course, but there are too many of the family gathered together. We will have to go through that later on. You are dining—don’t be terrified!—in a Mews.”

“With you—alone?”

“With me alone.”

“Are you going to drop me at Adelphi Terrace to change?” he asked.

“I couldn’t even spare you for that time,” she told him. “I have telephoned Robert to bring your dinner things round and prepare your bath *chez moi*. I changed myself an hour before the train came in—I was so excited. Gregory—I like being engaged.”

“After our long period of platonic friendship,” he agreed, “it is an enormous relief.”

“Tell me—during the last few years, Gregory,” she begged, “didn’t you ever want to kiss me?”

“I longed to,” he admitted, with a twinkle in his eyes. “But, you see, I have been a man of principle.”

“I hope very soon,” she whispered, “you will forget your principles and remember only that you are my lover.”

In the Finsbury Free Library somewhere about this time, David, free, after a somewhat hectic half an hour, from the surveillance of the law, was seated at a table in the open reading space, licking his fingers and turning over the pages of a Court Guide. Occasionally he consulted a slip of paper. The police constable had written it all down for him just to prove the absurdity of his wild imaginings.

Lady Judith Martellon, daughter of the Earl of Martellon . . . !

He found it at last, spelled out the entry word by word, then with painstaking fingers he copied it down. Afterwards he sought the street and the first telephone box. The number he enquired for was readily given. A somewhat pompous voice answered him.

“This is Martellon House, yes. Lady Judith does not reside here at present. Her ladyship has an establishment of her own at Number Sixteen, Arlington Mews. Who shall I say called?”

“That don’t matter.”

“Do you wish any message conveyed to her ladyship?”

The voice for some reason or other irritated David. He rang off. Outside, by a flickering light, he cautiously wrote down the address he had received. When, at midnight, Gregory’s manservant issued from the green-painted front door of Judith’s flat, and whistled for a taxi, there was a slim figure

lurking in the shadow of an elm tree which he failed to notice. The taxi came. Sir Gregory was visible upon the threshold, his arm around Judith. There was a long farewell. A shorter one. . . . Gregory, with his foot upon the running board, hesitated.

“Judith,” he said, retracing his steps.

She stood framed in the doorway, a flaming light behind, beautiful in the velvety foreground, as a beautiful woman, passionately in love, can be.

“Judith,” Gregory repeated, stepping back. “You know, I’m not entirely happy about leaving you here to-night with Sara. I wish you’d let Robert stay. He can be round by the time I want him in the morning and I’m perfectly able to put myself to bed.”

Judith’s laugh was soft and mocking. It even reached the loiterer on the other side of the cobbled thoroughfare.

“I love you for thinking of it, Gregory,” she said, “but what possible risk do I run? That terrible young man whom we left in charge of the police and who still thinks that I am Judy of Bunter’s Buildings, how could he find his way here? Besides, when you are somewhere near I am not afraid. I think you would hear me cry if I wanted you. Besides, there’s nowhere for Robert to sleep, and he’s much too fond of smiling at Sara. You take him away, Gregory. These spring days are treacherous.”

He stooped down and kissed her.

“Perhaps you’re right, my dear,” he admitted. “I shall begin to think, myself, that I’m glad we are going to be married next

week.”

He stepped into the taxi.

“You can come along, Robert,” he invited. “No need for you to walk.”

The perfectly trained servant shivered.

“I hope you will excuse me, sir,” he begged. “I shall be home as soon as you are.”

The taxi drove off and turned the corner into the main street. Robert, walking swiftly, also disappeared. A breeze was rustling in the leaves of the elm tree. From behind the masses of jagged clouds the moon threatened to appear. David slunk across the alleyway. There was no sidewalk. The few doors opened straight upon the causeway. His heart beat with excitement. They had left the door open! He crawled down foot by foot and stopped short at the broad beam which shone out from the unseen light. He heard a voice inside. He listened intently.

“It’s quite all right, Sara. I left the door open to get some air. There’s not a soul about. I’ll close it before I go to bed.”

Luck! That’s what it was. Riverman’s luck. David almost chuckled as he stepped boldly forward. He was inside the door —breathless. He listened for a moment. Judy was in that room to the left. He knew that. She was writing a letter. He could hear her pen scratching. She was humming softly to herself, too. The odour of her cigarette stole out. His face grew

evil. Perfectly happy she was. Perfectly contented. The man who had just gone out, the man who had shaken him like a rat at the station, had left her happy. Well, they would see! He closed the front door, then he opened the door of the studio, swung himself in, closed it and stood with his back to it. The bell was by his side. This time—well, they would see! His movements had been so noiseless that apparently they had been unobserved. He called to her softly.

“Judy!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

She swung round. For the moment astonishment banished fear. She looked at him in utter bewilderment.

“Why—how on earth did you get here?” she exclaimed.

“I found you out,” he answered. “I should always have found you out.”

Even then fear did not come to her. In her own room, with policemen at every corner, in the heart of London, with Gregory at the other end of the telephone, fear seemed ridiculous. Yet the sight of him made her shiver.

“How dare you come in here?” she demanded. “What on earth do you mean by following me about like this?”

“Can’t you guess?” he wheezed.

“Guess! How could anyone guess?” she replied scornfully. “I can only think that you are mad.”

“I am only mad about you,” he told her, glancing round the room with restless eyes. “I’m sane enough in other ways. When your man told the cop who you really were I was sane enough to listen and to remember. That’s how I found your address, Judy.”

“How dare you call me Judy?” she cried indignantly. “I’ve had enough of you! I’m going to ring up the police station and

give you in charge.”

“Are you?” he laughed. “Try it.”

She reached out for the instrument but he was too quick. He snatched the receiver before her fingers could touch it and an ugly-looking knife flashed before her eyes. He cut the cord through and flung the instrument away.

“So that’s that,” he said. “And I promise I’ll keep well between you and the bell. If you call out I’ll choke you.”

Then fear came to her. She looked round like a hunted animal. She was surrounded by hundreds and thousands who would have flocked in to her rescue, and there was no way of letting them know. He stood there only a few feet away, his ugly mouth twisted sideways, his prominent yellow teeth showing like fangs, a horrible light in his small treacherous eyes.

“Listen,” he demanded. “Which are you? Judy of Bunter’s Buildings, or Lady Judith Martellon of Grosvenor Square?”

“I am Lady Judith Martellon,” she told him, “as you will find out to your sorrow before very long. I know nothing of Judy of Bunter’s Buildings.”

“You’re lying,” he sneered.

“Whether I am or not, what right have you to come here and force your way in upon me?”

“I saved you from the captain,” he reminded her.

"You're just as bad as the captain," she answered furiously. "Can't you understand—I don't want you near me, I won't have you near me! I hate to breathe the same air as you. I'll give you money to go away if you want it."

He laughed maliciously.

"I shall be earning a good deal of money myself within the next few days," he confided. "You needn't look so scared. I don't want to hurt you. You're too beautiful. I've got something to say that you'd better listen to."

"Say it and go then," she insisted.

"I'll keep away—afterwards," he promised. "I'll see now whether I can make you change your mind without touching you."

"Quickly then," she begged.

"I ain't much of a talker," he admitted, "but I'll do that. I guess you know that I've been kind of a steward on the *'enrietta Anne* for two years."

"Well?"

"I've kept my eyes open," he went on. "I've learnt some of your secrets."

She caught her breath. So it was to be blackmail after all. What did that matter, so long as it was only money he wanted?

"I've kept my mouth shut about that there business on the

'enrietta Anne," he continued. "One or two have pumped me, but nothing doing. Now I'm feeling different. The old man, he nearly killed me that night. He would have pitched me into the North Sea if it hadn't been for that riverman coming aboard. The river cop took me for someone else and landed me in the hospital. Saved my life, I reckon. There was a tec down there asking questions as soon as I could open my eyes. I ain't told him much yet. I didn't get things together in my mind properly. Then, at the station to-night, I saw you with that man—"

"That man, as you call him," Judith interrupted, "was Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt—a great scientist and a very famous Englishman."

"Oh, was he?" David retorted sarcastically. "Well, I'll tell you what he is in Holland. He's a cheesemonger. I seen him in an overall. He's been aboard the *'enrietta Anne* seeing them stack away the cheeses. He's got a factory twelve miles from Amsterdam."

"Rubbish!" Judith protested.

"Not so much rubbish after all," he declared stubbornly. "What was you doing down at the Green Man listening to all that was going on, watching the captain, parley-vooing with the tec, talking intimate-like with the Customs House man?"

