

A KNIFE

*for the*



SUGLOVER

MANNING COLES

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# A KNIFE FOR THE JUGGLER

THE SIXTEENTH TOMMY HAMBLEDON ADVENTURE

Manning Coles

London  
HODDER & STOUGHTON

*The characters in this book are entirely  
imaginary and bear no relation to any  
living person.*

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To  
TEX NOORDEWIER

*"Can your friend speak English?"*

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## CHAPTER I

### TO VIEW THE BODY

He who wishes to ascend the heights of Montmartre has two ways open to him; he can either go by circuitous roads which wind transversely across the face of the extremely steep hill or he can go straight up the face by any of the several flights of steps which, connecting the roads, lead directly to the summit where the great Basilica of the Sacré Coeur dominates the city of Paris. These flights of steps are comfortably wide with double hand-rails down the middle; on either side there is a broad margin of concrete down which the children of the quarter slither upon the portion of their anatomy appointed by Providence for the purpose. The slope is far too steep to walk up or run down and the long flights of steps are warranted to fatigue the legs of any but the most practised athlete. There are tall houses on both sides of these stairs; by day they aspire to the heights and by night they are shadowy chasms plunging into impenetrable depths.

This neighbourhood is not particularly well lighted; this is not the fault of the City of Paris Authorities but is due to the nature of the terrain. Even the roads which terrace the hillsides are steep, winding and narrow between the tall houses; darkness seems to crowd in upon the street lights, containing their beams, and accumulates like fog in every corner.

Three men were walking up one of these roads one night. It was late, nearly midnight, and there were few people about. The three men were not together but one after another; the two first within ten yards of each other and the third some distance behind. The first was a tall fair young man without a hat, whenever he passed under a street lamp his blond hair shone in the light. The second was smaller and walked like a cat; one felt that at any moment he could either spring or slink. He wore a dark suit and a hat pulled down over his dark eyes. The third was a British Intelligence agent and his name was Thomas Hambledon.

The first man came to the point where one of the flights of steps turned up to the right; he did not hesitate but went straight up them. The second followed in his turn and the house at the corner immediately concealed them from Hambledon's sight.

"If Blondie doesn't know he's being followed," said Hambledon, who did not know their names, "I'll bet Brunette does. I don't quite fancy walking up those steps with him waiting for me. If there were a taxi I'd go round to the top and await their arrival." He came to the corner of the house by the steps and paused to listen before putting his head round it.

He heard something at once and it was not a sound which he had expected. It was not voices or footsteps nor even blows or curses, it was a sliding noise accompanied by dull bumps. It came down the steps towards him and ceased abruptly.

Hambledon put his head round the corner of the house. The stairs do not rise up directly from the street, there is a small level square at their foot forming as it were a forecourt very dimly lighted, but there was certainly something lying at the foot of the steps. Hambledon looked about him; there was no one in sight, not even upon the stairs, though the second man must have run fairly fast up the rest of the flight to be out of sight already. Perhaps he was merely sheltering in a doorway.

Hambledon went forward to bend over the man on the ground. He had evidently rolled down, the bumping noise was probably caused by his head hitting the steps in passing. He lay face downwards with one arm flung out and his legs asprawl and there was a knife in his back. It was the blond young man and he was quite dead.

Hambledon glanced round once more, turned the man over and went through his pockets, transferring whatever they held to his own. He was in the act of taking off the dead man's wrist watch—watches are often a help in establishing identity—when a quiet voice behind him made him spin round.

"If monsieur has quite finished," said the policeman.

"Ah," said Hambledon, and straightened up.

Three men came past in the road, stopped and then came towards them. Two women arrived from nowhere in particular and another man came running lightly down the steps. It was not the dark man who walked like a cat. A ring formed round Hambledon, the policeman, and the dead man on the ground.

"Stand there," said the policeman, still addressing Hambledon. "You will not attempt an escape."

"We'll see to that," said the men and closed in on Tommy while the women called him an assassin and a robber. The policeman bent over the body, rolled it over and disclosed the knife still sticking in its back. The handle had been pressed flat against the back in the transit down the steps but the change of posture released it and it rose slowly as though deliberately displaying itself. The women recoiled with shrieks and the men pinioned Tommy's arms and told him what they would like to do to him.

"That will do," said the policeman sharply, "we will see to all that is necessary, we, the police." The crowd grew larger and was joined by a second policeman. Tommy was marched away to the police-station of Montmartre escorted by a section of the crowd, more citizens added themselves to the *cortège* on the way and every new-comer had naturally to be told what the trouble was about. Loud talking in the street caused upper windows to be thrown up and shrill voices joined in the clamour of abuse. Hambledon's police escort took firm hold of his arm above the elbow and hurried him along, angrily checking any who pressed too close upon him and his captive. They turned at last into the Place Dancourt and Hambledon was not the only one who breathed more freely when the doors of the police-station closed between them and the mob shouting outside.

The desk Sergeant looked up and said: "What is all this?"

"Murder and robbery," said the policeman, and described the circumstances.

"Your name?" said the desk Sergeant, opening his record book.

Hambledon gave it and added: "I wish to speak to Detective-Superintendent Letord of the Sûreté at once. It is urgent——"

"To-morrow will do," said the desk Sergeant. He rose leisurely to his feet, opened a flat cupboard screwed to the wall and took a numbered key off a hook.

"At once," insisted Hambledon. "Have the goodness to ring him up and tell him that——"

"To-morrow. He will, no doubt, be equally eager to see you to-morrow. You do not suppose that I am going to bring a Detective-Superintendent of the Sûreté from his bed at the bidding of an assassin? You are not sufficiently serious."

Hambledon gave it up and was conducted to his cell. This was nothing like the picture which rises naturally in

the mind of a British miscreant when anyone mentions the word "cell", it was much more like a lion's cage in a pre-Mappin-terraced Zoo, for it had bars in front from floor to ceiling and from side to side. In fact, the whole range of cells was basically a large room with a passage down the middle between a double line of narrow stalls as for cows, except that one does not shut cows in behind close iron bars as thick as a man's thumb. This arrangement does, of course, save the trouble of tethering the prisoners.

The result was that Hambledon, if he chose to press his face against the bars, could see almost the whole range of cells opposite but nothing whatever of those upon his own side. There were four prisoners already there when he was brought in; he could see and hear two of them and only hear the other two.

There was only one piece of furniture in his cell and that was the bed, so he sat on it. The policeman went out, speeded on his way by acid witticisms from a humorist near the door, and attention turned to Hambledon.

"Hey, you in number four!"

"Good evening, the company," said Tommy politely.

"What are you in for, or is that a rude question?"

"A mistake in identity," said Hambledon, "a mere misunderstanding. It will be put right in the morning."

"That's what we all say, but you sound as if you believed it."

"I do."

"Oh well, good luck to you. I 'ope the Chief of the Paris Police comes 'ere in person to apologise."

"It would be nice, wouldn't it?" said Hambledon with a laugh. The cell directly opposite to him was empty, the man who had spoken to him was two cells further down. A certain degree of privacy could therefore be managed by retiring to the back of one's cell and Hambledon did this; it looked like being a thoroughly unpleasant night but as the time was already past midnight there were not many hours to get through. One small item was thoroughly satisfactory; when the police had emptied his pockets they had put all their contents into a sealed envelope and locked it up. There would be something to show Letord in the morning and probably the identity of the blond young man, now occupying a trestle-table in an outhouse before being removed to a morgue elsewhere, could be established. Once that was known it might lead on to other information, even a slight leading would be cheap at the price of a night in the cells. He wished that he could smoke but his cigarettes and matches had, naturally, been taken from him; it would be wise to try to go to sleep. "That the time may pass more quickly," murmured Hambledon, "and our guests be more contented." The other guests, if not contented, seemed to be settling down for the night apart from a low-toned conversation about horse-racing. Hambledon removed his shoes, lay down upon the plank bed and composed himself to sleep by mentally reciting *Horatius*, from the Lays of Ancient Rome. This was a habit he had carried from childhood's days whenever sleep seemed unwilling to come naturally; if he were still awake when "the stout guards were slain" he might just as well get up and find himself a book to read.

He was awakened the following morning by the same constable who had, so to speak, put him to bed. Some mellowing influence seemed to have been at work upon the man for he was shaking Tommy gently by the shoulder and addressing him as "monsieur."

"Eh, what? Time to get up?"

"Monsieur, the Detective-Superintendent Letord is here asking urgently for you."

"Oh. Well, tell him to order coffee and rolls while I put my shoes on."

"Monsieur, that has already been done."

Hambledon stalked into the Superintendent's office—for he was stiff from lying on so hard a bed—and found there waiting for him a short fat man with a florid complexion and a spiky black moustache who appeared to be amused at something.

"The things that happen to m'sieu' are beyond credence," he said.

"That's better than being beyond repair, Letord, and I slept a lot better last night than I should have done in the Seine."

"At all events you awake more easily," agreed Letord.

"I have something to show you, I hope," said Tommy. "I went through that fellow's pockets last night because I thought if I didn't somebody else certainly would before the police arrived. The stuff was put away with my own things last night—" Letord pushed a sealed envelope across the table towards him—"ah yes, you have it. Now then," said Hambleton, tearing the envelope open, "what have we here? This is mine, and these things. That wallet is his \_\_\_\_\_"

The wallet contained an assortment of French paper money, a book of Métro tickets, some postage stamps and a French National Lottery ticket, time-expired. There was no name on anything, no letters of any kind and the wallet itself had not even an initial upon it.

The other items from the dead man's pockets comprised a packet of "Gauloise bleu" cigarettes with two missing, two folders of packet matches from the Galeries Lafayette, a piece of string, a short pencil, a small tin of cough lozenges, a comb, a brand-new pocket-knife with engravings of the Eiffel Tower on one side and the Arc de Triomphe on the other, a leaflet giving details of the tram and bus service of Paris and some small change, all French except for two copper coins which were Spanish.

Hambleton pointed them out and Letord sighed and said he thought he had some himself somewhere.

"But put away," urged Hambleton. "Not carried loose in your pocket to be mixed up with the rest."

"That is so. Either our late friend has been in Spain recently or they were, perhaps, his mascots."

"His clothes," said Tommy, without much hope.

They were brought in and did not offer much help. They were all factory-made and bore their makers' names only; they were French, but there was no indication of what shop had sold them or even in which town they had been bought. Hambleton, from the habit of thoroughness and not from conviction, went through the pockets again, poking his fingers into all the corners, and came upon something at the bottom of the inside coat pocket. He took it out, it was such a folder as hotels issue to their guests, it was of thin card about two and a half inches by one and a half and bore on the outside the name of the Hotel Arcadia and its address, Flores del Sol, near Gijon, Asturias, Espana. Telephone, Flores 7. Hambleton opened the folder and found inside the usual price-list; the place was not cheap. The amusements offered included tennis, dancing, fishing and sailing in the Bay. American Bar.

"Spain again," said Tommy, and passed the card to Letord.

"No room number so he was probably not staying there. No name, of course. He may have gone in to have a drink at the Bar Americaine or perhaps a friend gave it——"

"One moment," said Hambleton, "there is something written on the back. Figures, in pencil."

Letord turned the card over and read them out.

"Telephone number, presumably, but since there is no Exchange mentioned—I ought to know that number," added Hambleton suddenly. "I'm sure it's familiar."

Letord looked up with a sardonic grin. "You do. I also. It is one of the telephone numbers of the *Préfecture de Police*."\*

\* Police Headquarters.

"Oh, is it. So it is. Well, now——"

"There is an odd thing," interrupted Letord. "I did not tell you because I did not think that it had anything to do with this affair of ours, but we have for the last three or four months been receiving anonymous calls on that line. Very useful calls, too. 'That robbery just off the Rue de Lappe last Friday, So-and-so did it. He lives at——' wherever it may be. Some forged notes circulating, he tells us who is passing them. The jewels stolen from some hotel, they are in a certain place. And, my friend, he is always right. At least, I think so."

"Not sure?"

"The jewels I mentioned just now. He—our informer—told us where to find them in a certain room in a tenement not far from Not' Dame, Jacques Bichou is the man's name. We go there, I went myself. The door is locked and he refuses to open so we break in. The man Bichou is there and so are the jewels, in a tin box—a cigarette box. Bichou says he knows nothing about them and keeps on saying it, but what else would he say?"

"'Somebody planted them on me,' of course."

"Oh, he said that. He could not prove an alibi for the time of the robbery or give any other proof of innocence, so we tried him, he was convicted and is now serving his sentence. But——" Letord shook his head.

"You are not satisfied."

"No. Somehow, I am not. There is something about that case which keeps on saying to me in a small voice 'This is phoney.' You know the feeling?"

"Perfectly well," said Hambleton, "and it is generally right. Tell me, did he look surprised when you found the jewels?"

"Not particularly. More—how shall I put it?—painfully interested."

"Did he accuse anyone by name of having planted the stuff?"

"No. I asked him that and he said he did not know. He—I have it!" said Letord, banging the table till the coffee cups rattled. "I know how I know it is phoney. He said he did not know who put the jewels there and he lied when he said it. His voice changed. He did know. So they were planted, and he is serving his sentence." Letord retired into silence while Hambleton sat still and watched him.

"Cheer up," said Tommy after a pause, "I daresay he deserves it for something else if not for that. Besides, the alternative may have been worse, we don't know, either going to jail or having his throat cut, perhaps. He was probably expecting a call from someone, you said you had to break down the door."

"All that you say is perfectly true," said Letord angrily, "but it means that I have been made a fool of and I do not like it."

"Cheer up," said Hambleton again, "you'll get used to it in time. I've had to." He waited till a rather sheepish grin spread unwillingly across Letord's face, and added: "These people who have been shopped over the telephone for various offences, had they anything in common?"

"Only their politics. They were all Communists or their friends."

"You knew that," said Tommy reproachfully, "and yet you did not see fit to tell me about this?"

"I did not see any connection, if I am wrong I am very sorry," said Letord frankly. "But we are so used to finding Communists in trouble, it continually happens. It is not that they are wickeder than other men, it is that they have a different system of ethics."

"We have a saying: 'What's yours is mine and what's mine's my own.'"

"That is it exactly."

"And now you are wondering whether our late friend out there," said Hambledon, "is your helpful telephonist."

"I have not got so far. I am merely looking at a telephone number and putting a query after it. The man who stabbed him, you did not know him?"

"No, but I shall recognise him again. There was that Communist meeting last night in the Bastille area where someone important was going to speak, no name given——"

"They have become shy of advertising their leaders since so many of them have been spirited away," said Letord.

"I know, yes. I didn't go in, I sat at a café where I could watch the door of the meeting. Long before the end our late friend came out and, the next minute, another man followed him. Since I was interested in our friend here, I tagged along too. We all went down the Métro, changed at the same stations and all got out at Abbesses and began to walk up the hill here. You know the rest."

"Yes, thank you. You can give us a description of the murderer?"

"Oh, yes," said Hambledon, and gave it. "I can also stroll about looking for him." This is not so silly as it sounds, for in Paris, even more than in other large cities, people tend to keep within their own district.

There came a knock at the door and a constable came in.

"The Superintendent's compliments, and if the gentlemen have finished breakfast——"

"Well?"

"There are two citizens asking if they may see the corpse."

## CHAPTER II

### THE JUGGLER

"I don't think they had better see me," said Hambledon. "At least, not here. It might be more useful at some other time and place if they could look at me without saying to themselves: 'Ah! The friend of the police approaches.' I should, however, like to see them."

"If m'sieu' will look out of the window," said the policeman, "he will see them pass by on their way to view the corpse."

He was quite right; a few minutes later two men passed the window under the escort of an inspector carrying a key. They were men in their early thirties, sturdily built, carrying their heads up and their shoulders back. As they approached the outhouse door, following the Inspector, they took their hats off and Hambledon had a good view of them.