"I was never there," Judith insisted firmly.

"You may as well stow that," he whined. "I ain't likely to be mistaken in a woman as has ripped me up inside as you've done. When I was at school they made me read some silly books

and there was one I remember now about a witch. You are a witch. That's what you are, Judy. You don't need to speak. You're just there, and there's madness comes to those you look on and fever in their blood and it's there for always. That's how it is with me. You think I'm mad. Well, mad I am and mad I shall be till I 'ave what I want—and then maybe I'll oblige the captain and go to sleep in the river, for there wouldn't be any living afterwards. I know what I am, you see, and I know what you are, and I know there wouldn't be any afterwards. You can turn me loose on the world again 'alf crazy, if you want to. I'll go when you send me away. Crazy people are dangerous. A crazy man—Why, there's most anything in the world a crazy man can do!"

"Then, for heaven's sake, do the one thing I want you to," she cried in exasperation. "Take up that ridiculous hat and go away. All that you're saying sounds like sheer rubbish to me. I don't want to listen to any more of it. I want you to go."

"It ain't sheer rubbish," he pleaded. "Think, Judy, think hard. If I'm crazy it's along of you. There's plenty of other things in the world and I ain't crazy about them. Are you listening?"

"I'm listening because I have to," was the angry reply. "I wish to heavens you'd go."

"If I do go," he rejoined, with that wicked gleam once more in his eyes, "maybe there'll be many a time when you'll wish you'd let me have my way rather than 'ave sent me out into the streets with all hell blazing inside me."

"I'll risk that," she assured him.

"It's like this, you see," he went on, and somehow or other this new, quieter manner of his inspired quite as much terror in her as the fear of any physical attack. "There's something about the goings-on aboard the *'enrietta Anne*, and the dump from Amsterdam, and your bloke that you call a professor being there on the quay, and Judy of Bunter's Buildings being the same as his Lady Judith Martellon, and him and you being pals, and that chap who's missing coming down to spy on the boat—there's something about all them things that don't add up right. There's a mystery about it all and I'm the one that's nearest to finding out what it all means. . . . You listening still, Judy?"

"I'm listening," she assented, "but for the love of God get on with it. Finish."

"Here's the finish, then," he said. "Give me what I want and I'll leave here and I'll tell you straight what I'll do. I'll drink 'alf a bottle of whisky and I'll go into the river. I've 'ad enough. There's only one thing in life I want and I want it so bad the river can 'ave me afterwards if I get you first."

"And if you don't?" she asked.

"I might," he continued, watching her with the cunning gleam back in his eyes, "I might try and put two and two together. I might try to understand all about the *'enrietta Anne*. Perhaps I shouldn't find out nothing. Perhaps I might. Perhaps it wouldn't do you no 'arm. Perhaps it might."

"Finished?"

"Finished."

“Then let me tell you this,” she wound up, her lips quivering. “I would as soon go into the river myself as do any such horrible thing as you believe your Judy of Bunter’s Buildings, or whatever you call her, is capable of. Sooner than bear the slightest touch from you—much more, allow it willingly—I would kill myself!”

He picked up his ridiculous hat and rose to his feet.

“That’s final?” he asked, with a lingering thread of wistfulness in his tone.

“Absolutely,” she answered.

He turned his back upon her, made his way down the passage and let himself out by the front door. She rushed out in wild incredulity as she heard it close and drew the bolt with hot, feverish fingers. A species of hysterics suddenly seized her as she heard it clank into its place. She snatched aside the curtains. There he was crossing the causeway. His long ungainly strides were unmistakable. His head was pushed forward. Even in the misty obscurity, with his features invisible, he was a sinister and unpleasant object. Judith staggered across the room, pressed her thumb on the bell and kept it there. In a moment or two Sara, her maid, came breathlessly in, still fastening her dressing gown.

“I’ve had a visitor, Sara, a madman,” Judith gasped. “Get me out some brandy. Is everything locked everywhere?”

“Everything, everywhere,” the girl answered, staring at the cut telephone wire. “Why didn’t you ring before, milady? I would have tackled him.”

“He wouldn’t let me get by,” was the sobbing response. “I thought I was a brave strong woman, Sara, but I was paralysed with fear all the time he was here. I’m frightened now!”

“Shall I ring up Sir Gregory, milady?”

Judith shook her head, although the temptation was terrible.

“Give me the brandy,” she begged. “After that you can ring up the police station. You have another instrument in the kitchen, haven’t you? Ask the sergeant on duty to send an extra constable round here. I want the house watched till daylight. I want a man standing on the step there who won’t move.”

“I’ll see to that, milady,” Sara promised, pouring out the brandy.

She stared at her mistress in unabated astonishment as Judith drained the glass and set it down empty. Then she hurried off to the kitchen. Judith made her way to the window, pushed aside the curtains once more and, supporting herself by the casement, gazed out across the empty causeway. The stopping of a taxi opposite was an immense relief. The car belonging to a neighbouring apartment swung in. The world was moving as usual. Nevertheless, she still hung on there watching until Sara returned.

“The sergeant was rare put about, milady,” the latter announced. “The constable is on his way.”

CHAPTER XXIX

With the dawn began the unloading of the *Henrietta Anne*, safely docked only the night before. Porters and seamen moved like ghosts through the enshrouding mist, but the work was carried on briskly all the same. Soon a huge quantity of cases was piled up in the Customs shed and a strong odour of cheese pervaded the whole place. There was a great deal of weighing, a great many entries made on the sheets which the Customs men were carrying about. Three or four of the cases had been opened and the cheeses examined. At about ten o'clock Captain Jan Henderson, in shore-going attire, strolled down the gangplank smoking his pipe. He exchanged greetings with one or two of the men.

"Getting on with the job?" he asked.

"Fine. Thirsty work, though."

"We'll see about that afterwards," the captain promised. "By the by," he added, turning to Joe Havers, "seen anything of that cabin steward of mine hanging around here?"

Havers shook his head.

"He ain't been down this way that I knows on," he answered. "Shouldn't be surprised if he wasn't in hospital still. You knocked him up a bit, Captain."

"Serve the skunk right," the captain grunted. "I thought he

might have been around all the same.”

“Slung his hook,” the other declared. “I expect he’s looking for another job.”

“How many of my cases will be cleared in an hour’s time?” Henderson enquired. “I want to get the lorries down.”

“I dunno,” was the dubious reply. “Better ask the Chief.”

Captain Henderson was conscious of some slight uneasiness as he made his way down to the wooden office and found the Chief of the Wharfside Customs engaged in conversation with two strangers. The former greeted him, however, with the usual handshake.

“How are you getting on with my stuff, Mr. Richardson?” he asked.

“Pretty well. You weren’t thinking of leaving just yet, were you?”

The captain glanced at his watch.

“Nothing for me to hang about for,” he answered. “I thought I might be having a look at the old town.”

“Stay around for a bit, there’s a good fellow,” the other begged. “We’ve not got the discharge papers yet.”

The captain assented ill-temperedly and strolled down the great shed towards the opening. The mists had cleared away and for a wonder the early summer sunshine was finding its way even into

the gloomy-looking shed. Coming straight towards him was a familiar and yet an unfamiliar figure. David, carefully brushed and washed and in his still comparatively new outfit, with nothing to remind one of the old disreputable lout except his long-strided, lopping walk, had entered the place and was making his way towards the office. At the sight of his late employer he stopped short. The latter stared at him, half bewildered, half uneasy.

“What the hell are you doing round here still, David?” he demanded. “Dressed up like a duke, too.”

David looked round the place and stared steadily at those thousands of cases piled to the ceiling. The shadow of a grin did nothing to enhance the attractiveness of his appearance.

“Bit of business with Mr. Richardson, sir,” he replied. “You brought a fine cargo over this time, I see.”

Then the lightnings flashed before the eyes of Jan Henderson and he had a swift and awful presentiment of what was to come. He took a stride forward but David slipped past him.

“Come here, you clumsy lout!” he ordered. “Remember you ain’t got your discharge yet. You obey your captain. Come here when I tell you.”

There was no fear in David’s face. Richardson, the Chief of the Customs, and the two strangers with whom he had been talking, were already approaching. He sidled towards them.

“See you later, Cap’n,” he said, looking over his shoulder with an evil smile. “Maybe we’ll have a drink

together at the Green Man.”

Jan Henderson, as he turned on his heel and made his way out into the sunlight, felt all the sick agony of an overwhelming fear. David, that little rat David, whom he had looked upon as his creature,—body and soul,—was giving the show away. Ten years it might be—the better part of his life. No drinks, no women, manual labour. . . . Sweat broke out on his forehead. There was one thing, one thing he must do. He turned away from the *Henrietta Anne* and made for the telephone box in the small Post Office beyond the Green Man. Even as he reached the door, however, he felt a hand upon his shoulder. He swung round. It was one of the two strangers who had been talking in the Customs shed.

“Were you thinking of telephoning, Captain?” the man asked him.

“What the hell business is that of yours?” was the blustering rejoinder.

The stranger shook his head.

“Captain Henderson,” he said, “I don’t want any trouble. I have no warrant for your arrest at present but it will be wiser of you to do as I ask.”

“Warrant for my arrest!” the other exclaimed angrily. “What should you arrest me for? What right have you to stop my telephoning? What are you getting at?”

“We have had information—”

“Who’s we?”

“I beg your pardon. I am Detective Inspector Grimston from Headquarters. We have had information that you have been smuggling contraband. I must ask you to stand by until we have examined more closely the whole of your cargo.”

“It’s been gone through once,” the captain objected.

“Precisely,” the inspector replied. “But we have had some very valuable information which we intend to make use of. Return with me, if you please, Captain, to the Customs shed.”

“And supposing I refuse?”

The inspector raised a whistle to his lips. The captain, for him, was thinking rapidly. After all, he was only a pawn in the game. Perhaps he would do better if he made no more trouble.

“All right,” he agreed sullenly. “I don’t know what you’re after but I’ll come.”

He swung round and kept pace with his companion. Looking behind him once he chuckled. He had certainly done the right thing. Three—four policemen he counted behind, two in front. After all, the inspector had not been taking a great deal of risk. Might have been an awkward customer to tackle too, he reflected, as he glanced at his broad shoulders. . . .

They re-entered the shed. David, with an open strip of paper in his hand, was standing between the other stranger and Richardson. A dozen porters were working amongst the cases, apparently obeying instructions which David was giving

them.

“LG-31-X,” someone called out.

“That’s one of ’em,” David announced. “Bring it out.”

The case was dragged clear away from the great pile and opened in a matter of seconds. From amongst the straw the porter produced a Dutch cheese with rich red rind. A perfectly harmless-looking affair on the face of it. Richardson took it into his hands and turned it over. He glanced enquiringly at David. The latter looked up with a grin.

“Here’s the captain,” he said. “He’ll show you, if you like. Bit shy, perhaps. Eh, Captain? Well, look here, Mr. Richardson.”

He took the cheese under his arm and felt it all over with cautious fingers. At a certain spot he inserted a knife. The cheese came in half almost at once. For an inch under the red rind there remained a coating of cheese. Inside was a parcel done up in a fine silk wrapping. David handed it over.

“What about that, eh?” he exclaimed triumphantly.

“To whom were these cases consigned?” Richardson asked quickly.

“Ordino’s Club,” was the prompt reply.

The Customs House officer turned towards the captain.

“What have you to say about this?” he enquired.

“Nothing at all,” the captain answered doggedly. “The goods were consigned to me in cases direct from the cheese factory in Amsterdam. How was I to know what was inside?”

“Quite so,” the Customs man agreed soothingly. “Couldn’t see through the cases, could you?”

“Of course I couldn’t. And what I would like to know,” the captain went on, recovering confidence and swinging round towards David with a sudden bright idea in his head, “is where you got that slip of paper you’ve got in your hand? Looks like a telegram. Where did you get that telegram from?”

David smiled. The smile itself was fatuous but there was a cunning gleam in his eyes.

“Picked it up in Bunter’s Alley,” he replied, “the morning after that chap threw himself down from the fire escape.”

The captain opened his lips and closed them again. He had been on the point of making a bad slip.

“Well,” he declared, “it ain’t no affair of mine.”

“I’m afraid,” Inspector Grimston said, glancing through a paper which a newly arrived police constable had just handed to him, “that you may find the magistrates take a different view of the matter. I arrest you, Captain Henderson, on the charge of carrying contraband. Here is the warrant just arrived. Are you coming quietly?”

“Of course I’m coming quietly,” the captain replied. “I’m a

fighter when there's a job to fight about but fifteen or twenty of you is too heavy odds. Besides, I'd like to tell a magistrate the whole truth. No need for a warning. I never saw a case opened. Never knew there was anything but cheeses inside. You can't get anything on me."

"We'll take a taxicab up to Bow Street," Inspector Grimston decided.

"May I telephone to my wife?" Henderson asked.

"Certainly," the inspector assented graciously. "The only thing is, we would like to come with you to check up the number, you see, and to be sure you didn't let out this little bit of news too soon. Quite a scoop it might be for the evening papers."

"I ain't allowed even to speak to my missus, then, without you chaps hanging around?"

"Well, you wouldn't mind me surely, Captain," the sergeant remonstrated. "I've met the lady, too."

"A bit of your spying work down at the Green Man, this, I suppose," the captain sneered. "What I should like to know is—even if David there did pick up this telegram where he says he did, how the hell did he know what it was all about? He was never anything but a born idiot at any job I put him to."

David chuckled.

"There's more than one sort of idiot in this world, Cap'," he told his late employer suavely.

CHAPTER XXX

There is something about the sound of a restaurant in full swing which is at once stimulating and disturbing to the unseen listener. Gregory rose from his place in the upstairs directors' room and, drawing aside the silk curtain, looked down. What he saw below seemed like pandemonium. Waiters were rushing apparently aimlessly in every direction, skirting or piercing the labyrinth of arriving guests. There was a ceaseless clatter of plates and dishes, the staccato hum of gay conversation, the popping of corks, a tinkling of glass. At the doorway the two senior maîtres d'hôtel were standing with welcoming smiles apparently painted on their faces, but also with an urgent desire to stem the ever increasing flow of would-be patrons. There is no greater tragedy in the world to a successful restaurateur than to watch the arrival of clients of distinction to whom he has to announce that every one of his best tables is occupied. . . .

Ordino, having somewhat the air of Horatius quitting his post upon the bridge, himself gave up the unequal task. He withdrew a little farther into the room and stood by the great central table laden with delicacies of every sort. Gregory watched him curiously. For the moment the man's excessive vitality, his gleaming eyes and human smile, seemed to have left him. He had become suddenly detached. He had the air of a man who is looking out into the wilderness. Then, at the sound of a familiar voice, there was an entire change. A look of mild horror spread across his face. The familiar voice of a well-known duke who had approached him was responsible for the

change.

“I say, you know, Ordino,” His Grace remonstrated. “A bit thick about my table, isn’t it? I wasn’t twenty minutes behind my time and there that fellow from down in the City with his harem have spread themselves all over it. A bit thick, you know, what?”

“Your Grace,” Ordino said humbly, “I was thunderstruck when I came down and found what had happened. As I said to Alfonso, ‘His Grace is only thirty-five minutes behind his time. It is a privilege which should have been allowed him.’ I turned my back for a moment—and behold! Besides, you know the newspapers this morning all declared that you were off fishing.”

The young man was mollified but disconcerted.

“Miss Amy Loyes is downstairs,” he confided. “What are we going to do about that?”

“You are only two?” Ordino asked.

“That’s all.”

It was settled in a flash. One table stripped. Another moved. A place of privilege was ready in a matter of seconds. Ordino, all smiles and bows, conducted the young lady to her place on her appearance. He watched the still surging crowd and saw more trouble ahead. With the air of a man who has been summoned by Royalty and can listen to nothing he strode away towards temporary security. Gregory dropped the curtain. Ordino swung open the door and closed it again behind him.

“Having a bit of a rough time, aren’t you?” Gregory observed

with a smile.

Ordino was suddenly haggard. It had been given to few men to see him in such a condition. He stood with his hand upon the edge of the table. Gregory wielded the cocktail shaker, which had been standing by his elbow, and poured out some of its contents into a glass. He handed it to Ordino.

“With your gracious permission, Sir Gregory,” the latter apologised. “You will forgive me?”

He tossed off its contents. Gregory looked at him curiously.

“Anything fresh?” he asked.

“No change,” Ordino assured him. “You have never seen me like this before, Sir Gregory. I don’t think I have ever felt fear before.”

“I wonder why?” Gregory speculated.

“We Sicilians are superstitious,” Ordino said. “To-day a black shadow seems to rest upon everything. I woke with it and it has been there ever since. It seemed to spread like a cloud over the day. It rests on my heart.”