"There's no such thing as a national type," he said. "I am always saying so, and it's quite true; but if those two aren't Germans I shall be surprised."

The Superintendent came into the room and was introduced to Hambledon, who asked what the men had said.

"They said their brother had been missing since the day before yesterday. They had not taken any steps in the matter yesterday because, they regretted to say, he was occasionally intemperate and failed to observe the passage of time. That was how they put it——"

"Very well put, too," said Hambleton. "Informative without being coarse."

"But apparently twenty-four hours is his usual limit," continued the Superintendent. "When he was missing for a second night in succession they became alarmed and informed the police."

"Where?"

"Montparnasse. In the Rue Jean-Bart. Then they looked at a newspaper and saw the account of our little affair last night here. The man was unidentified; he might, they thought, be their brother, so they came across to see. The name they gave was Pradier."

The two visitors emerged from the outhouse followed by the Inspector, who locked the door. They were smiling and evidently thanking him.

"Not their brother?" said Hambleton.

They made a gesture towards the charge-room, but the Inspector shook his head and led them to the yard gate, which he opened for them. More bows and smiles, the Inspector saluted, the gate closed and the visitors were gone.

"I suppose that's all right," said Hambleton in a tone of disappointment. "I was hoping they knew him."

"It is possible to check at least part of their story," said Letord. "It is but to ring up the Commissariat in the Rue Jean-Bart and ask them if they had anyone reported missing this morning."

The Superintendent ran his finger down a list of telephone numbers and dialled one of them.

"Did you have an enquiry this morning for a missing man name Pradier? You did not? Nobody reported missing this morning at all. Nor yesterday either. I see. Thank you very much."

"So they lied," said Hambleton, gathering up his possessions from the table and stuffing them into his pockets. "If I might have a taxi? They lied, how interesting. I don't suppose they live over in Montparnasse either—where's my hat—but wherever they're going to they will probably get the Métro from Pigalle. If I can get to Pigalle Métro first—" He hurried out of the room into the charge-room just in time to see a taxi pull up at the door. "Quick work—a thousand thanks—see you again. Pigalle Métro with the most unheard-of celerity," he added to the taxi-driver as he leapt into the car; the door slammed and the taxi swirled out of sight. Letord and the Superintendent were left looking at each other.

"Ivy will never grow on that one," said the Superintendent.

"And he thinks more quickly still," said Letord. "I who speak to you have seen it many times."

Hambleton sat well back in the taxi with his hat over his eyes, but that did not prevent him from keeping a very sharp lookout upon the pavements until he saw the two men whom he sought waiting, at the corner of the Street of the Martyrs, to cross the road. The pavement space in the middle of the Place Pigalle is divided into two by a road. Hambleton directed his taxi to the further one, paid off the man and walked back in time to meet the two men at the top of the steps leading down to the Métro station. He let them go first and followed down one flight of ordinary stairs and thereafter down two escalators, for the Métro, which normally slides about just under the skin of Paris, is really deep here where the ground begins to rise towards the heights.

They entered a south-bound train and Hambleton followed. He kept an unobtrusive eye upon them for any signs of preparing to get out and was particularly watchful when the train stopped at St. Lazare, for this station is to the Paris Métro much what Charing Cross is to the London Underground. However, they sat still until the next stop, which is the Madeleine, where they walked purposefully out with Hambleton drifting after them. They crossed the Boulevard Madeleine and walked on, deep in talk, past the end of the Rue Vignon and turned into the narrow entry to the Rue Godot de Maury. About half way up the street they entered a quiet café, sat down at a table and ordered coffee.

The café, actually a small restaurant, had tables jutting out from one wall with fixed seats between them back-

to-back with each other. The backs of the seats were high, those who sat at them were invisible to each other, but sounds travelled over them fairly well and Hambleton had quick ears. He sat at the next table beyond theirs, ordered a glass of wine and picked up a newspaper which someone had left on the seat.

The two men were talking, but in tones so low that he could not distinguish a word until one of them said distinctly: "*Nicht Morgen. Heute Abend*," with great emphasis. Not to-morrow, to-night, and they were speaking German. After that it became easier for they were so interested in their subject that they sometimes forgot to murmur.

"You are wrong. It must be done to-day, or we shall be the next."

"But how can it be done? He has always his friends with him."

"Not during his act. There is only the girl who carries the knives and she——" The rest of the sentence was lost in an indistinguishable murmur, from which Hambleton could only gather that one man was setting out some line of action while the other was objecting, or at least protesting. One voice was dominant and commanding, the other higher in pitch and almost plaintive, also most of his sentences began with "Aber" which means "but". However, the dominant voice eventually talked down the weaker and the next phrase which Hambleton was sure of was something about tourists. "We will join the tourists." This sounded so unexpectedly innocent that Hambleton blinked.

"But will there be an evening tour to-night?"

"Every night. And they always do the same tour."

The waitress came past the tables and the men dropped their voices; though Hambleton listened intently he heard no more except, again and again repeated, the hissing sibilants of "*das Messer*", the knife—the knife.

The two men got up and went out; Hambleton made no attempt to follow but sat still, thinking over the little he had managed to hear. Something must be done to-night "or we shall be the next". Something unpleasant for somebody since it was necessary to choose a moment when his friends would not be round him. He, whoever he was, was doing an act with a girl who carried the knives, a juggling act by the sound of it. Probably in a café, so many of the Parisian cafés put on a small cabaret show during the evening to entertain the clients. Yes, of course it would be in a café, that made the connection with the remark about tourists and "the evening tour," which otherwise sounded so irrelevant. Hambleton knew that there were evening tours arranged for visitors to Paris to show them something of the night life of the city. One paid a fee and everything was included in it; a visit to the Bal Tabarin or the Folies Bergère was usually the high spot of the evening but brief calls were also made to three or four other places. There would be Spanish dances near the Étoile, old French traditional songs in a cellar which was once a prison dungeon, modern "hot" singing somewhere on the slopes of Montmartre and a few cabaret turns—possibly cleaned up for the occasion—in some dive in the Bastille area. Apache dances, certainly. No trip to Paris is complete without having seen an apache dance somewhere thoroughly low. The only question was, which tour?

Finally, should he inform Letord? He thought over what he had heard and decided that he had not enough to go upon. These men had lied about having reported a missing man at Montparnasse, but it did not necessarily follow that they had lied when they said that they did not recognise the corpse. They might have had a dozen good reasons for wanting to look at him, and Hambleton was perfectly familiar with the common impulse to give elaborate and quite unnecessary explanations of an action which no one is likely to question. These men didn't know the deceased so they had written him off and were going to spend part of the evening at a cabaret watching a juggling act. Something was evidently going to happen—"it must be done to-night"—but it might be some practical joke calculated to make the gentlemen drop his knives and spoil his act. "I should look well," said Hambleton to himself, "turning out a squad of detectives to see somebody throw a plate at a juggler." No, he would not tell Letord, but he would go on this tour himself. Most definitely, yes. If only they'd had the kindness to mention the name of the café in audible tones he could have gone there direct and waited for them instead of spending a whole evening trailing round with a crowd of rubber-necks.

Hambleton sighed, paid his bill and went out to find a tourist agency. Here he was informed that there were no less than eight regular nightly tours of Paris; there was Cook's, there was the Havas Agency, there was——

Tommy wandered out again, entered a telephone booth and rang up Letord who, as he rightly surmised, had returned to his office by this time. Could Letord tell him the name of a café where a juggling act would be part of the show to-night? The juggler did his act with knives and had a girl partner who carried them. The café was visited every evening by a tourist autobus but he didn't know which one. If Letord could possibly identify the act, Hambledon would be immensely grateful.

"M'sieu' diverts himself?"

"Why not?"

"I only wondered if it were something more than a small diversion," said Letord, and paused, but as Hambledon did not speak the detective went on: "I will have enquiries made and ring you up in an hour—where?"

"At my hotel," said Tommy, and gave the telephone number.

Letord repeated it and added: "Those men this morning, did you see them again?"

"Oh, yes. I caught them up. Nothing definite, I'll tell you when we meet."

Letord rang up an hour later as promised. "You are lucky, there are only two knife-juggling acts in Paris at the moment, sometimes there are a dozen. There's one where the performer throws knives all round a member of the audience who is asked to volunteer. We looked into that because it sounded dangerous. If an unskilled assistant were to lose his nerve and move—but it was all right. It is not genuine, that call for a volunteer. He who comes forward is always a stooge. You should see that act, it is clever. Some part of the time the knife-thrower does not even look directly at his target, he turns away and only sees him in a mirror. Very clever indeed."

"But you would call that a knife-throwing act, not a juggler—has he a girl assistant?"

"No, a man. There is one knife-juggler with a girl assistant, he is a Spaniard I believe, he calls himself Don Pedro. I haven't seen the act. He is appearing at the *Homard Honnête* and some of the tourist buses do go there. I don't know which, would you like me to find out?"

"No, thank you, I don't want to tour. I just want to see the knife act. Where is the Honest Lobster?"

Letord told him where to find it. "It is in the Bastille area. You will be quite safe inside, but——"

"But be careful coming home," finished Hambledon.

"I beg your pardon," said Letord. "I hope that you will have a pleasant evening."

Hambledon entered the Honest Lobster soon after nine as he did not know at what time the tourist bus was due. The place had an inconspicuous entrance but was larger inside than one would expect. There were small tables and chairs along the left side, close to the wall in order to keep the floor clear for dancing. At the far end there was a rather awkward arrangement of long narrow tables with chairs packed close together; no doubt it made room for more customers than any other arrangement but one would not get out quickly if the chairs were all full. Against the wall there were padded seats covered with shiny leather cloth and there were clean ashtrays on the tables. This part of the room was not being used when Hambledon came in and he guessed that it was being kept for the tourist party. There was a gallery above the long tables which also was unoccupied. On the right of the room there was an archway with three steps leading up to it, through this came the waiters with their trays, scurrying. The floor was filled with boys and girls dancing to hot jazz music from a radiogram, they all seemed to be between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five and about a third of them were coloured persons. He found a seat at one of the small tables at the side of the room, ordered wine and watched the dancing. The room was hot, noisy, and full of tobacco smoke; it did not appear to have been redecorated for years and the walls and ceiling were of no particular colour, "just a plain mid dingy," said Tommy to himself. There were some middle-aged and elderly people sitting at the tables, they made room politely for him and then went on talking of their own affairs.

Time dragged past, there was a little interval between the dances. The radiogram was not far from Hambledon's chair and his head began to ache. He was about to ask one of his neighbours when the cabaret would start, when

there was a stir round the door and people began to stream in, headed by a short fat man who directed them to the seats at the far end. The tourists at last. Their guide happened to come to a stop near Hambleton, counting his sheep as they filed past him and answering questions in French, English, Dutch, Portuguese, and one of the Scandinavian languages. The company drifted in, staring about them, and the habitués of the place barely looked at them. There were some thirty or more tourists altogether and, among the last, the two soldierly-looking Germans for whom he had waited so long.

Tommy Hambleton cheered up at once and forgot his headache. The Germans went across to the far side of the room practically opposite to him, and sat on the two end seats against the wall, near the archway to the service quarters. The men were perfectly quiet and well-behaved but quite obviously a little drunk. They teetered on their feet and stared glassily at nothing in particular when they sat down.

Drinks were served to the newcomers and the cabaret started. The archway evidently led to the performers' dressing-rooms as well as to the bar, for the artists came through that way. Somebody sang "Pigalle" with immense verve and not much else, and a man and woman put on a comedy apache dance which made Hambleton rock with laughter. Instead of the man dragging the girl by the hair, the sturdy young woman threw her anaemic partner about like a rag doll and kicked him enthusiastically whenever he fell down, which was frequently and abruptly. She ended by banging him over the head with one of the waiters' trays with such violence that the tray folded up like a hairpin. The act was thoroughly clever and Hambleton enjoyed it.

The dancers retired in a storm of applause through the archway and a few minutes later the juggler took their place. He came down the three steps negligently throwing a couple of bottles from hand to hand, he was dressed in a manner reminiscent of Hamlet, in black tights and a close-fitting tunic, and Hambleton recognised him at once. This was the dark young man who had knifed the fair one on the Montmartre steps not twenty-four hours earlier.

Hambleton drew his chair back behind a large woman with feathers in her hat, and sat low in his seat. It was unlikely that the man would recognise him, but he might. The Germans took very little notice, one would have said that their eyes no longer focused very accurately and they were still drinking.

A girl assistant followed Don Pedro down the steps with more bottles and kept on throwing them to him until he had seven or eight whirling round him as though attached by strings. It was a good act well done but soon became monotonous, one does not wish to watch whirling bottles for more than a few minutes. The fellow didn't even drop one.

The girl ran up the steps and disappeared through the archway to return a moment later carrying a tray on which were eight or ten knives; ordinary straight black-handled ones like dinner-knives except that the blades had been ground to a sharp point. The juggler saw her coming and collected his bottles from the air; one by one they returned like homing pigeons to be gathered to his breast. He presented the whole armful with a magnificent gesture, as of one who bestows largess, to an adjacent waiter and turned towards the girl.

She was walking round the edge of the audience showing them the knives and evidently explaining that they were quite genuine. One of the tourists picked up one of them and promptly pricked his finger with the sharp point. He put the knife back and sat there sucking his finger and laughing. The Germans had taken no interest at all, they merely waved away the tray as do those who are offered some unwanted refreshment.

As soon as the girl saw that the juggler was ready, she threw him a knife which he caught; another and another, until they were whirling round his head and arms and flashing in the light. At this point one of the Germans—the smaller and meeker-looking one—rose up, attracted the attention of a waiter and whispered in his ear. The waiter replied by pointing to the archway indicating a turn to the left. The German nodded owlshly and staggered off towards the archway and up the steps. At the top he paused, leaning against the side of the arch, to survey the scene below. Hambleton, holding his breath, glanced at the other German and saw him draw something from under his coat—something which shone—he moved suddenly, the shining thing left his hand and at that instant all the lights went out.

## CHAPTER III

### THE KNIFE

Hambledon sat very still and waited. As always happens when such a gathering as that is cast into sudden darkness, there was quite a lot of noise. People exclaimed and fell over chairs, there were small feminine shrieks, the voice of the courier could be heard exhorting his tourists to keep their seats, please, in six languages, and there was a confused babble and a lighting of matches just beyond the archway. Hambledon guessed that the switch-board was there, or the fuse-boxes, or both. It was probably less than two minutes, though it seemed much longer, before the lights went on again and during that time there came through the window at the back of the hall the sound of a car's engine being started, brutally accelerated and driven away; also, as it turned, its lights swept across the darkened room. The next moment the café lights went on again, there was an instant's silence and then a woman screamed in real earnest.

The juggler was lying on the floor, quite still, in a surprisingly large pool of blood and there was a knife-handle sticking out of the right side of his neck two inches below the ear.

Hambledon looked quickly round the room, even standing on his chair to do so more effectively, but it was quite useless. The Germans had both disappeared. He stepped down hastily from his perch just in time to receive the person of the stout lady with the feathers who had been his screen. She flung her arms round Hambledon, buried her face on his shoulder and went into hysterics. Hambledon tried to lower her into a chair but she resisted detachment; she was too heavy for him and his knees were beginning to give way when a small man pushed his way through the crowd, removed the lady's hat and boxed her ears sharply.

"Lisette! You make yourself an exhibition!"

She released Hambledon so abruptly that he staggered and the small man caught his arm.

"My wife. I regret. She has discomposed m'sieu'. She is deficient in self-control."