“You seemed to be doing pretty well down there,” Gregory remarked. “I saw you tackle that young ass of a Lavendale in great form.”

“It is a crisis like that which relieves me,” Ordino confessed. “When all goes smoothly the cloud lowers and I seem to feel the thunder. You took my advice, Sir Gregory,

I am glad to see. Her ladyship is not here to-day."

"You were so insistent," Gregory said tolerantly. "In any case she was very busy with the dressmaker. Nothing has happened you haven't told me, I suppose?"

Ordino hesitated.

"Nothing of the slightest significance," he replied. "Our agents tell us that the *Henrietta Anne* docked at midnight. We were chaffed a little, of course, about the partiality of our clients for Dutch cheese, but that was only natural. The Customs House officers were at work at eight o'clock this morning. The first van got away at ten. There are six vans now in the back premises discharging."

"Well, that sounds all right," Gregory observed.

"I went down there some time ago," Ordino continued. "It seemed to me that there were several strangers about whom I did not recognise. I asked who they were and was told that they were from the Customs House to make sure that the goods were delivered as addressed, or something of that sort. I remember nothing of the kind happening before. Still, it may be of no importance. In an hour the unloading and weighing ought to be completed."

"Perhaps," Gregory surmised, "you are not sorry to think that this is probably the last time?"

Ordino shook his head.

"What has happened that I should have lost my nerve, Sir

Gregory, I cannot understand," he admitted. "Yet at this moment if you ask me I confess that it seems to have left me. We are making fortunes enough below. Perhaps what really disturbed me was that one of the strangers whose business I could not understand downstairs was curiously like the Colonel Granderson who disappeared! He was thin, and looked as though he had been ill, but there was a likeness. You will remember, sir, that we came to the conclusion that Granderson might be a spy."

Gregory nodded.

"It was Lady Judith who first had the idea," he remarked. "I think I will step across to the Marlborough and have a little lunch. It is too much of a hubbub for me downstairs."

"There is not an inch of space anywhere," Ordino agreed reluctantly. "Take my advice, Sir Gregory—I will ring for Alfonso and he will serve you up here or in my private room. You will be quite comfortable, and if I should need your advice at all," he added wistfully, "you will be on the spot."

"Suits me," Gregory assented. "Cold meat and a salad, Ordino. Nothing more. A little cheese to follow, perhaps, and half a bottle of the light Graves."

Ordino bustled over to the telephone and gave the order. Somehow the presence of his illustrious patron, so calm and composed, lent him confidence. He himself interviewed the waiter who presently arrived, superintended the arrangement of the table, and afterwards inspected the dishes which were brought up. He turned away with reluctance and

only at Gregory's insistent behest. On his way to the door, however, he stopped short. Gregory, too, laid down his knife and fork in amazement. It was an unimaginable happening. The cheerful tumult in the restaurant below had suddenly ceased. Everyone seemed to have stopped talking. There was no clatter of dishes.

"What on earth has happened down there?" Gregory demanded.

Ordino, who held the raised curtain in his hand, groaned.

"Come and look," he invited hoarsely. "It's a sight you won't forget, Sir Gregory. You won't scoff at our Sicilian superstitions again."

Gregory was across the room in a moment. He looked over Ordino's shoulder. Everyone seemed to have risen from his place and was staring towards the door, one or two still holding their napkins in their hands. Some of the women on the far side had scrambled onto the settees. The waiters were all standing as though smitten by some paralysis. Every head in the place was turned towards the entrance. Two police officers were standing on the threshold side by side. A man and woman, who had been in the act of leaving, were motioned back to their places. From outside in the hall came the subdued sound of angry voices.

"We're in for it, Ordino," his august patron announced. "I wonder how they tumbled to it."

"Someone has played the traitor," Ordino cried in a broken voice. "They would never have found out otherwise."

A man in the uniform of an inspector stepped from behind in front of the two policemen. He held up his hand for silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “there is no occasion for alarm. You can leave the restaurant as usual, only when you do so it will be necessary for you to submit to a brief search. The ladies will make their way to their own quarters, where female searchers will be in attendance. The same thing applies for the men.”

“But what’s it all about?” a man demanded from a little way in the restaurant.

“Yes, what’s it all about?” a dozen others chorused.

The inspector hesitated. The time had gone by, however, when there was any necessity for concealment.

“A large quantity of drugs,” he announced, “has been discovered upon the premises. I can tell you no more. Be so good as to observe instructions.”

Conversation started again—excited, staccato conversation, a very different note from the almost musical hum of half an hour ago. Gregory turned round and calmly resumed his lunch. Ordino looked at him in wonder.

“You can eat, Sir Gregory?” he sobbed.

“Why not?” was the cool reply. “I’m hungry. This is a disaster, Ordino, but disasters are part of life.”

“But I am ruined,” Ordino declared, wringing his hands.

“Never again will the police let us open the restaurant. I shall be deported.”

“I don’t think so,” Sir Gregory assured him, filling his glass with the light wine. “I shall take most of the responsibility. Besides, you have already enough money in Sicily to live like a prince there.”

“It is true,” Ordino admitted, “but the penalty—it is tremendous. Do I want to spend these best years of my life in prison?”

“To tell you the truth,” Sir Gregory confessed, “I should hate it. I was to have been married next week, you know. Here comes Nemesis. Pull yourself together, man! Be brave, Ordino. Remember I’m taking the brunt of this affair upon my shoulders.”

Simultaneously with the knock the door was opened. The police inspector and two constables entered. The former looked keenly at the two men. He saluted Sir Gregory.

“Sir Gregory Fawsitt?” he enquired.

“My name, Inspector.”

“I have a warrant for your arrest. You are charged with being concerned in a conspiracy to smuggle forbidden drugs into this country. Giuseppe Ordino?”

“That is my name,” Ordino admitted.

“I have also a warrant for your arrest. You are charged with receiving dangerous drugs and permitting the sale of them upon

the premises."

"Very well," Ordino replied. "What are you going to do with me?"

"You will both come with me to Bow Street Police Station. You will be charged there with the offence I have named."

"There will be a remand, of course," Sir Gregory observed. "What about bail, Inspector?"

"That is no affair of mine, sir," the man answered. "If I might venture an opinion, though, I should say that it is most unlikely that bail will be granted on such a serious charge."

"May I ring up my solicitor?" Gregory asked.

"There can be no objection to that, sir," the man assented.

Gregory reached out his hand for the telephone which Ordino brought. He was quickly connected and a few rapid sentences were exchanged.

"My solicitor will be up at Bow Street in a quarter of an hour," Gregory announced, laying down the receiver. "He will undertake your defence, too, Ordino, unless you want a man of your own," he went on. "Any objections to my writing a few lines to the young lady I was going to marry next week, Inspector?"

"Not the slightest."

Gregory scribbled a few lines, placed the paper in an envelope

and addressed it to Judith. Ordino seemed too bewildered to even think of holding a pen.

"I will send messages later," he said. "Perhaps there will be a telephone."

"It's an awkward time of the day for you to choose, you know, Inspector," Gregory pointed out in a tone of mild reproof. "If you had taken us into custody earlier in the morning we might have got through the affair during the day and been able to sleep at home without worrying about bail."

The inspector seemed to detect something like bravado in Sir Gregory's carefully measured words. He looked at him sternly.

"You will forgive my reminding you, Sir Gregory," he said, "that the penalty for the offence with which you are charged is imprisonment with hard labour for from ten to fifteen years. I should think that the chances of your securing bail are extremely remote."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Gregory remarked. "However, as you say, the magistrate will have to use his discretion. There is a back way here, Inspector. It would be more agreeable for us."

"I know all about the back way, sir. We are going to take it now, and there is a police car at the other end. At your service, if you please."

"Come along, my friend Ordino," Gregory enjoined cheerfully. "Don't be depressed. We must not tell the inspector too much but I think we can promise him that we neither of us are going to prison for ten years or anything at all like that."

“It is not my affair to comment upon the situation in any way,” the inspector said stiffly, as he ushered them out of the room.

Somehow or other the news had spread and when Ordino and his illustrious patron took their places the Court was already filled to overflowing. Gregory sat next his solicitor, an old family friend, who welcomed him with a reproachful shake of the head. They conversed for a few minutes in whispers. Ordino, who had recovered his nerve, sat with folded arms and a sphinxlike expression. The treatment of the case was described by the evening papers and by the next morning’s press as the most extraordinary in the annals of the Court. On the other hand there was nothing absolutely illegal in the procedure, and the case itself presented very curious aspects. An official from Scotland Yard went into the witness box. He described rumours which had reached the Yard of the vast increase in the drug traffic in the West End. He told of the strict watch that had been kept upon incoming steamers from Continental ports, and he described the discovery of an enormous quantity of the drugs concealed in the interior of Dutch cheeses and unloaded from a steamer, the *Henrietta Anne*, with which Sir Gregory was without a doubt connected. A large quantity of these cheeses had been discovered in Ordino’s restaurant, and it could be easily proved that the contents had been disposed of by Ordino to his clients. Upon that evidence he asked for a remand to enable the Crown to complete their case. Sir Gregory’s solicitor then produced something of a sensation. He rose to his feet and, addressing the magistrate, consented on behalf of his clients to the remand,—pleading guilty on their behalf to a technical offence,—and made an urgent appeal for bail.

The magistrate looked at him in amazement.

“Do I understand you to say that your clients plead guilty then at this stage of the proceedings?” he asked.

“To a technical offence, yes, your worship,” the solicitor explained. “They themselves welcome the utmost publicity and they feel that their trial should take place at the forthcoming assizes. They agree to the remand and are willing to help the prosecution in their efforts to formulate the case, but they themselves need time to prepare their defence and, above all things, they need their liberty.”

The magistrate had the air of a baffled man.

“You astonish me, Sir William Hodson,” he said. “A more flagrant case has never been brought before my notice.”

“On the face of it, your worship,” the solicitor replied. “All the same, I assure you, of my own personal knowledge as solicitor for Sir Gregory Fawsitt and his family for many years, that there is a very well-defined and logical defence which will be made to this charge. All that I have to ask of your worship is that he will grant bail to both prisoners and commit them for trial.”

“I am afraid, Sir William,” the magistrate said solemnly, “that I cannot listen to your application for bail. I cannot accept the prisoners’ plea of guilty to a technical offence only, because that is utterly past my comprehension. They are either guilty or not guilty of a heinous crime, and bail under the circumstances is out of the question.”

“Your worship,” the lawyer insisted gently, “I am prepared here to offer you my word of honour, and I have pleaded in this Court for thirty years, that there is a defence and a very complete one.

Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt is a man of distinction, of position and of great wealth. Signor Ordino, I have been given to understand, is either his tool or his partner according to the findings of the jury when the case comes on for trial. Sir Gregory is prepared to deposit sureties to the extent of twenty-five thousand pounds for himself and the same amount for Ordino. They are both willing to submit to any form of police surveillance for the fortnight your worship may agree to. I have the word of honour of Sir Gregory that he will not attempt to leave the country and I have no doubt that Signor Ordino will give the same pledge. Bail, however, is necessary—first because to be incarcerated on a charge which was subsequently found to be groundless would inflict an unnecessary humiliation upon a man of great distinction, and secondly because a certain amount of freedom is necessary to prepare convincingly important features of the defence."

The magistrate beckoned to his clerk. They conferred together for several minutes. There was a buzz of subdued conversation everywhere.

"What," the magistrate asked, looking up and addressing the Solicitor for the Prosecution, "is the position regarding Ordino's restaurant or club?"

"The place has been thoroughly ransacked, your worship," the Solicitor for the Prosecution replied. "The whole of the stock of drugs—and it is a very large one—is being removed and a seal affixed to the room in which it is at present stored. The Crown does not propose to offer any objection to the reopening of the premises under police supervision until the case is decided. A summary closing would mean the throwing out of employment of

a large number of people.”

“A very reasonable leniency,” the magistrate admitted. “The decision of the Court, then, is that the prisoners are committed for trial to the forthcoming Assizes opening the day after to-morrow and that they—Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt and Giuseppe Ordino—are admitted to bail for twenty-five thousand pounds each, the guarantor in both cases being Sir Gregory Fawsitt. The Court is dismissed. Sir Gregory Fawsitt and Giuseppe Ordino will remain to sign their recognizances.”

The first stage in a *cause célèbre* was over.

CHAPTER XXXI

Habitués of the famous club in the Adelphi Terrace, and occasional passers-by, were greatly intrigued during the next few days by the sight of two constables of formidable appearance guarding the entrance to Number Eight B, where Gregory's bachelor flat was situated. Visitors were passed on to an emissary from Scotland Yard, who was seated at a hastily improvised table in the hall, and the list of people allowed to visit Gregory was a very brief one. Nevertheless, Judith was one of these and she lunched with her host on the day before the trial quite pleasantly at a table drawn up to one of the high windows looking out on the Thames. Gregory was very much as usual but he seemed to have developed a new crispness of manner and tone. His little vein of indulgent banter had disappeared. He was an economist of words but not, to Judith's great content, of affection.

"Tell me how it really feels," she asked, "to be out on bail?"

He smiled cheerfully.

"Not much 'out' about it," he reminded her. "If I were to ring for a taxicab I should have the whole police force clamouring. So long as they leave me you, my dear, the materials for these excellent cocktails I am now making, and the lunch which I have reason to believe will presently appear, I think I rather like it. Much less noisy than Ordino's."

"How they will be talking this morning!" she laughed.

“I can almost hear the buzz of voices from here,” he declared. “I hope we are coming in for a certain amount of sympathy. The older generation, I suppose, will be letting off the big guns.”

“Is Ordino there himself?” Judith asked.

He shook his head.

“I’m afraid they are tying Ordino up a little more tightly even than me,” he said, “but, after all, it doesn’t matter. He is much better away from everybody. He would talk himself into a dazed state and would end up by being utterly incoherent.”

“What about Captain Henderson?” she enquired, stretching out her hand for the cocktail he had just finished shaking.

His eyes twinkled.

“Poor old Henderson!” he exclaimed. “I told Sir William not to fuss about bail for him. He would only get raving drunk if he were out. He’s much better where he is for a few days. Besides, he would certainly kill David if he could get at him.”

She shuddered.

“That horrible youth,” she murmured.

“There’s something coming to him from what I can hear,” Gregory went on. “Judith, congratulate me. If they send me to penal servitude they won’t waste my talents making boots or clothes. They’ll stick me behind the cocktail bar!”

“Aren’t you a little sanguine about their arrangements?”

“I suppose I am,” he replied. “But the cocktail’s good, isn’t it?”

“Marvellous,” she agreed. “There will only be one thing better.”

“And that?”

“The second one.”

“Never as good as the first,” he told her.

“By the by,” she asked him, “what do you know about David?”

“Oh, I’ve had a lot of mixed-up information this morning,” he said. “You see, Sir William has been in touch with Captain Henderson’s lawyer—the man I sent down to look after him. Do you know where I believe David got the information from, which enabled him to burst up the show?”

“No idea.”

“From the telegram you saw pinned to Loman’s door the night of his murder,” Gregory confided. “Furthermore, I believe that the captain sent David there to get that telegram. He had been hunting the fellow round Amsterdam, and I am inclined to think he tipped him over that fire escape balustrade.”

“Horrible,” she murmured. “But who was Loman?”

“He was the secretary of one of those anæmic societies which are fostered by stupid old ladies and retired parsons who have more money than they know what to do with. He was the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Drug Traffic. They had sent him out to Amsterdam to spy round, with

plenty of money, and apparently he did succeed in getting hold of one of my men after one of the shipments had left, who sent a telegram to Loman telling him how the cases were marked. However, I'm tired of the conversation," he declared, finishing his cocktail and taking the two glasses to the sideboard. "Here comes the lunch. Just in time. I never could have thought that without an hour of out-of-door exercise I could have had such an appetite. Lamb and green peas, Judith. What do we want with caviar and pâté?"

Parker set out the table and opened a bottle of hock.

"I'll touch the bell when we want you," his master told him.

Parker inclined his head respectfully.

"There are seven emissaries from the Press arguing with the gentleman from Scotland Yard downstairs, sir," he announced.

"Shocking," Gregory exclaimed. "Go down and in your best manner, Parker, explain that prisoners out on bail cannot be interviewed even by the editor of the *Times*. Tell them to run away and I shall be pleased to see them on Thursday evening after the trial is over."

The faintest flicker of a smile disturbed the perfect immobility of the man's expression.

"There is not one of them, sir," he remarked, "who thinks he will have the chance."