"Please don't apologise," said Hambledon. "I'm sure this scene is enough to upset any lady—it is to be expected that——"

"Nonsense. She is my wife. I am a butcher. Thirty-two years have we been married and she has not accustomed herself to it yet." He flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow. "These women!"

"Etienne!"

"My dear?"

"I should like a little cognac."

"You shall have it. Any reasonable request——" He went away to get it, the stout lady sat down and fanned herself with a wine-list and Hambledon was free at last to look about him. The door had been shut and the negro doorkeeper stood in front of it, showing the whites of his eyes like a frightened horse. A tablecloth had been laid over the object on the floor, but as blood shows up much more brightly upon a white cloth than it does upon dark boards the general effect was not greatly improved. The manager made a short speech to the effect that the police were coming and matters would then be regularised if the company would but have the infinite goodness to be patient for a time, the tourist guide translated his words into four languages and looked as though he wished his mother had never had him, and the waiters began again to circulate with glasses on trays. Cognac, Hambledon noticed, was the popular order. The butcher returned to his wife with three glasses on a tray and begged Hambledon to do him the honour of taking a little drink with him. Tommy accepted gratefully and they exchanged bows and murmurs of "Santé. Bonne chance. Salut," and so forth. An English voice spoke confidentially in Tommy's ear.

"Got him in the jugular. Rough on the juggler. What?"

Hambledon looked round into the face of a gawky young man with a red face and rather glazed eyes.

"I'm a med-medical student. You can take my word about the juggler's jugular. That's why there's all that blood. When the fuse went, poor man couldn't see his knives. So one of them got him in the jugular. Pure accident, why don't they let us go home? Nobody's going to the jug over this." He giggled.

Hambleton said in slow and distinct French that he infinitely regretted his complete inability to understand one word of what the gentleman did him the honour to say to him, and strolled away. He found himself near the door and asked the doorkeeper whether anybody went out while the place was in darkness.

"But, yes, m'sieu', why not? There are people coming and going all the time."

"Of course," said Hambleton. "Naturally."

"I can't be held to blame if people went out, can I, m'sieu'? I did not know there had been an accident."

"Of course not," said Hambleton.

There was a knock at the door and the police were admitted. Fortunately for Hambleton, the Inspector in charge knew him to be a friend of Letord's and Hambleton drew him aside for a moment.

"This wasn't an accident," he whispered, "it was a murder. That knife was thrown, I saw it. The two men have gone."

"Two men?"

"One sat in that end seat there, the other was just at the top of the archway steps. I think he asked a waiter the way to the toilet. He waited till the knife was in the air and then moved suddenly, I think the main switch is just there——"

The Inspector looked round, the manager was impatiently waiting to speak to him.

"Here. Are you the manager? Where is the main switch for all these lights?"

"Just within the archway there on the left. Some fool——"

"Yes, yes. Just a moment——"

"And of course there will be one knife too many," added Hambleton. "May I go now? I want to speak to M. Letord as soon as possible."

"Naturally. Of course. The police car shall take you, we shall be here some time. Dupré!"

Hambleton was escorted outside, the police car received him and he was driven swiftly away with the two-note official horn—"hoo-hah! hoo-hah!"—clearing the road.

"I am sorry," he said as he entered Letord's office, "they have done it again."

"What," said Letord, "another kidnapping?"

"No. Murder this time." Hambleton told the whole story. "As soon as I recognised the juggler I ought to have known something would happen but I didn't expect anything like that. I must say it was very well done."

"This was no part of a series, I think, this was plain revenge. He knifed their brother last night so to-night they knife him. None of them, I think, are much loss only we cannot allow that kind of thing."

"At least, Letord, you have not to fatigue yourself pursuing last night's murderer. The account has been paid."

"Not much has been saved since I have two more to look for instead," said Letord sourly.

"On the contrary, a good deal has been gained. Our kidnappers, who are my main interest in life at the moment,

are beginning to come out of the shadows. One is dead and I doubt not you will find out more about him before long, two more are known to us and will be recognisable in future. I call that a considerable advance. You want their descriptions, here they are. They are both Germans and ex-Army men, they speak German of a good middle-class type. Both have fair hair bleached white on the top from wearing no hat as a rule, though they are wearing felt hats now. One is about five foot ten, strongly built, carries his left arm more bent at the elbow than the right when walking. Blue eyes, short nose, straight mouth, square chin with a cleft in it. Dressed in grey cloth with a faint stripe in it, a shirt with narrow green stripes, collar to match, green pullover, no overcoat. This one is the dominant partner. The other is two inches shorter and more heavily built, inclining to stoutness. Pale grey eyes, freckled skin, round face, medium nose rather thick, ears fleshy and the right one sticks out, full mouth, round chin, thick neck. Dressed in brown with darker brown stripe; waistcoat, not pullover, light brown shirt, green tie, brown shoes and socks. So were the other fellow's, by the way. They are not at all alike in any way, I mean, there's nothing to suggest that they are really brothers——"

"I don't suppose they are," growled Letord, busy taking notes.

"The shorter one has no noticeable tricks of carriage or walk. They are both men between thirty and thirty-five."

"You have used your eyes to some purpose."

"I travelled with them in the Métro this morning from Pigalle to the Madeleine, besides seeing them tonight."

"Yes. You think they went off in a car?"

"There was a car which went off with a roar just before the lights came on again. It was behind the café somewhere, the sound came in through the back window. So did its lights."

"It may have been waiting there," said Letord. "Somebody may have seen it."

"Yes. If the juggler, Don Pedro, had any definite political affiliations, that somebody might possibly talk."

"People do, sometimes," agreed Letord. "Sometimes, though more rarely, they even tell the truth. The juggler's female assistant may be able to tell us something, I will tell them to bring her here." His hand moved towards the telephone. "Would you like to be here when she comes?"

"On no account, thank you very much. The fewer people who see me with the police the better."

Letord nodded. "Did those Germans see you in the café to-night? They may have noticed you in the train this morning."

"They may have seen me this morning, but not to-night. I'll go now and leave you to it. I'm going straight back to my hotel if you want me. Good night, Letord. Good hunting!"

Hambledon walked back to his hotel, deep in thought. This was, as had been said, a kidnapping case, or rather a case of several kidnappings, and the victims were always Russian Communists. No one knew how many victims there were because Russians, once they are well outside Russia, do tend to disappear and there is no means of telling how many of the disappearances are voluntary and how many are enforced. In the normal way, Hambledon could not possibly have been less interested if all the prominent Communists in existence, Russian and otherwise, had disappeared into thin air leaving no trace and returning no more to the sight of men, but there was one exception.

The name of Pavel Dinnik had been gradually and increasingly before the public eye for the last two or three years. He appeared first as one of Vishinsky's entourage at meetings of the various United Nations committees and it was noticed, at first with distrust, then with interest and finally with a dawning hope, that he was by no means so bitterly uncompromising as the rest of the Russian delegation. He seemed to have some glimmer of understanding of another's point of view and even to think that his opponents might be honest, if mistaken. This was such a pleasant change from the usual accusations of cheating, dishonesty and lying that the North Atlantic Treaty Powers simply did not believe it. "It is a new line, that's all," they said among themselves. "It is beyond belief that an influential Russian is prepared to be reasonable. If he is, he won't last long. He will be recalled and his name will never be heard again."

But he was not recalled, he merely returned to Russia with the rest of the Soviet delegation and was there advanced step by step in the Soviet hierarchy. His portrait began to appear beside those of Molotov, Vishinsky and Beria in the inner ring around Stalin and there was a slight but perceptible improvement in the relations between the Soviet bloc and the Western powers. A Russian paper which published a cartoon of Churchill and Truman on either side of a blood-dripping millstone grinding to paste the workers of the world, was suppressed for publishing unethical and deviationist comment upon Soviet foreign policy. The editor disappeared from his home and family one dark night never to be seen again and the chief typesetter shot himself beneath a statue of Hygeia in a public park. His wife was immediately arrested.

At the next annual celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution Dinnik was one of those who made a speech in the Red Square in Moscow from the Tomb of Lenin and his subject was International Relations. He said that the time had come when it was at last possible to announce to the faithful and devoted followers of Stalin that the first faint streaks of a possible dawn were dimly discernible upon the Western sky. The nobly idealistic and yet severely practical demonstration of solidarity and human brotherhood in the cause of peace, which had been over so long a period and with such unexampled patience exhibited by the Russian people, was at last beginning to produce an effect, feeble and wavering as yet but none the less definitely discernible, upon the backward and misguided peoples of the Western Powers. Dinnik said that he did not wish to raise his hearers' hopes too high, but it was only fair to their political integrity, their loving trust in their Leader and Father, Stalin, and their unexampled tenacity through so many years of unprecedented difficulty and continually recurrent disappointment, to tell them frankly that the faint streaks previously referred to were still there. Their great and almost divine Leader would naturally do his utmost to nourish these streaks since his one aim and hope was that they should broaden into the wide sunlight of peace over the whole world. It might, of course, be a false dawn spewed up by the forces of international evil for the misleading of the innocent and pure-minded; if so, the resultant retribution in store for those blood-boltered criminals would be such as to freeze the blood in the veins of twenty generations to come. Let them work, let them trust, let them hope.

The American Ambassador's lips were observed, during Dinnik's speech, to be moving as in prayer and even the British Ambassador was seen to take his monocle from his eye, polish it and put it back no less than three times. The other Ambassadors were no less conspicuously overcome and the scene was one of unexampled emotion.

When the next United Nations' Conference was due to be held in Paris and the Soviet Union announced that their Chief Delegate, in the unfortunate incapacity through illness of M. Vishinsky, would be M. Pavel Dinnik, a sigh of hope blew like the little wind which comes before the dawn across the wide spaces of the Western Hemisphere, a strong trend of Russian influence became obvious in the latest models in the great Paris houses of *haute couture*, and a mother of triplets in Cardiff called them Byelo, Sovia and Moscovia respectively.

Pavel Dinnik came to Paris in the evening of March 31st and retired to bed with the hopes of the world under his pillow. In the morning he was not there and no one had seen him since.

"He's been snatched," said America. "Probably the Russia's did it themselves to put the skids under UNO."

"It would appear," said Britain, "that some misfortune has occurred in the case of this promising and talented young man. It is devoutly to be hoped that this is not the outcome of an intrigue to replace the *status quo* by a *casus belli*."

France said that the melancholy occurrence was doubtless due to the machinations of the *Croix de Feu* and was strongly reminiscent in certain significant respects, of *l'affaire Dreyfus*.

Holland and the Benelux countries congratulated themselves that this distressing affair had not taken place upon any of their territories and Spain said that nothing else was to be expected considering the political ideologies involved.

Russia screamed at the full pitch of the world's most brazen lungs that it was a plot on behalf of the—usual adjectives—Western so-called democracies to sabotage the peace overtures of the Soviet Union, and Britain and America said: "There. Of course they would say that. Oh, *hell*."

The Foreign Office in London sent for Hambleton and said: "Go and find this feller and don't come back without him and for heaven's sake get a move on."

Hambledon arrived in Paris two hours later, having been furnished with various means of getting information, and had had the young victim of the Montmartre murder pointed out to him as one who, from sundry indications, had almost certainly some connection with the kidnapping gang unless the arm of Coincidence had been pulled right out of its socket. Tommy was watching him on the last evening of his life and was hardly surprised when his body, with a knife in its back, rolled down the stone steps of the Mount of Martyrs. Helping the Soviet Union seems to be a tricky matter enough; kidnapping its brighter citizens must be dangerous to the point of suicide.

Hambledon was staying in a small and quiet hotel, the Astra, in the Rue Caumartin. By the time he reached it that evening he had decided to summon assistance. He could not be in more than one place at a time, the French police were naturally not under his orders and, though next to nothing was known about the persons involved in this case, it was fairly plain that there were a good many of them. He locked his bedroom door, sat down at the little table near the window and drafted a letter. When it was done he took a small notebook from his pocket and proceeded to code his draft with many curses, for Hambledon detested codes. However, on this occasion it could not very well be avoided.

On the following morning he went to see Letord again and asked him whether the juggler's girl-friend had given any useful information.

"She wasn't his girl-friend, she was his wife. I think she told me all she knew, but it was not much. He was Spanish by birth and brought up in a travelling circus and she was assistant to an elderly conjurer. The circus fell on bad times during the war and finally disbanded, so he got work in Marseilles. I do not know what sort of work. There are many forms of employment in Marseilles besides those listed in Governmental Returns," said Letord dryly. "Her conjurer died and she went home to her people in Marseilles—she was born there—and was employed as waitress in a restaurant. They met there, worked up a cabaret act together, married and went on tour. That was three years ago, they have been in Paris for the last five or six months. I asked about his political affiliations and she was, at first, evasive. Finally she admitted that he had been mixed up with the Reds in Marseilles, there are plenty there as we all know. She said that whatever town they went to he always seemed to have ready-made friends even if he had never been there before——"

"Passed on from one 'cell' to another," said Hambledon.

"Exactly as you say. She said that, in a way, it was a help in strange towns, but that she did not like the Reds and was always against his mixing with them. She may have said that to please me or it may even be true. He would not give them up but he left her out of it. Only very rarely he brought a friend home and even then he did not introduce him; he never took her to meetings. She does not know who any of his Communist friends are, and that may be true also."

"It may be," agreed Hambledon. "One must be just. It is even possible that you know more about his Communist friends than she does. Personally, I am not interested in Communists as such, at the moment, but only as men who may give me a lead towards these other blighters. This business of Pavel Dinnik——"

"I know," groaned Letord. "A little more of this Pavel Dinnik and if he is not found I will go home to my mother at Voteny in the Department of Yonne and breed goats."

"Goats?" said Tommy. "The last time I heard you say that, it was racing pigeons you were going to breed."

"I have changed my mind," said Letord without a smile. "Goats, at least, do not take wing and fail to return."

"Pigeons, on the other hand, don't butt you when you least expect it. However, to return to your Reds. Listen, Letord. If there were a much-advertised Communist meeting to be addressed by two eminent Comrades from Spain, don't you think it would be a temptation to the kidnapers to kidnap?"

"I should think it might be," said Letord, looking at him with interest, "but why from Spain?"

"Because the two men I have in mind can pass as Spaniards quite easily."

"Are they Communists?"

"Heavens, no. They are quite respectable—at least, their politics are. But anyone can mug up all that Marxist nonsense out of a text-book in a couple of days," said Hambleton, who had never tried, "but the convincing background details so much to be desired are not so easy to fake. These men will do that on their heads."

"I see. What is your idea, that they should be captured and then escape to tell us all about it?"

"Not at all. They might not escape. They are singularly intelligent and resourceful, but their throats are as cuttable as any other man's if there were enough people to hold them down while it was done. No. If it were advertised that they are only to be in Paris one night *en route* for Moscow or somewhere convincing like that, the kidnappers would have to pick them practically off the doorstep of the meeting-hall, wherever it may be, wouldn't they, or they might miss them altogether? Yes. They would use a car, of course. Now, if your police cordoned off all the streets round the hall they could intervene in any case of snatching, rescue the snatched and gather in the snatchers."

"I think the reasoning is sound," said Letord slowly. "If my men are a reasonable distance from the hall, neither too near nor too far——"

"And completely invisible till they are wanted," said Hambleton.

"As invisible as any police can be in that area—I suppose that they will hold the meeting in the Bastille quarter? The Reds generally do. The people of that quarter can see a police agent through three stone walls and the most impenetrable disguise——"

"And a stout oak coffin with brass handles," finished Tommy. "I know. But we have no reason to think that our snatchers are resident in that area, have we?"

"No, but we don't know. However, we will do our best. Can you supply me with photographs of your friends to hand out to my police?"

"I'll get some for you."

"Do you want any help," said Letord, "in arranging this Communist meeting?"