"If there is one thing that fills me with joy, Gregory," his

companion murmured as they commenced their lunch, “it is your amazing confidence. I even ask myself sometimes,” she went on, clutching his hand, “whether this is a magnificent bluff. You don’t mean, Gregory, do you, to—to end the thing your own way?” she concluded, with a little break in her voice. “I sometimes forget, you know, that you are a great scientist. I suppose you could pass into the next world at any moment if you wanted to—however much they searched you.”

“I could do that,” he assured her. “Clever of you, dear, to have realised it, but I don’t think I want to. We are due to be married on Saturday and I have chartered Monty Ardisson’s yacht to take us over to New York on Sunday. It’s lying in Southampton Harbour at this present moment. I thought I might manage things without going over but a great fortune like the one old Ben left needs some looking after, and it only seems respectful. . . . Besides, they would kill us with a succession of fatted calves at Ordino’s—or with something else.”

“What do you mean ‘with something else’?” she asked suspiciously.

“Such a short time to wait,” he reminded her. “Remember our bargain. No questions. I know the one you want to ask. . . . Yes, there’s a sweet coming—raspberry-and-red-currant tart. And there may be cream if Parker is the man I think he is.”

“You dear humbug,” she laughed.

“A man out on bail must be fed,” he assured her. “By the by, I knew I had some news for you. Who do you think the second

witness for the Crown is, after David?”

“Tell me quickly,” she begged.

“Granderson.”

“Do you mean that he is alive?”

Gregory touched the bell and, leaning back in his chair, pushed the cigarettes across the table.

“Yes. I meant to tell you about Granderson,” he said. “It seems this fellow Henderson is, after all, not such an utterly bad egg. It was David who smashed Granderson’s head in. They dragged him down into a cabin, got one of those low-down riverside doctors—who are as clever as paint—to patch him up, found him a hospital nurse of the same ilk, carted him over to Amsterdam and let him loose after the fun had commenced. He is shaken up but fairly well recovered, they say. The joke of it is, the captain believed that he had got rid of him to the river police, for he had David locked up in another cabin. The river police boarded him, on Granderson’s track, and David was handed over by mistake! That’s how David got free to tell the awful story. The private opinion of the captain’s solicitor, between you and me,” Gregory concluded, “is that the captain meant to get rid of David on the way over to Amsterdam—but he lost his chance. . . . The sweets, Parker,” he added, looking over his shoulder. “Something was said about cheese, too, I think. After that you can bring the coffee, in about twenty minutes.”

“You are a wonderful host to-day, Gregory,” Judith declared. “Full of bright newsy chat, too.”

“I am relieved about Granderson. I don’t think the captain will get into much trouble about him,” Gregory reflected. “Scotland Yard were as mad as hatters at his intervening at all. They thought they had got on my trail by themselves, and they didn’t want this new arm of the profession to get all the credit.”

“There’s very little difference, really, between the sexes,” Judith observed with a sweet smile.

“At any rate,” Gregory remarked, “motive is one of the strangest things in the world when you come to analyse it.”

They drank their coffee at a smaller table in easy chairs drawn a little way back from the window. They watched the curving line of the Thames past Chelsea Bridge out of sight. Then there was a warning hoot below. Judith peered forward and made a little grimace.

“It’s the family chariot,” she announced. “As the possible villainess in a great society scandal Mother thinks I’m safer in the limousine, when I am not enclosed behind the walls of Grosvenor House.”

She rose to her feet. He wrapped her lace cape round her. They stood for a moment, their lips touching.

“Oh Gregory,” she begged, “one last word: this confidence of yours—it is not only courage?”

“My darling,” he assured her, as he led her through the door, “I should be the greatest coward in the world if I thought that there was the faintest chance of not standing up with you in the Registry Office on Saturday.”

CHAPTER XXXII

The trial took place the next day before a court packed to suffocation. Every chair and inch of available space was occupied to excess. Crowds, even of the smart world with influence behind them, were wedged together without the excuse of a bench. The officials were driven, for the first time in their lives, to the last resort in such cases. All doors in the faintest way accessible to the public were locked and guarded inside and out.

The initial proceedings followed the ordinary routine. The jury took their accustomed places. The judge, with the usual ceremony, took his seat upon the bench. The three prisoners—Gregory, Ordino, and Henderson—duly surrendered to their bail and took their places in the dock. Amidst a breathless silence, Counsel for the Crown, in unimpassioned but convincing tones, opened the proceedings. In ten minutes he had resumed his seat and a sense of inevitable disaster was brought home to all Gregory's friends and sympathisers. From the first, the case for the prosecution had been conducted in a spirit of almost arrogant confidence. The facts were all so simple and yet so damnable. There seemed to be no place anywhere for extenuation or excuse. The drugs, of which a large number of samples were spread upon the table, were the most familiar and noxious on the forbidden list. The method of their introduction into the country was in itself a triumph of criminal secrecy and ingenuity. Unwilling witnesses had testified to purchasing them at exorbitant prices at Ordino's. The

stock seized upon the premises and transported to police headquarters was the largest ever heard of in the country. The idea of any sort of defence seemed incredible. Yet Gregory, looking very smart and debonair, with a bunch of violets in his buttonhole and evidently fresh from the care of his Curzon Street barber, listened to the damning evidence with an air of mild but critical interest, in striking contrast to the haggard and despondent appearance of Ordino by his side. . . .

Everyone had abandoned hope of any dramatic development when the Counsel for the Defence rose to his feet, yet there was a little murmur of surprise, not unmixed with excitement, at the mention of the first witness, whose name was impressively rolled out by the famous K.C. whom Gregory's solicitors had briefed.

"Lord Bromford of Wray."

A heavily spectacled, but broad-shouldered, powerful-looking man, with an intellectual forehead and masses of grey hair, stepped into the box. All leaned forward in their places, anxious to catch a glimpse of him. He had the reputation of being the greatest scientist in Europe, with the somewhat unpleasant habit of closing the door in the faces of all itinerant photographers or interviewers who ventured to approach him, either at his laboratories or at his private house. He was, at any rate, known to be a man with few courtesies towards the outside world, and even his acceptance of a title came as a surprise. He answered the preliminary questions nonchalantly but in a firm, clear tone. Yes, he had been a Professor of Toxicology, connected with the Rockefeller Institute; and he admitted blandly that he was considered the greatest authority on his

subject in the world.

“You examined, I believe, a great many samples passed on to you by the police, of the drugs which were smuggled into the restaurant club of Giuseppe Ordino, of which Sir Gregory Fawsitt is the chairman?”

“Quite true,” the witness replied. “I examined them all with great interest.”

“They consisted, did they not, of heroin, opium, cocaine, and various lesser known Eastern products?”

“Precisely.”

Then came the question, the answer to which sent a shiver of emotional excitement all through the court.

“What was the result of your examination?”

“I found the whole of the drugs submitted to me pleasant to take and completely innocuous.”

The few seconds’ dazed silence in the packed chamber was followed by an audibly expressed murmur of amazement which swelled in volume until for some time the ushers, and the judge himself, lost all control over the hysterical assembly. The surprise was a complete one. People realised only by degrees the significance of so amazingly unexpected a statement. It was a full minute before the counsel was able to ask his next question.

“You found these specimens of drugs, then, with which the

restaurant of Ordino was so liberally stocked, to differ in a vital respect from the harmful drugs which are rightfully considered one of the great curses of this country?"

"I found them entirely different."

"And you think that they could be taken by an ordinary human being without harm to his system or the usual effects produced by drug taking?"

"Most decidedly."

Counsel for the Defence chose this surprising moment to resume his seat. Then, indeed, there was tumult in court. It was at least five minutes before order was restored. Then it was seen that Ordino, who had nearly fainted, was sipping from a glass of water which had been handed to him. Gregory, with a faint smile upon his lips, was the least moved person in the court. By degrees the riot subsided. The silence was once more intense as the Counsel for the Prosecution rose to his feet.

"You are aware, Lord Bromford, that the statement which you have just made to the court is a very serious one, of immense significance and incomprehensible to lay minds?"

"I can quite believe it," was the prompt reply. "Let me explain."

"By all means," the judge intervened. "I must point out to you, Lord Bromford, that a statement of such an extraordinary nature needs the fullest and most amplified interpretation."

Lord Bromford bowed to the judge.

“I will do my best, your lordship,” he promised. “These drugs are properly named. The samples submitted to me consisted of cocaine, of opium, of heroin, and of several lesser known drugs, the names and qualities of which I will spare you, but each one had been treated by a system of chemical evaporation which had drawn from it all the harmful qualities and left it a product which might be taken with impunity, and even with possible benefit to the human system. I will spare you more technical details but they are at your service whenever you desire them.”

“In plain words, Lord Bromford,” the dazed Counsel for the Prosecution demanded, “you consider these drugs imported into the country in a craftily built steamer, and concealed in a most extraordinarily ingenious fashion, were, notwithstanding all these secretive measures, in reality not drugs at all but harmless vegetable products?”

“So far as the samples submitted to me are concerned, some of which I may say I chose myself at haphazard,” was the quiet, convincing reply, “this is certainly the case.”

The Counsel for the Prosecution was compelled to wait until further evidences of commotion had subsided and order was restored.

“You will excuse my persistence, Lord Bromford,” he continued, “but you must admit that your statement is one of the most extraordinary which has ever been made in a court of justice. As one of the greatest living authorities on such subjects have you any idea yourself how this condition of harmlessness has arisen?”

For the first time the witness smiled. He leaned a little forward in the box.

"Certainly I have," he admitted, "and the subject is a most interesting one. It has been the basis of many discussions between myself and my learned friend Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt, than whom—if I may be permitted to say so—this pernicious drug traffic has had no more determined and persistent enemy. It was he, some years ago, who brought me specimens of drugs which he had treated by a species of suction, created by the compression of various chemical substances which extracted the poison from opium, which was the first drug upon which he experimented. I was aware that he had set up in a small factory near Amsterdam all the machinery which he had perfected for treating drugs in this fashion, but for some years, in this busy world, I have lost sight of Sir Gregory, and I had no idea that he was making practical and beneficent use of his discovery."

"But, Lord Bromford," counsel went on, "you must forgive me, and I must ask your lordship's pardon," he added, turning almost pathetically to the judge, "if I wander a little from the direct issue, but the whole case for the Prosecution is threatened by this evidence. I therefore ask you, Lord Bromford, as a man of common sense, as well as a man of great scientific attainments—having reduced these drugs to a state of innocuity, how do you imagine (I ask you as man to man) they were of practical value to a man in Ordino's position who was requested to furnish the veritable article?"

Lord Bromford answered without hesitation.

“We are now,” he pointed out, “outside the limit of scientific facts, and I suggest that the question you have put would be more fittingly addressed to my friend Professor Sir Gregory Fawsitt, who is, I understand, the principal defendant in this case.”

The judge nodded.

“I agree with the witness,” he said.

Lord Bromford left the box. There was a whispered consultation between solicitor and barrister, and Sir Gregory Fawsitt was called to take his place. There was a curious feeling in court that everyone was dying to applaud him as he stood there after having taken the oath, suave and smiling. To applaud him, not because of any heroic deed, but because he had afforded a listening audience the greatest sensation of their lives. The Counsel for the Prosecution wasted no time.

“Your name is Gregory Fawsitt?”

“Yes.”

“You were a Professor at Cambridge some seventeen or eighteen years ago?”

“Quite true.”

“You retired from your official position with various distinctions?”

Gregory bowed slightly.

“I have also,” he said, “been granted honorary degrees of

considerable importance by various foreign universities."

"Will you tell the Court," counsel asked, "what made you enter upon the extraordinary course of conduct which has led to the present unbelievable situation?"

Gregory thought for a minute.

"I will be as brief as I can," he added. "When I was quite a young man I was impressed by the terrible strides the drug traffic was making both here and on the Continent. The idea occurred to me that even if it was impossible to keep drugs out of the country they might be rendered comparatively harmless. I followed up that idea with success. I claim that at a very small cost, by means of the process I have adopted in my factory near Amsterdam, I can transform the well-known drugs into harmless and even beneficial tonics or sedatives."

"What made you enter into this system of importing the drugs in their revised state into the country?"

Gregory's eyebrows were a little raised.

"I am afraid I must confess," he acknowledged, "that side by side with my desire to deal with the harm which drugs were doing came a realisation of the immense profit which could be made by distributing the new product."

"I am glad you admit that, Sir Gregory," the counsel said severely. "Let me ask you this. How on earth did you expect to cure people of the habit of drug taking by your enterprise?"

“As a matter of fact,” Gregory admitted, “the idea on which I worked was borrowed from the last witness, Lord Bromford of Wray. I worked upon the principle suggested by that strange condition of the brain which accepts fixed ideas in the byways of that unexplored philosophy, the philosophy of psychoanalysis. Afterwards my theory was that if the addict believed that he was taking the real thing he would actually experience the reactions to which he knew he was entitled and at the same time be benefited by such good as remained in the drug after my process had finished dealing with it.”

Counsel for the Prosecution deliberated for a moment.

“I suggest that such a state of things, even if it happened once or twice, would scarcely continue,” he said. “The taker of the drug would realize that he was being fooled.”

“Probably,” the witness agreed. “On the other hand, he might remain fooled long enough for the desire for the drug to become exterminated.”

Counsel for the Prosecution resumed his seat. There was a little buzz in court. There was whispering at the solicitors’ table. Counsel for the Defence rose to his feet.

“Your lordship,” he asked, “have I your permission to recall for a moment my witness, Lord Bromford of Wray?”

The judge assented. Lord Bromford stepped once more into the box. Counsel for the Defence leaned towards him.

“You will forgive me, Lord Bromford, for asking you to repeat

one of your statements. My learned friend in charge of the prosecution agrees with me that it is best to have it in black and white, after which my learned friend will probably have a statement to make. You are aware, I dare say, that nearly a ton's weight of drugs of different sorts were seized and removed from the premises of Ordino's Restaurant. Samples from this immense store were selected and handed to you entirely at random by your own chemists and by the police. I ask you once more—is it your deliberate and assured conviction that this stock of drugs is harmless to the public?"

"That is so," was the firm reply. "They could be sold with impunity to anyone. The only effect they could possibly produce would be an imaginary one."

The Counsel for the Defence resumed his seat. Curiously enough the revulsion of emotion was so great that one or two women were suffering from actual hysteria. Some were laughing. Some were sobbing. The potpourri of emotions was so cunningly intermingled that people scarcely realised whether they were assisting at a comedy or a tragedy. In the midst of it all the Counsel for the Defence rose once more to his feet.

"Your lordship," he said, "I submit that the Prosecution have failed to make out any case against the three prisoners which could possibly be submitted to a jury."

The Counsel for the Prosecution also rose to his feet. Various technical arguments were brought forward, discussed or refuted. The wording of the act, in which drugs such as those seized were alluded to in each case as "noxious and dangerous preparations," was read out and commented upon by everyone

in turn. Finally the judge submitted two questions to the jury to which a prompt reply was given. Without leaving the box the foreman communicated the verdict.

“The jury, your lordship,” he announced, “find the prisoners not guilty of the charge of handling and distributing noxious and dangerous drugs.”

“And with regard to the minor charge of smuggling?” the judge asked.

“The jury also find the prisoners not guilty,” he replied.

There was probably no human power or authority which could have at once restrained the pandemonium which broke out in court. The judge, being a man of common sense, waited patiently for nearly ten minutes. Whispers went through the court that judgment had not yet been pronounced, and there was a rumour that the judge had threatened to adjourn the proceedings if order was not restored. Comparative silence was in this way at length secured. The judge first addressed Ordino.

“Giuseppe Ordino,” he said. “You have been found not guilty of the charge of trafficking in noxious and dangerous drugs. You are discharged and may leave the court at your will.”

Ordino resumed his seat in a dazed manner. His eyes were fixed upon his companion and there was something curiously touching in the dumb sort of fidelity with which he waited.

“Gregory Fawsitt,” the judge continued. “The jury have found you not guilty of any crime in the eyes of the law in connection

with this traffic in the drugs named. It is my duty, therefore, of which I shall at once acquit myself, to inform you that you are a free man and may leave the court when desired. I may say that in all my experience it has never happened to me to adjudicate upon such an amazing case. The jury, however, are perfectly right in finding you not guilty of any criminal intention in connection with this charge. I ask myself, and I have not yet succeeded in answering the question, whether your great scientific achievement presented itself to you as a huge practical joke upon society at large, or whether you were inspired with a sincere and altruistic desire to experiment in their own interests upon a class of people addicted to one of the worst of vices in an effort for their restoration to sanity. You, yourself, must answer those questions to your own conscience. I can only say that the law finds no charge against you proved, and that you, with Giuseppe Ordino here, and Captain Jan Henderson, are herewith discharged."