"Oh no, thank you. I think I can manage. And if our little plan is successful and we capture one or two men——"

"They shall talk," said Letord between his teeth. "Believe me, they will talk."

"If they don't, you can always fall back on goats, can't you?" said Tommy Hambleton.

## CHAPTER IV

### COMRADES FROM SPAIN

Several days passed in comparative calm, no more Communists were kidnapped and nobody was murdered; that is, not with, from or by any of the organisations in which Hambleton was interested. The United Nations' Conference was postponed for two months by general consent and Tommy was told that he had six weeks at the outside in which to clear up the affair and produce the person of Pavel Dinnik. At the end of the first week the Foreign Office in London pointed out to Tommy that he had now only five weeks left. He replied that he was merely Thomas Elphinstone Hambleton doing his best and not the Angel of the Last Trump. "You know," he added, anxious that there should be no mistake, "the one who blows it and all the graves open."

"Do your enquiries lead you to suppose that the man's dead, then?"

"It is my considered opinion," said Hambleton, for the speaker happened to be a man he did not like, "that witchcraft has been used, the man has been metamorphosed into a white rabbit and is now in a hutch being fed on cos lettuce. The matter has my unsleeping attention."

The Foreign Office speaker, well aware that Hambleton was considerably more irreplaceable than most men, including himself, made vaguely soothing noises until he heard the receiver in Paris replaced upon its hook with a crisp click. Hambleton left his hotel and went to take a little walk in the Bastille area.

Here, upon hoardings, blank walls and other convenient places there had appeared a violent rash of red posters headed by the hammer-and-sickle emblem of the Communist Party. They announced that a Great Public Rally of the Party would be held in two days' time in the Hall of Harmony; the Meeting would be addressed by two Spanish Comrades who had escaped from the tyranny of their native land and had come at the risk of their lives to tell their French brothers how the Cause was growing there. Let all good Comrades rally to their support.

Hambleton looked at these posters with a degree of approval surprising in a man of his political opinions, and strolled into a small wine-shop to buy cigarettes. He waited politely until the only other customer had been served and then asked for what he wanted. The other customer lingered on the doorstep, lighting a cigarette, and Hambleton talked about tobacco until the man went away.

Tommy raised an eyebrow in his direction and the tobacconist said yes, indeed, that was one of the boys. He wiped his counter with a grubby duster and sniffed audibly, and Hambleton laughed.

"Still keeping an eye on you," he said.

"Oh yes. It means nothing, we all do it to each other."

"Perhaps I had better not come here again?"

"It would, perhaps, be as well," said the tobacconist. "We can meet elsewhere, can we not?"

"Easily," agreed Hambleton.

"M'sieu' has seen the poster display?"

"I have, indeed. They have excelled themselves, the Party. There was no difficulty, then, in passing the news?"

"Oh, none whatever. Everybody was delighted. There are stories already being whispered about of the perilous adventures undergone by the Comrades in crossing the frontier. I was myself surprised when I heard some of them. M'sieu' will, I feel sure, find these to his liking," added the tobacconist as another customer came in.

"I'll try them, anyway," said Hambleton. He bought a packet and strolled out of the shop without a backward glance.

Two days later Hambleton went again to the Bastille area of Paris late in the evening when the lamps were alight in the streets and the citizens had returned from their labours. Most of the shops were shut, only those which sold food were still open together with the ubiquitous cafés and wine-shops, cinemas and dance-halls. There were plenty of lights everywhere, white and coloured, neon and otherwise, but for some reason the underlying impression was one of darkness; black roads, grimy pavements and smoke-stained houses. The moment one turned from the brilliance of the main thoroughfares into a side street, there was the darkness waiting, piled up in corners and lying in pools between the infrequent lamps.

Hambleton turned out of the Faubourg St. Antoine into the tangle of small streets which lie between the Rue de Charonne and the Rue de la Roquette. He had a two-day growth of beard on his face, which was none too clean, he wore blue overalls, faded and patched, a very second-hand sports jacket and regrettable boots. He was not in any way distinguishable from any other citizens who, at that hour, were making their way towards the hall where the two Comrades from Spain were to address their Communist brothers.

Communist meetings are by no means unusual in Paris, but there seemed to be something of a fuss about this

one. It was the presence of the Comrades from Spain which had aroused it and the meeting had been so very well advertised. Letters had appeared in the papers asking if this was the moment in World Affairs to annoy the Spanish Government by petting their subversive elements. What were the police about to (a) allow them unhindered to cross the frontier, (b) to run freely about France debauching the allegiance of the unlettered poor, and (c) to have the barefaced insolence to address a public meeting in the heart of Paris upon the alleged short-comings of a noble and friendly Power. Whereupon other correspondents rushed to their writing-pads and demanded to know whether Liberty was dead and her cap debased into a mask for Oppression, Equality become a mounting-block for Tyranny, and Fraternity an obsolete word. Abstract nouns, with capital letters, are popular in France.

The hall was of a fair size, holding some two hundred and fifty people easily and more at what is rightly called a push. Hambledon found himself a seat near the back and watched the place fill up, mainly with men, though there were a few women among them. There were windows down both sides of the hall and a platform, decorated with the red flag, across the further end. There was a row of chairs on the platform as usual and a table in front with a carafe upon it and a couple of glasses. There was a door at the back of the stage from which Hambledon deduced a separate entrance.

Five minutes after the appointed time the stage door opened and the speakers filed in to be greeted with fraternal cries and the raised fist of salute. There was the Chairman, a tall thin Frenchman with black hair and the deep-set flashing eyes of the fanatic, four minor personages of the kind always used as platform furniture, and finally the two Comrades from Spain. One was tall, lean and red-haired, the other short and stout with dark hair going thin on the top. They were both hairy rather than bearded, one would have said that they had not long left off shaving. A fortnight, perhaps.

Hambledon's brows drew together, for the description he had given to the police was of clean-shaven men, he had not expected this. Whether the police would recognise them now was dubious, but it was too late to do anything; if the police were hidden away in closed yards and behind doors he would never find them in time. He could only hope that the circumstances of the kidnapping would be such that no mistake was possible, but he promised himself a few words later on with the two Comrades from Spain.

In the meantime they were led to chairs on either side of the table with the Chairman between them, they took their places with an air at once shy and determined, and sat down to a round of applause. Hambledon leaned back in his seat.

The Chairman wasted no time. He told the audience that they had come to hear news, at first hand, of the struggle in Spain against the forces of counter-revolutionary reaction and they would not be disappointed. The Comrades, after incredible difficulties, had arrived only within the last half-hour. He then introduced them by name to the audience and sat down.

The two Comrades glanced at each other and the red-haired one rose first to his feet.

He may have been an indomitable and untiring worker in the Cause of Freedom, as the Chairman had said, but he was definitely not a public speaker. He did his best. He addressed the gathering as: "My brothers—my more than brothers and—" with a jerky bow—"my sisters. My more than sisters. My heart yearns towards you." But the French Communist is not an affectionate type, he is coldly logical and if the logic leads to bloodshed he is prepared to follow. This come-let-us-embrace opening, therefore, did not go down particularly well and the speaker noticed it. He changed his tone and told them a quite funny but markedly improper story about two Spanish Customs officials whom they had evaded upon the frontier, and that raised a laugh which unfortunately encouraged the speaker to give them a couple more of the "stop me if you've heard this one" type. The laughter ceased, the Chairman glared, and the speaker lost his way in the middle of a sentence.

"My golly," said Hambledon to himself, "he's had one or two too many. He's pickled!"

The audience began to fidget and talk among themselves in low tones, the dark-haired Comrade leaned across the table and spoke briefly to the red-haired one, who pulled himself together and began again.

"Communism in Spain," he said, "what is it? You ask and you have a right to be answered. I will tell you. It is a burning flame in the hearts of the poor, it is a lamp to guide the feet of the oppressed." Murmurs of approval, during

which the speaker glanced at some notes he held in his hand. "We are the oppressed, we who speak to you to-night. In Spain there are many priests who presume to control our consciences and there are also police and soldiers to control our bodies. This all makes it very difficult, my friends, to be a Communist in Spain. It is, of course, intended to do so. But shall they succeed? No!"

The speaker paused, filled one of the tumblers half-full from the carafe and drank it off. The result was astonishing. His face turned bright red, his eyes seemed to protrude and he choked violently. The other Spanish Comrade looked surprised, poured himself a drink in the other tumbler and tasted it carefully. He smiled, nodded to the Chairman and went on sipping it.

In the meantime the speaker had recovered enough to continue. He described to them a small country town in Catalonia from which, so he said, he came. "My home-town," he said, in a voice broken by emotion. "The square, surrounded by houses with a fountain in the middle where the band plays." He paused and obviously thought over what he had just said. "It is not the houses which have a fountain in their middles, it is the square. The band does not play in the fountain, it plays in the square beside the fountain which also plays, one music and the other water. That reminds me of a story——"

The other Comrade from Spain sprang to his feet, dodged round the table and lowered his friend into a chair. He then turned rather too quickly, caught at the table to steady himself, and addressed the meeting in his comrade's place.

"I must ask you to excuse my Comrade," he said with considerable dignity. "He—we both are—fatigued to the point of exhaustion from travelling night and day, mainly on foot, to reach your beautiful City in time for this meeting. He suffers, poor man, from an intermittent undulant fever caught in one of the foul gaols into which, for his principles, he was cast, and over-fatigue always brings on an attack. I feared this," said the new speaker, shaking his head mournfully, "I was watching for it. Your fraternal sympathy will excuse him. I will now, if I may, address this great meeting in his stead."

He drew himself up, paused for a moment in thought, and then addressed them earnestly upon the basic principles of Communism. It was, unfortunately, Communism à la Tito which he preached; the pure milk of Marxism, not to be adulterated by Trotskyism, Leninism and especially Stalinism. The present rulers of Russia, he warned them, had strayed aside from the straight and narrow road of the true faith down the primrose path of Individualism. "'From each,' said Marx, 'according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.' What do we see in Russia to-day? Ballet-dancers, play-actors and musicians cossetted and overfed and hung with jewels while the toilers slave in the factories underfed, underpaid and clothed in rags. Moreover, Russia is not content——"

Hambledon lost the thread of the speech to watch his immediate neighbours who were very plainly annoyed. They scowled, they murmured, they fidgeted, and the murmurs rose to interruptions. Down with Tito!

On the contrary, said the speaker, long live Tito. Let his intelligent hearers not be misled by the stream of abuse from Russia aimed at the so-called imperialist-Powers. The most grossly imperialistic Power in the whole world to-day was Russia. Who, out of all the countries engaged in the War, continued the speaker, raising his voice against a rising storm of interruptions, had increased her territories as Russia had? Had Britain? Had the United States? Had France?

His voice was drowned in yells of: "*Vive la Russie! Vive Stalin!*" and ruder things as well, addressed more personally to the speaker. Hambledon could see the Comrade's mouth opening and shutting in what might just as well have been dumb show. By this time many of the audience were on their feet and several people were pushing their way out. The Chairman was also standing, hammering the table and calling for order, but he had left it too late and no one took the slightest notice of him.

Hambledon's next neighbour, a quiet little man with only one eye, turned to him and remarked that, in his opinion, there would be trouble in a minute.

"A general loss of dignity," said Hambledon, "appears imminent. Regrettable."

"Deplorable," said the quiet man. He had a shiny black shopping-bag at his feet, he stooped and took out a

turnip and looked thoughtfully at it.

"A good turnip, one would say?"

"An excellent turnip," agreed Hambledon, wondering what was coming next. Perhaps his quiet neighbour was a market-gardener who took pride in his——

The one-eyed man stood up slowly, balanced the turnip in his hand and suddenly hurled it at the platform. It took the Chairman between the eyes and he disappeared with a crash behind the table.

"Now I go home," said the thrower. "Excuse me." He pushed past Hambledon and vanished in the crowd. Certain large and truculent-looking men who had been standing together near the door—Hambledon had identified them as "the chuckers-out"—began to push their way up the centre aisle towards the platform.

Both the Comrades from Spain were on their feet, the first speaker's fever had apparently left him. They looked behind them, but the door by which they had entered was barred by the rest of the platform party, presumably the local Committee. The Spanish Comrades exchanged a hasty word and parted.

There was a window at each end of the platform, the last of the row of windows down either side of the hall. The red-haired Comrade ran to one and his black-haired friend to the other. With one accord, as though they had practised the act, they smashed the glass with a chair and dived out through the aperture. The dark one apparently got clear away, which was unfair since he had caused all the trouble, but the red-haired one was followed through the window by several of his more agile pursuers and there came from without the ringing clatter of dustbins in distress.

Hambledon rushed for the door, wriggled through the crowd and found himself outside where a number of promising fights were already in progress. The neighbours, it seemed, had come out of their houses and joined in. Fights in Paris are even noisier than in most cities and the air rang with yells and curses.

There was a footpath along one side only of the meeting-hall and Tommy ran up it at top speed, passing on his way the broken window through which the dark Comrade had escaped and the side door leading to the platform. Men were rushing, in twos and threes, out of this door, among them the Chairman in a state of gibbering fury. "This way," they cried, "he went this way," and ran ahead of Hambledon the short distance to the next street.

Hambledon followed in time to see the short, broad figure of the Spanish Comrade tearing up the street pursued by a group of running men who, it was clear, could run faster than he. They were overhauling him fast, they were only some ten yards behind, when a lorry passed Hambledon and, hooting loudly, cleared a road for itself. The lorry had the usual type of flat open body behind the cab and a man was kneeling up in this and leaning over the side. Hambledon saw him plainly and recognised him; it was one of the Germans who had knifed the juggler in the Café of the Honest Lobster.

The leading group of runners diverged to the pavement to let the lorry pass, it then came level with the fugitive. It slowed down as it passed him and the man in the back beckoned to the Comrade who instantly rushed after it, sprang at the back and was hauled inboard. The lorry accelerated and the disappointed hunters dropped into a walk and gathered into a group, talking angrily together.

Hambledon continued to run. There were some police coming towards him along the road, also running; Letord's outposts coming in, having been attracted by the uproar increasing every moment round the hall. There, they said to each other, was the trouble. No doubt a kidnapping had been attempted and resisted and what they heard was the outcome. Hambledon, galloping to meet them, pointed at the lorry and shouted to them to stop it, but they were fifty yards away and in the general din his voice was inaudible. Nor could they recognise him at that range in his unfamiliar dress and, what was more serious, they did not recognise the Spanish Comrade either. The photographs and descriptions which Hambledon had given Letord had portrayed both men as clean-shaven, not with their homely features blurred behind an inch of whisker. The police let the lorry pass them with hardly a glance and came running on.

With one exception. The excellent Sergeant Dubois, elderly, rotund and within six months of retiring upon his

pension, came trotting steadily behind. He could no longer run as fast as his young constables and he did not even try; he had had quite enough of Paris riots in his long and honourable career and he did not want any more. His boys could rush on and get their heads broken with brickbats, it was a laudable ambition at their age, but he, Papa Dubois, had advanced beyond that stage. It was, perhaps, because he was taking matters more quietly that he found time to observe the lorry. He met it under a lamp and had a clear view of the two men at the back. One was just completing his scramble over the tail-board and the other was hauling him in.

It did not look like a kidnapping, certainly. On the other hand, a man had just been picked up and he was short and dark and had come from the meeting; the other was broad-shouldered, fair-haired and looked like a German. He looked like one of the two men whose descriptions had been issued after a murder at the Honest Lobster ten days earlier.

Dubois stopped, glanced down the road and saw Hambledon, who by now had passed his police, desperately signalling him to stop the lorry. Dubois could not, for it was already past him, but he turned and ran furiously after it. It was astonishing, even to himself, what a turn of speed a fat elderly Sergeant of Police could produce upon occasion. Besides, those bright boys of his had missed something and he, the old Dubois, had spotted it. Ha!