The interior of that small chamber of tragedy at the top of Bunter's Buildings, on the door of which Loman's name, crudely painted, still remained, had gained nothing in beauty or cleanliness from David's brief tenancy. David himself, coatless, with his shirt open at the throat, his hair more tousled and unkempt than ever, sat, on the morning of the great trial at the Old Bailey, before a table improvised from a packing case, a knife and fork in his hand and an enormous steak on a cracked plate in front of him. The oil cooking stove had been badly manipulated. It was still smoking, and the room, devoid of any form of ventilation, was full of unpalatable odours. David, however, was eating noisily and greedily, and glancing every now and then at the morning paper spread out by his side with

its sensational headlines:—

FAMOUS RESTAURATEUR AND WELL-KNOWN
BARONET CHARGED WITH DRUG TRAFFIC
WILL TAKE THEIR PLACES IN DOCK AT OLD BAILEY
THIS MORNING
MANY SOCIETY LADIES SAID TO BE INVOLVED
FURTHER ARRESTS HOURLY EXPECTED

Between his savagely gulped mouthfuls David read the headlines and grinned. Judy of Bunter's Buildings, the woman who had brought the madness to his brain, would be one of those further arrests. He chuckled as he read. He chuckled as he ate. It was the hour of his triumph. Soon the boy whom he had hired for the purpose would be in with the evening edition. The heading which he was aching to see would be there:—

ARREST OF PEER'S DAUGHTER
LADY JUDITH MARTELLON TO BE CHARGED WITH
COMPLICITY IN THE GREAT DRUG CASE

After all, it was he who was the clever one. It was he who had brought about the great *débâcle*: David—at whom they had sneered and mocked. David—whom she had brushed aside like the dirt under her feet. David—at whom she had looked in that tiny den of luxury with eyes full of loathing. He had pulled down the pillars and brought ruin upon them all. He was free, with money in his pocket, ready to spend a riotous evening, prepared to gloat over them in their cells. They were all to suffer. The brutal, bestial captain whose tyranny he had endured for so long. Judy who had mocked him. Sir Gregory, coldly supercilious. They had all treated him as though he had been some poisonous

insect. Well, they knew now. He had nothing to fear. The captain would never walk the earth a free man again. He, David, would be able to sit in the saloon bar, in the captain's favourite corner, for as long as he chose. If there was another Judy coming he had the money. He could buy the things he wanted in life. Clever fellow! All that money which would bring him in the luxuries for which he thirsted had come to him through their ruin. Again he chuckled. 311

The odour of the little room became nauseating but it never occurred to him to open the window. He ate on—eating huge mouthfuls of steak and bread alternately, drinking stout from the bottle noisily. Oh, life was good for the cunning ones of the world!

Bunter's Buildings, close to which half a million people passed their days and nights, scowls over a realm of silence. Tramways and buses are plentiful enough half a mile away. All the traffic in the immediate vicinity consists of the daytime motor lorries going backwards and forwards from the steamers, and the only alien sounds are the calling of sirens through the fogs upon the river. Footsteps upon the stairs, confused at first, soon became clear and distinct to the tenant of the filthy room on the top floor. David listened, and he laid down the fork which he had been in the act of raising to his mouth. Men were coming up the stairs. These were not the light footsteps of the youth whom he had hired to bring him the first paper in which he should read of his triumph. These were the footsteps of grown men, of heavy men, of men who walked with solemn and purposeful deliberation. 312

David rose hesitatingly to his feet. His expression changed. Fear had taken the place of that greedy joy which had shone in his beady eyes. The flush which rapid eating had brought to his cheeks was replaced once more by that unwholesome greenish pallor. He began to breathe fast. The footsteps had passed the landing below. They were mounting the final flight. They were coming to him. What could it mean? Who could they be? The lurking fear which had lain underneath his hour of triumph passed suddenly into being. It was impossible, he told himself. The captain was at that moment in the dock at the Old Bailey. His word was discredited. There was nothing to be feared from him—and he was the only person in the world who knew. And yet . . . !

The footsteps became more insistent. David crouched over his table. There was someone on the landing now. The footsteps had ceased outside his door. There was a sharp insistent knocking. He summoned up a thin thread of courage.

"Come in," he invited.

The door was opened and David's unpleasant eyes were glazed with fear. It was Jan Henderson who stood there—apparently free. Not only free, but with a terrible menace in his face and manner. David shrank back in his improvised seat. He would have risen to his feet but his knees were trembling.

"You dirty hound!" the captain exclaimed.

"What are you doing here?" David faltered. "You should be in prison. They told me that it would be a life sentence."

The captain's laugh was an evil thing to listen to, but there was something in it of grim triumph.

"Nicely fooled, you have been, you little rat!" he snarled. "Thought you had got the let-down on us all, didn't you? Two hundred and fifty pounds reward, wasn't it? You won't have much chance of spending it."

Even in the throes of his mortal terror David felt the urge of a savage curiosity.

"How did you get out of jail?" he demanded.

"No charge against me," was the triumphant reply. "You were fooled, my lad. Those weren't drugs we were carrying. They were faked."

"It's a lie!" David cried out. "They've not got hold of the real stuff. What about the cases stacked away in the aft hold? What about the false deck?"

"Don't you worry," the captain advised him. "The police have been all over the ship. They've had their pick of the stuff. Why, my lad, you told them yourself which cases to open. I told you it was all faked stuff. I didn't believe it myself, but that's no matter."

"And you're free?" David faltered.

"I'm free," the captain assented, "and if it wasn't that the law wants you worse than I do I'd smash your ugly little body into smithereens. Come in, Sergeant."

David was petrified into silence. The cheerful visitor from the police station, who had been for so long an habitué of the Green Man, stepped briskly into the room. He laid his hand on David's shoulder.

"What do you want?" the latter stammered.

"I want you."

"What for?"

"I wouldn't ask too many questions if I were you," the sergeant advised him gravely. "I want you on two charges. The first one is for the murder of Anthony Loman, once a tenant of this room, secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Drug Traffic. Secondly for a murderous assault upon Major Granderson on the ship *Henrietta Anne* on the night of April the nineteenth. I wouldn't say a word if I were you. You will be allowed to send for a lawyer as soon as you are safely in the police station. He will do the talking for you."

Neither Captain Jan Henderson nor the sergeant himself were ever able to give a clear explanation of what happened during the next ten seconds. The sergeant was making a slight adjustment to the handcuffs which he had produced and which he was on the point of putting into use. Henderson was gloating over his victim, to whom he had moved a little closer. Suddenly, without speech, without the slightest warning, David, who had been sprawling forward on his seat as though helplessly stricken with mortal fear, gave a flying leap which almost carried him to the door. He was through it in a second. Three of his great lopping strides and he was across the landing.

Simultaneously the two men sprang after him. They missed him by a bare half-yard. The fire escape door was swung back on its hinges. With a terrible cry of passionate fear, in which there seemed curiously enough to be some undernote of triumph, David, uncouth to the last, with legs and arms all at distorted angles, went hurtling into space.

Lord Martellon, who, an hour or so after the proceedings at the Old Bailey had terminated, drove with the bride and bridegroom from the Registry Office to Waterloo, always prided himself upon having developed under his daughter's guidance a somewhat tardy sense of humour. He held his silk hat upon his knees and sustained the burden of the conversation during the short drive.

"If you people escape as well from Waterloo as we have done from the Registry Office," he said, "you will be lucky. In fact, you are having all the luck. Here I shall be, left alone in London to study the headlines on the newspaper boards:—

PEER'S DAUGHTER ELOPES WITH RELEASED FELON

—or some awful balderdash like that—is probably what the *Evening Crawler* will make of it."

"I shouldn't worry about the evening papers, Dad," Judith laughed. "There will be worse to come. Wait for the *Daily Locomotive* and some of the others! Personally I think that the whole world—especially our world—will be in debt to Gregory for weeks. They will say that his was the most magnificent hoax ever known. They will laugh so much that their digestions will be improved; they will eat too much; and, if

Ordino is only allowed to, he will be able to sell those drugs at fifty pounds an ounce! I really think we ought to have stayed and dined with him to-night.”

“Would you like to?” Gregory suggested.

She laughed softly as they swung into the long approach to Waterloo.

“I should hate to do anything to interfere with your perfect arrangements,” she declared. “How did you know that the trial would be over just in time for us to get respectably married, to catch the boat train to Southampton and be on our way to America whilst people are still looking for us?”

“Divine impulse, I suppose,” he answered, reluctantly withdrawing his arm from her waist as they turned into the station yard. “In other words, I took a chance.”

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

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[The end of *The Magnificent Hoax* by E. Phillips Oppenheim]