Another fifty yards, however, found his lungs labouring and his legs growing leaden. Happily at this point a taxi came to meet him, it passed the lorry and slid to a stop before the stout agitated figure gesticulating in its path. Dubois hurled himself into the seat beside the driver.

"Turn and go after that lorry! Quick! Ten thousand devils, hurry!"

"But I have a fare——"

"To Gehenna with your fare," panted Dubois. "I command you—name of the Republic—kidnapping—probably murder——"

The taxi-driver swung his car round in the road, bumping on the pavement and off again to shoot up the street after the lorry.

"My train!" wailed the passenger in the taxi. "Where are you going? My train, at the Gare du Nord——"

But no one took the slightest notice of her and the only answer she received was the voice of Dubois crying "Faster! Faster!"

## CHAPTER V

### ARREST AND DETAIN

Hambleton stopped in the road as the pursuit disappeared into the distance. There was nothing more to be done in that direction. He turned on his heel and went back to pick up the traces of the tall red-haired Comrade who had left by the other window. If he had not shaken off his pursuers he might be in quite serious trouble.

There seemed to be quite enough trouble in that area. There was sporadic fighting in the street he was in, but it seemed to be only the overflow from a much more serious conflict somewhere ahead. As he drew nearer to the scene his experienced ear told him that there were two separate battles in progress; one away to his right, that would be outside the meeting-hall and possibly inside it too, the other a little further off and more or less straight ahead. Hambleton hurried on, dodging disputants as he went.

There was no alley beside the hall on that farther side, Hambleton walked on and took the first turning to the right. The moment he turned the corner he saw that there was a small but active turmoil a little way down the street which appeared to be centred upon a brightly-lighted café with little tables upon the pavement.

Tommy walked towards it. There was no object in hiding his interest, it would be unnatural not to be interested. On his right was a row of small houses which backed upon the hall of meeting; all the neighbours were out upon their doorsteps looking towards the café opposite and giving tongue as only excited Frenchwomen can. The local men were more actively embroiled.

"For the love of Heaven, Madame," said Hambledon to the first he met, "what is all this?"

"The dirty Communists, who else would it be?"

"Who indeed? But what exactly——"

There was a resounding crash across the road as somebody, carried by excitement beyond the bounds of discretion, threw a table through one of the café's plate-glass windows. The people recoiled momentarily to avoid the falling glass and then surged forward again through the entry thus provided. A young woman came running along the pavement towards Hambledon and stopped suddenly to scream for "Achille! Achille! Achille!" at the top of her voice.

Hambledon's gossip took three steps forward, seized the girl by the shoulders and shook her severely.

"Will you control yourself? Or do you want this one also to end in hospital?"

"I want my Achille! They are murdering him over there, mother, they are killing him——"

"He is much more likely to be murdering somebody else. In any event he is enjoying himself without spending money, consider that and be calm. Really," to Hambledon, "what one brings up daughters for is beyond explanation. Her husband is six feet high and four feet wide, one would not require to put him in a greenhouse to keep the rain off him!"

"But what happened?" asked Hambledon.

"There was a meeting in the hall behind and there was a fight. One man escaped and others pursued him. He ran across the road and entered the café opposite. They say he has locked himself in the toilet. Then those who pursued the poor man rushed into the café after him, upsetting tables and making an uproar. The customers did not like it. Who would? To be thrust here and there and pushed down and have one's little glass of something upset after one has paid for it? Even the patient Saints would retaliate."

"And what we now see is the retaliation in progress."

"Exactly, m'sieu'. Calm yourself, Margot."

"One would almost expect the police," said Hambledon.

The battle came out of the café and spread itself about the street, the weapons were usually bottles and the legs of chairs. An upper window opened in a house opposite and a set of fire-irons was thrown from it with great accuracy, considering the difficulty of hitting moving targets. The poker felled to the ground a small man with a bald head and the tongs engaged the legs of a tall thin runner so that he fell also and rose again limping and nursing his elbow. An ancient face looked malevolently down from the window and a skinny fist was shaken.

"It is the old Mère Tobrin," said the girl Margot. "She always throws the fire-irons."

"I should have thought that bedroom crockery would have been more effective," said Hambledon.

"But it breaks, m'sieu'. One can recover one's fire-irons."

There came the sound of loud official voices above the uproar; Hambledon, retreating with his friends up their front-door steps, saw the police in numbers with batons closing in upon the battle from either end of the street. Some of the combatants turned upon the police, but most of the local inhabitants thought it time to go home and one of them was the large man, Achille. His wife clung to him.

"What, then, my pretty? Frightened? Nothing to be frightened at, only a bit of good fun."

"There," said the girl's mother, "what did I tell you? He was enjoying himself."

"What happened," asked Hambledon, "to the man who was being chased?"

"Got out of a window and clean away. By the time they had broken in the door he was gone. He had sense, that one. Let us go in, I do not wish to get myself arrested. Will you not come in also until the street is clear? There is a little glass of something in the cupboard——"

Hambledon thanked him and said that he must get on, he had an appointment and was already late for it. He shook hands with Madame and her daughter; the large man insisted on seeing him safely to the end of the street.

"It is nothing, there is no risk. They will not arrest me if they see me in respectable company. It is easily seen that you are of a serious type. You have had education."

The disturbance was dying down and only a few minor struggles between police and anything but passive resisters still encumbered the street. The proprietor of the café came out with a broom and began to sweep broken glass off his stretch of pavement into the gutter. From the house almost opposite Hambledon an incredibly old woman crept out, leaning on a stick, to pick up a poker, a coal shovel and a pair of tongs. An ambulance came slowly along, picking up the wounded, and the police van followed to collect the prisoners.

"Anybody killed, do you think?" asked Hambledon, and the big man laughed.

"Oh, no. No, we have hard heads in this quarter. A little antiseptic, a few bandages, a few headaches, that is all. No, if anyone gets killed in our little affairs it is by accident. I saw a man get his throat cut once with a broken bottle, but it was not meant for him in particular. Somebody threw it, it was an accident."

They parted with mutual courtesies at the end of the street. Tommy walked hastily along the road, now almost deserted, and went down the next turning. Here the middle houses on the right were back-to-back with the café and Hambledon dropped into a stroll.

There were a number of people standing about in groups, talking about the riot, which seemed to have come to an end. There were also a couple of policemen standing together and doing nothing in particular. Riots in towns are like a grass fire in this, that when it seems to be quite extinguished a little spark will blaze up suddenly at the edge of the blackened area and, unless there is someone at hand to stamp it out at once, the fire-fighters may have as much work again to do and more. These police were waiting in case it should be necessary to stamp.

Hambledon was on the point of breaking courteously into the conversation of one of these groups, he wanted to know whether the red-haired Comrade had got clear away, when a door opened in one of the middle houses. The door had three steep steps leading up to it. A large man appeared upon the top step and he was as it were encumbered with something. He rid himself energetically of his encumbrance which teetered down the steps and fell on the pavement with an audible thud, revealing itself as a man who lay quite still. Everyone in the street turned to look and the police approached with long strides. Before they reached the doorway the large man reappeared with another victim which he threw upon the first, this one also did not move. The hero then stood upon his top step with his chest thrown out and his chin high, twirling his moustache and looking up at the evening sky as one who dissociates himself from the unimportant garbage he has just discarded.

The police came up to the spot, the crowd gathered round and Hambledon with them.

"Some undesired guests, possibly?" said the police.

"Precisely, precisely," said the large man, and lowered his eyes enough to stare over their heads. A dark haggard-looking young woman pushed her head round his shoulder from behind.

"They burst into the house," she said excitedly, "they rushed into our room, they assaulted us and our guest, they accused us of harbouring traitors, they upset our furniture, they broke my clock and both the pink vases my grandmama gave me when we married, they upset the coffee, they called us names——"

"You can take them to jail," said the large man graciously. "I myself will give evidence."

The police rolled the men over and looked at them. "That will be all right," they said, "we know these two. They will not give any trouble for another half-hour at least and the patrol-car will be along in a few minutes. Your names, please?"

The woman gave them.

"And your guest?"

"He has gone. I do not know his name. There was a fight at that Communist meeting and he escaped through a window and took refuge with us. Then these found out where he had gone and burst into the house and rushed into the room and assaulted us and our guest——"

"Yes, yes," said the senior policeman, "but where did your guest go?"

"I told him," said the large man, "that I could deal with a dozen such as these," waggling his foot in the direction of the sleepers on the pavement. "I said he was not to derange himself. He thanked me and said he did, indeed, wish to return home and rest a little. So he went."

"As to where his home is," said the woman, "I cannot tell you for I do not know. He went, that is all."

Hambledon had heard enough to reassure him. He detached himself from the crowd, walked a couple of hundred yards and then had the luck to pick up an empty taxi in which he drove to Letord's office.

The Préfecture of the Paris police force is on the Ile de la Cite, that small island in the Seine, the bud from which has grown the flower called Paris. Hambledon, who loved this part, paid off his taxi at the Pont Neuf and crossed the bridge on foot. He paused, as he always did, to murmur his customary malediction upon the evil souls of those who melted down in 1792 the original statue of Henri IV—the present statue is a replica made in 1818—and walked on along the pleasant Quai des Orfèvres past the Palace of Justice to the enormous block which houses the headquarters of the Paris police. He passed through the gates into the great quadrangle and there saw Letord standing, with his legs wide apart and an expression of complete exasperation upon his face, watching the unloading of sundry police vans. They were of the type known in London as "Black Maria" and their contents comprised the less damaged participants in the recent riot. They came out of the vans one at a time in quick succession, snarling and cursing and making a fuss about such minor injuries as they had sustained; here a swollen ear, there some loosened teeth, a black eye or a damaged nose and a whole hospital exhibition of cuts, bruises and gravel-rash. They were formed into line and hustled away into seclusion, a safe seclusion, while another van drove into the yard, and yet another.

Hambledon wandered across towards Letord, meeting on the way an elderly police-sergeant of his acquaintance who glanced over his shoulder at Letord, pulled down the corners of his mouth in a grimace of comic dismay, and passed on without speaking. Letord, hearing steps behind him, looked round to see Hambledon at his elbow.

"Er, good evening," said Tommy apologetically.

"You think it is a good evening," said Letord crisply. "You think this is a good evening's work, no doubt. Tell me, do you think also that the police of Paris do not already earn their few beggarly francs? Do we sit about in our luxurious offices smoking and drinking and getting into the mischief Satan provides for idle hands? Tell me, and I will try to be grateful for what is doubtless the good intention. Look at them! Fifty-seven already and the good God only knows how many more to come. What do they represent, tell me that. You do not know, let me tell you. Every one of them represents an interview, a dossier, a search of records, a hundred-and-five entries in files, records and lists; booking in, booking out, searching, locking in cells, half-hourly supervision, preparation of police case, production in court, marshalling of witnesses, hearing of evidence most of it untrue, delivery of sentence, execution of sentence, dispatching to jails as though we had not enough rascals in our jails to keep us busy already—in the name of Heaven what is this? Do my Sergeants now consider themselves entitled to report for duty in taxi-cabs? You there, name and division!"

A taxi-cab, which had entered the gate, rolled across the yard to a stop at Letord's elbow and a stout red-faced

Sergeant leapt out.

"Dubois, Sergeant, Quartier St. Ambroise, Eleventh Arrondissement. I have to report that I commandeered this taxi to pursue the lorry which abducted the speaker whom we were told to protect——"

"Where is he?"

"He—they have him—it got away just east of the Boul' Mich' in all those little streets——"

Letord threw his hat on the ground and tore his hair. He also released his overcharged emotions in a flow of remarks which horrified Hambledon, Sergeant Dubois and even the taxi-driver, seeing that the lady passenger was still there.

"Here," said Tommy nervously, "steady, old chap. Ladies present. At least, one lady."

"A lady—it only wanted this," said Letord. He picked up his hat and put it on in order to sweep it off again at the taxi door and stand with it in his hand.

"Madame. A thousand pardons. I did not observe, in the agitation of the moment, that we had the honour——"

The lady, who spoke excellent, if rather British, French, leaned out of the taxi window and desired to be told what was the reason for this outrage. "Here was I, being driven from the flat of my friends with whom I was staying, to the Gare du Nord to catch the Dunkerque Ferry train to London——"

"Madame, I regret infini——"

"When my taxi was seized upon by this person whom I assume, by his attire, to be a policeman——"

"I have been apologising to this lady," said Dubois, addressing Hambledon since nobody else would listen to him, "for the past quarter of an hour without stopping. Would she listen to me?"

"No," said Hambledon sympathetically, "no."

"M'sieu' is right," said Dubois gloomily. "No."

"——rushed round Paris at most dangerous speed," proceeded the lady, "into most curious parts which I did not know existed——"

"Madame," said Letord, wiping his forehead, "I implore Madame not to——"

"And now, instead of the Gare du Nord, I am brought here. Among this extraordinary assortment of people who appear to have been fighting. I demand to know, what is this place?"

"This, Madame, is the Préfecture de Police."

"Oh. Oh, is it really? And why was I brought here?"

Letord, with a look, transferred the question to Dubois who took two smart paces towards the taxi, stood at attention and answered her.

"As I had the honour of trying to explain to Madame, I was in pursuit of a gang of criminals who had just abducted a man in the street. In pursuance of my duty, I was obliged to commandeer the first vehicle which passed. I deeply regret that it should happen to have been Madame's taxi and that she should have been——"

"Do you seriously mean to tell me," said the lady, "that all that nonsense you were talking as we came along was, in fact, perfectly true?"

"Yes, Madame," said Dubois, in a voice so suppressed as to be almost a squeak.

"Oh. Oh, well, in that case of course you were quite justified and I accept your apology. Well now," she glanced at her watch, "I seem to have lost my train."

"Any inconvenience," began Letord, "to which Madame has been put——"

"No inconvenience at all. I shall just return to my friends for one night more and travel to England to-morrow. To think I have actually been engaged in pursuit of a gang of dangerous criminals. Quite a thrill, I assure you! Please don't apologise any more. Good-bye, and I do hope you catch them! Driver, back to the house where you picked me up, please. Good-bye, and the best of luck!"

The taxi turned round and drove away with Letord and Hambledon bowing, hat in hand, and Dubois standing stiffly at the salute. Then Letord turned upon Dubois.

"And you let them get away?"

"Yes, but I've got their number!"

"Gould we not," suggested Hambledon, "go to your room and tell you all the story there? I do feel that I should like to sit down, if I may say so."

"I myself," said Letord, leading the way with long strides, "should like to retire to a nursing-home for a month at least."

Sergeant Dubois sighed heavily but said nothing.

Letord led the way, two steps at a time, up four flights of stone stairs and rushed into his room, closely followed by Hambledon and the Sergeant. Letord threw himself into his chair at the desk, picked up a pencil and said; "Sit down, m'sieu', come here, Dubois," practically as one word. "You said you took the vehicle's number, what was it?"

Sergeant Dubois gave it.

"Description of vehicle?"

"A lorry. One would say a home-made lorry. I mean, not one of a regular series turned out by a firm of lorry-builders, but one with a body built on to a car-chassis in some garage. It had a solid-looking cab in front, very square, door each side, windows in door, another window at the back of the cab. Painted grey, black wheels and wings. Flat tray behind cab, sides about fifty centimetres high, tail-board could be dropped, holding chains swinging either side, laden with boxes and some sacks and two men sitting in it. Very long chassis, narrow for its length. Powerful, fast engine. I would say that the lorry had been built on to a Lancia Lambda chassis, the note of the engine sounded to me like a Lancia."

"Oh, really," said Letord in a surprised voice, and Hambledon said that in that case it was no wonder that the lorry had got away from him.

"You are perfectly sure," said Letord, "that one of the men sitting in the back was, in fact, the speaker you were told to protect?"

"I can confirm that," said Hambledon. "I saw him get into the lorry and Sergeant Dubois go off after it in the taxi."

"One moment," said Letord, picking up the telephone. Hambledon and Dubois waited in silence while a general call was ordered to be sent out to all patrol cars, police stations and street police boxes in the whole Paris area and beyond to stop, arrest and detain lorry number so-and-so, description as follows, and anyone and everyone driving or travelling upon that lorry or seen to depart from it. Urgent, urgent. A kidnapping case. Description of men to follow. Letord replaced the receiver and turned to Dubois.

"I suppose it is useless to expect you to be able to describe the kidnapers——"

Hambledon and Dubois burst into speech together and Letord waved his Sergeant down. "M'sieu'?"

"The man in the back of the lorry was one of the two Germans who knifed the juggler at the Honest Lobster last week——"

"I thought so!" cried Dubois. "I said to myself——"

"The shorter one of the two," finished Hambledon. "I did not see the driver. My friend who was picked up, you have his description but he has grown a beard. All over; I mean, wherever beards come. A fortnight's growth, black."

"Half an inch," said Letord. He snatched a file of papers from a shelf and took from it the official descriptions of the wanted Germans and of the Spanish Comrade. "One moment while I give these out."

In connection with the search for lorry number so-and-so just ordered, descriptions of two of the men on it are as follows ... stop, arrest and detain....

From the Paris equivalent of Scotland Yard's Information Room the messages go out by telephone, teleprinter, radio telephone. Calling all stations, calling all cars, lorry number so-and-so, of such a description; two men (descriptions follow) stop, arrest and detain——

## CHAPTER VI

### CONFOUND THEIR POLITICS

Sergeant Dubois completed his evidence. He had thought the man in the back of the lorry answered the description of one of the Germans wanted for murder at the Honest Lobster, but he did not recognise the speaker because he was bearded——

"Their mistake," said Hambledon. "One of their mistakes."

Dubois went on to say that it did not look like any kidnapping he had ever heard of because the victim undoubtedly ran after the lorry and swung himself aboard it. But when M. Hambledon shouted and signalled to him that settled the matter.

"The victim was arranging himself as a mark of identification, presumably," said Letord acidly. "One may presume that such was the idea, if any, that he had in mind—if any—in thus leaping into the lion's mouth. Why, if I may be permitted to ask, did he not shout for help?"

Since the only possible answer was that he had expected the police to stop the vehicle, Hambledon tactfully refrained from making it.

"I shall also expect it to be made clear to me why the police abandoned their posts to run down the road, passing their assignment on the way."

"There was a riot," said Dubois. "They—we—jumped to the conclusion that it had been occasioned by the attempt at kidnapping which we had been warned to expect."

"Go on," said Letord in a resigned voice.

The taxi had kept up with the lorry surprisingly well for a time since the lorry's extra speed had been counter-balanced by the taxi's greater handiness in traffic. However, when, after a lot of dodging about, the lorry found the Boul' Mich' for once fairly clear of traffic it simply shot up the hill leaving the taxi practically standing. "It was then that I heard the deep throbbing roar so characteristic of a Lancia exhaust," said Dubois.

Letord listened without interruption to the end and sat in thought for a few moments.

"The whole affair," he said at last, "was a débâcle of the first order. You, Dubois, were greatly to blame for allowing your men to leave their posts. However, after your initial error you appear to have done what little was possible to retrieve the situation. You may go."

Sergeant Dubois, who had expected to be reduced to the ranks at least, with consequent loss of pension, saluted smartly and removed himself thankfully from the room.

"Now," said Letord, turning upon Hambleton, "perhaps you will explain why your quiet little meeting turned into a riot involving four streets, some two hundred people, a large number of casualties and many thousand francs' worth of damage. I am, for my sins, one of the poor imbeciles responsible for quiet and order in Paris and, I tell you frankly, I am very seriously annoyed."

"I am extremely sorry," said Hambleton, "if it was any fault of mine that all this trouble arose. If only I had known that those two mutts had left off shaving, heaven knows why! I did not have any personal contact with them before the meeting, I thought it wiser not to be seen with them even in Jugo-Slavia——"

"Jugo-Slavia? I thought they were Spaniards."

"Oh no, they are English, they were on holiday in Dubrovnic. They have passed for Spaniards before, they do it very well. It seemed a good cover for them this time."

"Who are they?" asked Letord. "Or is that one of your little mysteries?"

"Not to you. The dark one who was captured is a man named Forgan, the other who is almost certainly awaiting me at my hotel is his partner, Campbell. They have a model shop in the Clerkenwell Road in London, model railways, ships, all that sort of thing. They have a natural flair for intelligence work and have helped me on one or two little jobs before. Their business has done so well in the last few years that they are able to leave a manager in charge whenever they are away. They are, now, 'on call' to M.I.5, so when this affair blew up I sent for them."

"I see. I still do not understand why there had to be a riot also."

"I sent them a letter, in code of course, telling them they were to come here and address a Communist Meeting, after which one or both of them would probably be kidnapped, but they were not to worry because they would be immediately rescued. All we wanted, I said, was to identify the kidnappers. I told them to mug up enough about Communism to be able to gas about it for half an hour each." Hambleton paused. "That was another mistake. They absorbed the wrong brand of Communism—Tito's—I don't suppose they knew that there was more than one kind or they didn't think it mattered. They are not politicians. Then there was something wrong with the drink on the speakers' table, you know, the usual carafe of water and a couple of tumblers. Campbell got rather stuck in his speech so he poured himself a glass and drank it off while he was thinking what to say next, I suppose. Well, I don't know whether it was vodka or dynamite, but I thought the top of his head was coming off. He turned bright scarlet, his eyes bulged like a Pekingese dog's and his speech went all to pot. Forgan pushed him into a chair and took his place. He spoke quite well but, as I say, the wrong brand of Communism. You should have heard him leading off about the evil intentions of Russian Imperialism and imploring his intelligent hearers not to be misled by a white-washed façade behind which millions of their fellow-workers were slaved to death in chains and misery."

"That, I suppose, was when the riot started."

"Precisely. People began to stand up and shout and then one gentleman threw a turnip and scored a bull on the Chairman's nose. After that the party got really rough and Forgan and Campbell escaped through windows, going different ways. Forgan got clear away till he was picked up, but Campbell, who seemed to have got over the vodka or whatever it was, had a train of pursuers. He rushed into a café, locked himself in the toilet and got out of the window. The café people resented being thrown about and having their drinks knocked over and that's how that fight started. I never heard such an uproar in all my life and then everybody all down the street joined in. You know how, when a dog-fight starts, all the dogs within earshot rush along to get into it? I saw two doors open, one either side of the street; a man rushed out of each and they started fighting furiously in the middle of the road. They could not

possibly have known what it was all about. Oh, and an old woman who opened her window and threw her fire-irons at just anybody within reach. Thank heaven! I thought you were never going to smile again."

Letord leaned back in his chair and laughed till the tears came into his eyes and Hambleton watched him with a perfectly unmoved expression.

"It is people like you, my friend, who are a danger to the public peace," he said, "not my poor silly Communists being unloaded in the yard here. Next time you have one of your little schemes on, I will petition to have the Garde Republicaine called out well in advance. It will save trouble in the long run."

"Yes," said Hambleton.

"What is the matter?"

"We have been talking here for—what—nearly half an hour since you put out that call for the Lancia lorry."

"We shall find it," said Letord.

"I think I should be happier," said Hambleton, "if I knew what those damned kidnappers did with their victims. Or should I? Do they stow them away somewhere, or do they just cut their throats and drop the bodies in the Seine?"

"In the case of Pavel Dinnik it is to be hoped that they stow——"

"Blast Pavel Dinnik!"

"Half an hour," said Letord in a soothing voice, "is not long. In any case, it is not yet half an hour since my message was received in all quarters. Nothing like half an hour. A quarter of an hour at most, probably less. Take heart, they cannot dissolve the Lancia——"

"They can run it into a shed and shut the doors. They can abandon it in some wood, having transferred——"

Letord's telephone rang and he snatched up the receiver while Hambleton waited for news. The conversation was very short, the detective replaced the receiver and picked up another.

"Information Room? Lancia lorry passed through Bièvres going south. Send it out to districts beyond. Thank you. You heard?" added Letord, replacing the telephone. "A policeman saw it and signalled it to stop. He had to jump for it. We shall have them soon."

"Where is Bièvres?"

"Near the aerodrome at Villacoublay. On the road to Rambouillet, more or less. My friend, they cannot escape."

"I am going back to my hotel," said Hambleton, "to try to persuade Forgan's partner, Campbell, that they cannot escape. I hope I succeed. I hope you succeed. Ring me there, will you?"

Hambleton returned to his hotel where the hall porter had news for him.

"You have a visitor, m'sieu'. I sent him up to your room as you directed me to, if such an one should come, giving that name."

"Thank you," said Tommy, "quite right." He went up in the lift and walked along the corridor to his room, at first quickly and then slower and slower. He stopped outside the door, put his hand out to the door-handle and withdrew it again, stood irresolute for a moment and then squared his shoulders, opened the door and went in. The tall red-haired Spanish Comrade was sitting slumped in his armchair with a cup of coffee and Tommy's bottle of aspirins on the table beside him. He looked up, blinking, as Hambleton came in.

"Well, Campbell! Glad to see you. Any damage?"

"Not really. No bones broken. I just don't feel very well."

"What's the matter?"

"Vodka, that's all. Vodka. They fed us on salami sausage and vodka in the back room and we felt we had to drink it. We don't like vodka. Then, what d'you think was in that bottle on the table? It ought to have been water. It wasn't, it was more vodka. Nearly killed me. Where's Forgan?"

"Not back yet. Have you taken any aspirins? No? Take four and sit still for ten minutes. Here you are," as Campbell groped blindly for the bottle, "I'll count them out for you. Have some water with them, that coffee's cold. I'll just have a word with the manager about a room for you and come back. That's right, down with them. You'll be all right; vodka isn't really poison, it only feels like it. Lie back and keep quiet, I shan't be long."

Campbell's head went back and his eyes were closing as Hambleton went out of the room, thinking that it would be a very good thing if the patient slept soundly all night. To-morrow would be quite soon enough to afflict him with the news that Forgan had really been kidnapped, besides, there might be some better news before the morning.

Hambleton went down and explained to the manager that his friend Mr. Campbell was really quite a respectable person in spite of his peculiar appearance which was due to some unpleasant adventures through which he had recently passed. It was so easy, was it not, on a care-free walking tour, to trespass inadvertently across unmarked frontiers into zones where an innocent freedom of movement was neither permitted nor understood. Exactly, exactly. No, he was not sure himself where his friend had been and really it did not matter, did it, since he had escaped? No use making fusses, nothing would be gained by it.

The manager said that since parts of Europe were infested by persons who considered politeness a folly and an apology a confession of weakness, there was indeed nothing to be done but to avoid such parts with the utmost care.

Hambleton agreed heartily. His friend Mr. Campbell had, incidentally, arrived without clothes except what he wore. Some shopping in the morning would be necessary. Yes, yes, one of the larger stores, the Printemps or the Galeries Lafayette. In the meantime, the sooner the poor man was in bed, the better. If there was, by happy chance, a vacant room near Hambleton's Mr. Campbell could be helped along to it and assisted to undress, he was completely exhausted. "In fact, he has fallen asleep in my chair. Perhaps he had better have my bed for to-night and I will go into another room?"

The manager consulted the hotel register and said that the room next Hambleton's was vacant, it could not be more convenient as there was a connecting door which could be opened. The room was all ready for occupation, the bed made up and clean towels upon the towel-rail. Vacant rooms were always kept like that.

The manager collected the key and they went up in the lift together. When Hambleton entered his own room Campbell had slipped down in the chair and was profoundly asleep. The next moment the connecting door opened and the manager stood in the doorway.

"He's gone right off," said Hambleton. "I understand he hasn't been in bed for three nights. I don't know if I can wake him up."

He tried, but not very insistently, and Campbell took no notice at all. The manager intervened.

"If I were to summon the night porter, between us we could carry him through here and put him to bed."

It was done with less difficulty than Hambleton expected. Campbell was a tall man, but not heavy for his size, and the manager and night-porter handled him expertly. In a quarter of an hour he was tucked up in bed in a pair of Hambleton's pyjamas without having been disturbed at all. He snuggled down and the manager turned out the lights.

"Very well done," said Hambleton. "One would say that you and your porter had done that sort of thing before."

"Oh, m'sieu'," said the porter, putting away Hambleton's tip, "if you did but know! I could tell you——"

"Not now, Jacques," said the manager, and returned him to his duties.

Hambledon went to bed but did not sleep particularly well. He was listening for a telephone call which did not come. At seven he telephoned Letord's office; Letord was not there, but there was a piece of news which did not reassure Hambledon. At eight he got up again, had a bath, ordered breakfast to be sent to his room and was sitting by the window occupying himself with coffee and rolls when he heard a sound of stirring in the next room. Presently Campbell appeared in the intervening doorway, looking only half-awake but perfectly normal.

"Hullo, Hambledon. That coffee smells good, can I have some? And some rolls. Lots of them, I'm starving."

"Certainly," said Hambledon, picking up the hotel telephone, "I'll order it to come up."

Campbell waited till this had been done and then borrowed an overcoat for use as a dressing-gown.

"These pyjamas appear to have shrunk," he explained. "Besides, I don't think they're mine. Are they yours? It's an odd thing, but, d'you know, I can't remember going to bed last night."

"I don't wonder. I gave you some aspirin of which you appeared to stand in need, and you just went out like a light."

"Had I been drinking? I believe I had, it's coming back. Some foul muck—vodka. I remember now. Did Forgan pass out, too?"

Hambledon did not answer.

"I suppose Forgan's still asleep. Why don't you answer? Hambledon. Where is Forgan?"

Hambledon described exactly what had happened. "And this morning I had a message to say that the lorry had been found but not its occupants."

"Oh," said Campbell. He took a turn or two up and down the room in Hambledon's pyjamas, which reached his knees, and Hambledon's raincoat, which did not. "I gather that these people you're after don't like Communists, is that right?"

Hambledon said that one gathered that that was, in fact, the case.

"Then why weren't we backing them up instead of chasing them? Here's my breakfast; come in and talk to me while I have it."

"I'd much rather back them up, frankly, but they've snatched that fellow Pavel Dinnik, you know. The Possible Man, as they call him, the other Soviet Delegates being all impossible. You must have heard of Dinnik."

"Oh, yes. Returning to Forgan, he's no Commy so they can't have anything against him. I mean, they must interview their captures, mustn't they, if only to make sure that the raiding party has come back with the right man."

"Certainly."

"Forgan has only to tell a convincing story and he'll be all right. And Forgan, you know, could convince a billiard ball that it needed a shave. They'll probably elect him on the Committee."

"I sincerely hope so. Then they could be persuaded to hand back Dinnik and no questions asked."

"And thereafter carry on unhindered with their good work for the welfare of mankind," said Campbell. "There's one thing to be said for them, at least they won't give Forgan vodka, will they?"

"I shouldn't think so. I was sorry to interrupt your holiday, by the way."

"Didn't matter," said Campbell, pouring out more coffee. "It was getting rather boring. We grew beards, as you see, and tried to sink into the countryside so to speak, but we'd had about enough of it when your letter came. Terribly intense, these politically-minded people. We got quite homesick for a little reasonable converse about

football pools and backing horses."

"What on earth took you to Jugo-Slavia in the first place?"

"Just itching feet, we'd never been there before. It was very useful, as it happened, having just been in Jugo-Slavia. When you said you wanted us to make Communist speeches at a meeting, we knew we'd have no trouble. We'd been living with it for a fortnight, so much better than having to mug it up. I mean, fancy having to read Marx—really read him!—in the service of an ungrateful country. I mean, there are limits. As for Spain——"

Hambledon was not amused. "That was what all the row was about. You'd got Tito's brand of Communism and that doesn't go down here. All that anti-Stalin talk, you know."

"Oh, was that it? Oh, I didn't know. When those blighters in the hall started in on us I thought we'd gate-crashed the wrong meeting or something. I considered yelling 'Vive De Gaulle!' instead, only Forgan said we'd better *vamos pronto*, so I left. Did you hear me fall in a dustbin?"

"Where did you go after that?"

"I found myself in a foul little yard with high walls all round topped with broken glass. There was a door I naturally supposed would be locked but it wasn't, so I went through it. By this time several of my faithful followers were through the window and after me, I ran down a narrow passage and across the street into a café opposite, dodged the waiters and took refuge in a toilet at the back. The bolt was nearly rusted up, but it was a good solid one and I managed to shoot it. Then I went out of the window." Campbell paused to empty his coffee-cup. "It was a small window and rather high up, but by this time my would-be murderers were banging on the door so I climbed up the plumbing and opened the window, which must have surprised it. It hadn't been used to that treatment. It wasn't really big enough, but I remembered that where one arm and your head will go through the rest of you will follow. It did, but it was a bit of a struggle and some of the plumbing suffered. I think the hand-basin thing came off the wall, I was standing on it and it certainly gave way. There was a sound of breaking crockery."

## CHAPTER VII

### TIRED AND DUSTY

"What happened," said Hambledon, "after you got out of the window?"

"Another little yard just as filthy as the first one and there was no door, but the walls weren't high and had no broken glass so I went over. This landed me in what was almost a garden by comparison, at least it had some weeds and a bush in it because I fell into the bush. There was a house attached to the garden, naturally, and the door was open. There was a passage inside which led straight through to the front door. I think it was one of those houses which are let off in apartments, you could tell that the passage and stairs weren't anybody's pride and joy, so I guessed the front door would not be locked. I was just walking quietly along the passage when one of the doors opened and a young woman bounced out and grabbed me. She was small but she was violent and she had a grip like a gorilla." Campbell rubbed his left arm thoughtfully. "She said I was a villain and a robber and had come to steal from the hard-working poor. I denied it and proceeded on my way unwillingly towing the young woman with me when, just before we reached the front door, it opened and her husband came in. An enormous man with fists like hams. A cousin of Carnera's, I should think." Campbell sighed. "Then the evening's excitements really reached their peak. Or would it be depths?"

"Don't tell me," said Hambledon, "that the lady's husband thought you were eloping with her?"

"Just exactly what he did think. Apparently she'd been threatening to leave him for a better man if he spent so much time in the cafés, but he went on doing so and then came home to find one accompanying her towards the door in a furtive manner. Oh dear. Then a real rumpus started. Between them they pushed me into a room which seemed

to be their bedroom and went on with the argument in the sitting-room. I could hear them through the door."

"Blessings on the falling-out which all the more endears."

"This one did. They kissed again with tears or words to that effect and then the man unlocked the door and apologised. He said that he thought I was bolting with his Madeleine and when I said that I should never think of doing such a thing, she got annoyed. Temperamental people, the French. He offered me a drink and sooner than give any more offence I accepted. We were just getting nice and matey and I was telling them I'd barely escaped with my life from a Communist meeting—they didn't like Commies—when there came a knock at the door and Madeleine opened it. There were two men from the meeting looking for me and they recognised me, too. At once. Then the brawl started in real earnest; deeds, not words. They came for me and my new friends went for them. Madeleine hit one of them on the ear with a pastry roller and her husband kicked the other at the same moment as I hit him over the head with a chair. Then the husband told me to run, he could deal with these so-and-so's. So I left and came here."

"I saw something of the brawl at the café," said Hambleton. "It was quite a good one, it spread up and down the street and everybody joined in."

"Now tell me how this Communist meeting came about. I suppose you organised it, did you?"

"What I actually did was to offer the local Communist party two Comrades from Spain who would be willing to address a meeting. There are, naturally, several members of the Paris Communist party who are not nearly so Red as their fellow-members think they are. One must know what is going on, mustn't one? In fact, one of my friends is actually on the committee, a bright lad. So when the Party heard that two martyrs for the faith—you and Forgan—had escaped from Spain they jumped for joy and arranged a meeting with their customary efficiency. I was pretty sure that the kidnapping gang—let's call them the K's—would snatch one or both of you either before or after the meeting and the police were all round the place in a ring waiting to rescue you. Only, I didn't know you'd grown that face-stubble, for beard I will not call it, so your descriptions were all wrong and the police didn't recognise you."

"I see," said Campbell. "I wish," he added uneasily, "that I'd gone out of the same window as Forgan and been picked up with him. We divided in order to divide the pursuit, of course."

"He'll be all right," said Hambleton, putting more conviction into his voice than he really felt, "the police will find him. Every policeman in Northern France is looking for him. Are you going to shave? Let me lend you the tackle."

Campbell shaved, had a bath and dressed, after which he looked considerably more civilised, as Hambleton told him. "I don't think anyone at last night's meeting will recognise you now, especially if you get another suit. You'll want to do some shopping."

"No need. Our suitcases are in the left-luggage office at Le Bourget station, the main-line one. We changed to a slow train at Nancy, got out at Le Bourget, walked across to the Grand Circle station and went by train to Champigny. We got a train from there to Vincennes and then went by Métro to the Bastille. Quite a tour, and of course we said we'd come from the Gare de Lyons. Must I go to Le Bourget to pick up the cases or will somebody get them for me?"

"We'll ask Letord."

They went to the Préfecture to get the latest news and were handed a report from the police station at Maintenon, which is not far from Chartres. It said that their police had stopped the wanted lorry going towards Chartres between midnight and one in the morning, but that when they had questioned the driver he turned out to be a perfectly respectable man who kept a small garage at Nogent-le-Roi and there was no trace of the original occupants of the lorry.

The police at Maintenon were on their toes that night since it was evident that they were within the area which contained, or had contained, the Lancia lorry. Accordingly, when a lorry answering that description had come down the road, heading for Chartres, they had imperatively signalled it to stop and it had obeyed at once.

They approached it with some caution, for were they not desperate men upon the lorry? There was then no one sitting at the back but doubtless they were all in the cab, it was big enough. However, when the police had come up from behind and more or less pounced, the cab contained only one elderly man who appeared to be in distress of some kind.

"Come out," said the police.

The man switched on the dash light which lit up the interior of the cab and was seen to be scrabbling at the door. He did not manage to open it so he tried the opposite door with no better success.

"Come out!"

The driver put his face close to the glass and shouted that he could not open the doors and would they please do so? They looked, but there were no handles on the outside, only a small keyhole.

"Wind down the window," yelled the Sergeant.

"One cannot," replied the driver. "These windows do not wind."

He sat sideways upon the seat and tried to kick the door open but it did not move. Neither of them moved and the police climbed into the tray at the back and examined the cab's rear window. This also was immovably fixed and, now they came to examine the cab, it was seen to be of no ordinary sheet metal but of something much more solid. Armour-plate, or something like that. The driver plainly came to the conclusion that there was something seriously wrong.

"I want to get out!" he shouted. "Do something, can't you?"

"Cover your face," ordered the Sergeant, and attacked the window farthest from the driver with his baton. "There is," he panted between blows, which merely chipped the glass in places, "something—very peculiar—about this—glass. It does—not break."

"Bullet-proof," suggested one of his constables. "Specially toughened." He picked up a small lump of rock from the roadside and hurled it violently at the glass from short range, but the rock merely starred the pane, bounced off and fell heavily on his foot. This unreal sight horrified the driver and he could be seen to be tearing up the floor-boards with the idea of dropping out through the bottom.

The Sergeant bellowed at him through the windscreen. "Drive on into our station-yard, we have tools there." But the driver had managed to get both legs down between the transmission-shaft and the side member of the chassis. He went down to halfway up his thighs and there stuck. He was a man of solid build. His head, now, was a little lower than the steering-wheel; one of the constables, stooping to look underneath the lorry, could see a pair of elastic-sided boots writhing together and that was all.

"There are outside hinges on these doors," said the Sergeant. "Let the hinge-pins be knocked out and the door must open. Run, you, for a hammer and a punch."

It was done, one of the heavy doors came open a little and then fell out with a crash. The police climbed in and hauled the driver up on the seat. He sat back panting, and rubbed his grazed shins.

"What is all this?" he began.

"It is for you," said the Sergeant, "to tell us what all this is. You are in custody on a charge of being concerned in a case of kidnapping."

The driver called upon his Maker to witness that he had never kidnapped or attempted to kidnap anything or anyone in all his innocent life. As for this lorry it was brought into his garage by three men.

"Ah!"

The engine was suffering from a maladjustment of points which had caused it to fail. The men were evidently not mechanics or they could have put the matter right themselves, but they professed themselves baffled and also in a violent hurry to reach Chartres. They had seen in the garage an old Renault—"but, a vehicle of the *ancien régime*, very dignified"—and had paid a deposit on it and driven it away towards Chartres. Since they had also left their lorry, he had no qualms about letting them take the Renault. Ten minutes after they had gone he had located the trouble, put it right and started off in pursuit, thinking to catch them long before they reached Chartres since the lorry was really fast. Unlike the Renault. He had just jumped into the lorry, slammed the door and driven off. It was not until he was stopped by messieurs of the police that he had discovered that the doors would not open nor the windows wind down. The Renault, doubtless, had passed that spot only a few minutes before?

The police said that, on the contrary, no Renault had passed that point since they had been on guard there. Its number?

The driver gave it. He also gave the police a lift to the police station where they reported their find to Paris. They also reported the Renault and its number.

But elderly Renaults are much commoner in France than specially-built lorries and this Renault was not picked up that night at all. It was reported the next day at Rouen by a timber-merchant who had found it in his yard. Assuming that someone had merely parked it there and would come back for it later, the timber-merchant did not say anything to anyone about it until the late afternoon. It had been there when he came to work in the morning so presumably someone had put it there during the night. No one had seen it arrive. There was no sign of the men.

"Rouen," said Hambleton thoughtfully, "is a port. It's some way up the Seine, of course, but it's quite a port. Sizable ships go up to Rouen, don't they, Letord?"

"Certainly they do."

"Are you suggesting," said Campbell, "that Forgan has been put on a ship and taken away by sea?"

"He might have been," said Letord. "On the other hand, these men might have abandoned the Renault in Rouen in the hope that we might assume that that was what they had done."

"Is it possible to find out what ships left the port at the material time?" asked Hambleton.

"I can ask, certainly. I shall, in fact, do so in any case. But, ship? It might have been a motor-launch or a cabin-cruiser or even a rowing boat if it were a boat at all, as I said just now."

Three days went by. Campbell collected his luggage from Le Bourget, changed into an English suit and a typically English tie, had his hair cut and became quite unidentifiable with the picturesque ruffian who had addressed the Communist meeting just off the Rue de Lappe. The police pursued their enquiries in Rouen and district for anyone who might have heard of or seen the occupants of the dignified if whiskery Renault, but learned nothing. The timber-merchant's yard backed on to the river, in fact, it had a small wharf of its own and a little track running down beside it to the river, but this only proved that the men could have left by water if they had wanted to, not that they had. The Renault bore a variety of finger-prints some of which proved to be Forgan's when Hambleton sent to London for his record card; this showed at least that the police were on the right track but the track was a dead-end. Campbell made no complaints, but his usually equable cheerfulness gave place to alternation between periods of complete silence and incessant talking. He developed an upright line between his brows which Hambleton had not noticed before and he smoked cigarettes one after the other all day and half the night.

Hambleton's mind went back to the hotel card he had found in the coat of the young man who was stabbed on the Montmartre steps. The Hotel Arcadia, Flores del Sol. A charming name, suggesting romantic possibilities, but not necessarily having any connection with abducted Communists. It was just as likely to be the address of a girl-friend, or a man friend or relation, or even a recommended spot for a holiday. Nevertheless, Hambleton said to himself that unless Forgan came back very soon, he himself would make the long journey to Flores del Sol and look very carefully at the Hotel Arcadia.

Campbell and Hambleton were standing, late in the afternoon of the third day, in the hall of the Astra Hotel

discussing without much interest whether they should go out and if so where they should go, when the desk telephone rang and the manager answered it. It was apparently a long-distance call for he put a finger in the unoccupied ear and asked his correspondent to speak a little louder, please. "I cannot hear you very plainly," he said, raising his voice. "Who are you, again? The police station at—where? Yes, I have it now. Yes, this is the Hotel Astra in Paris. What name? I am sorry, I cannot catch it. Will you spell it, please? H A M B L E D O N—"

Hambledon spun round.

"Yes, Monsieur Hambledon is here. Hold on, please. In the telephone box," he added to Hambledon, who dashed into it.

"Hambledon speaking. Who is that, please?"

A faint tinny voice said, from very far away, that it was the police station at St. Jerais in the Department of Basses Pyrénées.

"On the Spanish frontier?"

"Close upon the frontier. We have here, monsieur, a man who claims to be acquainted with you. The name he gives is Forganne."

"Forgan," said Hambledon. "Yes, it is true, I have a friend named Forgan, is he there?"

"He is, monsieur. He is destitute and has no money at all. He wishes to come to Paris if his fare could be found for him."

"Certainly," said Hambledon. "Delighted. I will telegraph the money to you at once. Tell me, is he well?"

"Quite well. Tired and dusty, as is natural."

"Oh. Well, if you would have the infinite kindness to supply his immediate needs, I am wiring sufficient money to you at once. I address it to you, do I?"

"There is also another matter," said the distant voice. "Your friend appears to be without papers of any kind and there is some reason to believe that he has made an illegal crossing of the Spanish Frontier."

"Oh, has he? Indeed. Yes, well, I shall have to get official authority to deal with that point. Is Monsieur Forgan actually with you at this moment?"

"Er—he is in the building——"

"I should regard it as a personal favour as well as a great kindness on your part if I might be allowed to speak to him for a moment."

There was a momentary pause and then the voice told Hambledon to hold on and Monsieur Forgan should be brought to the telephone. There was a rattle as the receiver was put down; Hambledon pushed open the door of the telephone box and called to Campbell.

"Forgan seems to have turned up again in a French police-station somewhere on the Spanish Frontier. He wants some money."

Campbell's face lit up but all he said was: "I suppose there's no doubt it really is Forgan?"

"I am going to make sure, they are calling him to the telephone. I say, calling him, I rather think he is in one of their cells."

"What for?"

"Having no papers, crossing the frontier illegal—hullo! That you, Forgan? Hambledon here."

"I'm Forgan, all right. I say, Hambledon——"

"Listen a minute. I can't honestly say I recognise your voice through this contraption. Will you repeat to me a certain number which is known to you and me and very few others?"

Forgan repeated a combination of letters and figures like a car's registration number, in point of fact it was his Foreign Office code number.

"Thank you," said Hambledon briskly, "that will do. I will telegraph you some money and see about your papers."

"Is Campbell all right?"

"Perfectly. He is here with me. Hand me back to the cops, will you? Ah, m'sieu'. You will hear from me by telegraph and from the Préfecture de Police by telephone, I expect. I am infinitely obliged for your courtesy in ringing me up. Good afternoon. Now Campbell, a post-office before they close and then we will stir up Letord to authorise Forgan's release."

"Did he—or they—say how he was?"

"He sounded all right. The police said that he was tired and dusty, whatever that means."

"It sounds as though he'd been walking," said Campbell thoughtfully.

"Or even running," said Hambledon.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREEN BICYCLE

Matters having been satisfactorily arranged, Forgan came up from Hendaye by the night train and Campbell went to meet him soon after nine at the Austerlitz station in Paris. Hambledon was finishing the last of his breakfast coffee at the Astra when the door of the dining saloon was pushed open and a figure appeared at the top of the three semi-circular steps. It was a stout figure wearing a beret, a very short-sleeved jersey with narrow horizontal stripes in blue-and-white, floppy white trousers rather badly creased and rope-soled canvas shoes.

Hambledon put his coffee-cup down and said: "Good heart alive!" The waiters left off clearing tables to stare and the head waiter ruffled up and prepared to repel intruders. The door opened again to admit Campbell who propelled his friend across the lounge and up the steps to the dais upon which the Astra serves its meals.

"He feels shy," explained Campbell. "He didn't seem to want to come in here. I can't think why."

"Forgan," said Hambledon, "I am extraordinarily glad to see you, but have you joined the sailors' chorus in *H.M.S. Pinafore*?"

The head waiter, thinking privately that Monsieur Hambledon's friends were, one by one, each odder than the last but being too polite to show it, asked if the gentlemen desired breakfast.

"Yes, please," said Forgan, "but can't I change first?"

"Certainly not," said Hambledon. "I find you a refreshing sight, come and sit down. What is all this?"

"St. Jerais," said Forgan, sitting down and trying to pull his sleeves down enough to cover his elbows but they would not, "the town from which the police rang you up, you know, is only a very small place. It has three churches,

one convent, five cafés, numerous bars and only one clothing establishment, for tailor's I will not call it. Slop-shop is the word. These garments were the only things they had which would fit me." He sighed. "This jersey, believe it or not, was labelled 'For the Sport'. I didn't like to ask them what kind of sport. I mean——" His voice trailed off and the waiter came with coffee, rolls and what the French call marmalade, which is an indeterminate kind of jam.

"Crown and anchor, undoubtedly," said Tommy. "Have you been in Spain?"

"I have, yes."

"Was that where you lost your money?" asked Campbell.

"It was indeed," said Forgan, tearing up a roll and buttering the fragments. "I met him on the shore."

"Who?"

"An old, old man who looked like a mediæval picture of one of the apostles. Paul, I think. He had one of those noble but craggy faces and he was sitting on a stone gazing out to sea and smoking a pipe. He looked as though he were engaged in pious meditation, I hardly liked to interrupt him but I wanted to know where I was. So I addressed him in French and he answered me in Spanish. Then I asked him if the *Señor* were Spanish and he asked me if the *Señor* were French. We got on fine." Forgan drank a large cup of coffee straight off and poured out another. "I had a badge in my buttonhole. You remember, Campbell. One of those little red hammer-and-sickle badges they gave us at the meeting. He looked at this and told me that if I walked about with that on I should find myself in clink, so I took it out and trod it into the sand. Wonderful sandy beaches they have there. Family bathing. Safe for children. You walk out for half a mile and then you're ankle deep. I know because I walked it. In, not out. Can I have some more rolls?"

"Certainly," said Hambleton, signalling to the waiter. "Go on about your Apostle, we'll have the earlier part of the story in private."

Forgan nodded. "He said he wasn't a Communisto himself but he didn't really know why not except that he was too old for politics. 'Franco', he said, 'Franco, huh! Look at the prices of things,' he said. 'How is a man to live?' I agreed and offered him a cigarette. He took the packet; that ought to have warned me, but he looked so unworldly that I put it down to absent-mindedness. He asked if I wanted to get to France and I said I did, so he said it was quite simple, I only had to follow the coast road for about twenty kilometres and I should come to the International Bridge at Irun, simple. I couldn't miss it. I said I dared say not, but I was afraid they might not miss me, either. The bridge was guarded I said, was it not? He said it was and appeared to go into some kind of meditation so I sat down on the sand and waited. The sun had set, the dusk was turning to dark and we were alone. Presently he returned to the more ordinary affairs of life and said I could show them my papers, couldn't I? I said no, not having any. (They took them all from me on the boat, you see.) He had another relapse at that and we sat there in silence watching the stars come out." Forgan tilted the coffee-pot and nothing happened so he lifted the lid and looked disconsolately inside.

"Waiter! Some more coffee, please," said Hambleton. "Go on, Forgan."

"I asked him if it were possible to buy a bicycle. A good strong one, I said, it needn't be smart. A second-hand one. He did spark up a bit at that, after a moment's thought he said that bicycles were scarce but he had a friend who had one to sell. A noble bicycle, fit for Royalty. Crowned heads, he said, would be proud to ride it and even Presidents would not despise it. So I said right, let's go and buy it. He said I had better not go into the village—it was just a small fishing village, this place—because the policeman was young, active, alert and had eyes in the back of his collar. He would get it for me, the bicycle I mean, and bring it back. So I gave him eight thousand francs and he went off. He said French money was all right."

"And you never saw him again?"

"Oh yes, I did. He came back wheeling quite a good bicycle, painted dark green so far as I could see in that light. Some dark colour. He gave me elaborate instructions how to go in order to avoid Fuenterabbia and Irun and I thanked him heartily. He sat down again on his stone and looked as though he were communing with the angels, so I rode away."

Forgan had not ridden a bicycle for thirty years and though it is said that once a cyclist, always a cyclist, it is possible to be out of practice. However, after the first half-dozen miles his swooping curves straightened themselves out and he only fell off twice, once when he wobbled into a ditch and once when a dog dashed out and collided with his front wheel. He followed the old man's itinerary and steered clear both of Fuenterrabia and Irun; when the almost full moon rose at about half-past nine he was riding along a country lane which more or less followed the course of the Bidassoa, the river which is crossed at Irun by the famous International Bridge. The Bidassoa is, physically, the frontier between Spain and France in this area.

He rode along, looking for either an unguarded bridge which he was not likely to find if indeed there was a bridge there at all, or a boat tied up which he could borrow, preferably without permission. He rounded a sharp corner and so nearly collided with a man walking that the resultant wobble unbalanced him and he landed with a crash in the road. The man rushed to his aid; as he came out from the shadow of a wall Forgan saw with horror that it was a policeman.

One cannot spring to one's feet and run away when on one's back in the road with one's legs through the frame of a bicycle. The policeman, with exclamations of pity, lifted the machine off Forgan and instantly the the condolences stopped.

"This is a police bicycle," he said sharply. "Who are you and what are you doing with it?"

Forgan got up slowly, rubbing one painful ankle-bone which had met the road. A police cycle, then that venerable old spiv on the seashore had sold him a stolen——

"I am a police detective from Madrid," he said with dignity, "come in disguise to investigate smuggling offences on the——"

The policeman made a rude noise suggesting disbelief. "If you were a detective in these parts," he said, "you would come from Pampeluna, not Madrid. I do not believe you."

"I have been temporarily attached to Pampeluna——"

The policeman shot at him a string of sounds which Forgan assumed correctly to be speech but the language quite unknown to him.

"I beg your pardon?"

"There you are," said the policeman. "Investigating smuggling, are you, in this district and you don't know one word of Basque? Nonsense. You are under arrest and I am taking you to the police station."

Forgan turned to flee but his damaged ankle failed him and he all but fell. When he recovered, the policeman was covering him with a large revolver about the size of the .45 Colts which used to be issued to the British Navy.

"Is that thing loaded?" asked Forgan.

"Certainly."

"Very well, then. I will accompany you to the police station. A delightful night for a walk, is it not?"

The policeman made no answer and they walked along the lane together in companionable silence. Forgan was pleased to find that the injury to his ankle was working off; a bruise, merely. In less than a mile they came to a village by the riverside.

"What is the name of this place?" he asked.

"Bosque del Rio. Keep close to me. No bolting, or I shoot."

The village looked a poor place enough even in the light of the moon, which is kind to shabbiness. Shutters hung askew from one hinge, panes of glass were missing from windows and the houses had not known fresh paint

for many years. They walked along a narrow lane, deep in dust, between small houses and came out into the usual 'plaza', the central square. Here were trees and a derelict fountain; the police station, a little smarter than its neighbours, was between the butcher's and the chemist's shops.

The policeman stood the cycle against the wall by the door and pushed Forgan inside with the barrel of his revolver. He did as he was told and entered the charge-room.

There was a Sergeant in charge, sitting behind a big desk well out into the room. There were the usual dingy cupboards against the walls, a row of pegs with police cloaks hanging up on them, half a dozen twenty-litre petrol tins on the floor near the desk, a clock on the wall and three hard wooden chairs upon one of which a prisoner was sitting. One of the petrol cans was leaking, for the smell filled the room; the Sergeant was smoking and Forgan wondered what would happen if he threw a match down. However, he was a tidy man, he used an ash-tray.

He was, when Forgan went in, addressing the other prisoner.

"You cannot deny it," he said. "You smuggled this petrol across the frontier."

"No, *Señor*," said the prisoner firmly. "With respect, I bought it in Irun for my little lorry."

"With respect," retorted the Sergeant, "you are a liar. These cans are the property of the French Air Force."

The prisoner uttered a yelp of dismay. "And I thought he was my friend," he wailed, "the conscienceless villain who sold me this petrol in Irun. Now he has gone away, taking my hard-earned money to spend upon his vile pleasures while I am to lose my petrol, my character, my liberty——"

"That, at least, is almost certainly true," said the Sergeant, cutting short the lamentation. "Come with me and I will prove it." He rose clumsily to his feet, for he was of a stout and awkward figure, took a bunch of keys from a nail on the wall behind him and motioned the prisoner to stand up. "I will just show this one his accommodation for the night," added the Sergeant, addressing Forgan's captor, "and return immediately to deal with your prisoner. Forward, you!"

The prisoner rose by sections to his feet, a tall gangling creature with incredibly long arms, and grinned sympathetically at Forgan.

"To our next meeting, comrade in misfortune," he said, and Forgan grinned in reply. The Sergeant gave the prisoner a push and both passed through a door at the other side of the room.

"You may sit down," said Forgan's guard, "in the chair which the other prisoner has just vacated."

"Thank you," said Forgan, and sat down. His prospects were not looking very bright but it was fair to assume that the Sergeant and this constable were the only police in the station at the moment. If there had been another constable on hand the Sergeant would hardly have done the locking-up himself. Only two men, surely something could be done with only two men.

The Sergeant returned, hung up the keys again upon their nail, sat down heavily in his chair and looked at the constable.

"You can put away that cannon of yours, Pedro," he said. "It is, I know, loaded and the sight of it in your hands makes me nervous. Have you the safety-catch on?"

"No, *mi Sargento*. It no longer has one. I took the weapon to pieces to clean it the other day and the little screw fell out. It was such a little screw, *mi Sargento*, that I could not find it again, but the gun fires quite well without it."

"I daresay," said the Sergeant. "I daresay it does. None the less, you ought to be severely reprimanded for losing Government property."

"Yes, *mi Sargento*."

"Kind Heaven," said Forgan, and mopped his brow.

"That frightens you, does it?" said the Sergeant, turning upon him. "That you have been brought in by a man with no safety-catch upon his fire-arm? I am glad to see it, it will teach you to respect the police force of Spain. Pedro! *Will* you put that gun back in its holster at once instead of waving it like a baby's rattle?"

"Yes, *mi Sargento*," said the constable, and did as he was told.

"That is better. It is all very well to flourish firearms without a safety-catch at prisoners, but you must be more careful in the presence of your superior officers. Now then, you! Your papers, please."

"I have none," said Forgan. "I have lost them."

"Indeed. Search him, Pedro."

Forgan did not wait to be searched, he emptied his pockets upon the desk and, as he did so, he glanced at the clock. There were the usual things a man carries about with him; a couple of handkerchiefs, both rather grimy, a small pocket-knife, a rather large ball-point pen, a stub of pencil and a wallet containing seventeen thousand French francs.

"French money," said the Sergeant, and counted it. "A considerable amount in French money. Are you a Frenchman?"

Forgan, whose one idea was to get back to France, said yes, he was. They might perhaps fine him heavily and let him go if he could think of a convincing excuse for having no papers.

"I do not believe you, you have not the accent of France. I have a singularly good ear for accents and yours reminds me of that of a relative of my wife's from the Argentine."

"Your Excellency is almost right," said Forgan. "I learned my Spanish in the Argentine where I lived for many years. But I am a Frenchman and now live in France."

"Your name?" said the Sergeant, opening a record book and picking up a pen.

"Pierre LaChaise," said Forgan at random.

"Address?"

"Paris."

"Age? Your parents' names? Are they alive? No, then we need not enter their addresses. Your profession? Religion?"

Forgan did his best with a string of questions and the Sergeant wrote down his answers. The clock ticked steadily on, the Sergeant wrote slowly, and a quarter of an hour went by.

"Although I have no doubt that most of these entries are totally untrue," said the Sergeant, "I have to go through the formality of entering them." He closed the book and put it in a drawer; as an afterthought he swept up Forgan's possessions and put them also into a drawer except for the handkerchiefs which he flicked back to Forgan with the handle of his pen.

"Now then," he said, preparing to take notes, "you will tell me, please, exactly how you come to be in possession of a police bicycle."

Forgan knew perfectly well that it would not be the slightest use telling the truth. For one thing, not only did he not know the name of the apostolic-looking old scoundrel on the sea-shore but he did not even know the name of the village; for another, he did not want to reveal how he came to be in Spain and, finally, they would not believe him if he did. He looked down, shuffled his feet in plain embarrassment and then looked straight at the Sergeant with an air

of candour.

"*Señor*," he said, "to speak frankly, it was a lady."

"Name and address?"

"Oh no, *Señor*, not among gentlemen."

The Sergeant hesitated a moment and then said: "Continue."

"She came to Paris to see her sister. We met. She is, alas, married, *Señor*, to a brute who ill-treats her. She confided in me. When she left Paris we parted with tears for ever, as we thought. But I could not rest, *Señor*, her face haunted me. The memory of her tears—I apologise, *Señor*. I will control my emotions. I came to Spain, to the village where she lives, I will not even tell you its name. I spoke to her in secret—I leapt the wall of her garden and when she saw me she swooned in my arms. Her husband went away, to Pampeluna on business, so he said. I went to see her to implore her to leave him and return to her sister in Paris, to her sister, *Señor*, not to me—ah, not to me. She—I am a man of honour, *Señor*. We were talking in their parlour, sitting at a table, the table was between us as I hope to see Heaven, when the door slowly opened and her husband came in. He had, *Señor*, a long knife in his hand, she shrieked and fell upon the floor. He rushed at me, I dodged him and ran out of the room. I leapt down the stairs, he after me; I tore through the garden, he pursued me; I sprang over the wall, he followed me; I ran along the road but he was gaining on me. I saw this bicycle outside a house, unattended as it is now outside here. I glanced over my shoulder and saw him running after me with long strides and the knife gleamed in his hand. I took the bicycle, *Señor*, I admit it. I leapt upon the saddle and pedalled madly away, how do I know where? I do not know Spain. I rode on, sunk in misery, until I met your good constable. You know the rest."

There was a brief silence, broken only by sniffs from the constable. Forgan and the Sergeant turned to look at him.

"I was only," said Pedro, rubbing his nose with the back of his hand, "wondering what he would do to her when he got home?"

"Silence!" shrieked Forgan, "will you tear my heart?"

"Pedro," said the Sergeant, "go outside at once and bring that bicycle in. It is unsafe to leave it outside."

"Yes, *mi Sargento*." He went out.

"Not until you asked me for my papers," said Forgan, visibly pulling himself together, "did I remember where they were. They are in the pocket of my overcoat which is thrown down upon a settle in—that—man's—house——" He covered his face with his hands.

The constable came in again, wheeling the bicycle and propped it up against the wall behind his Sergeant's chair. The Sergeant lit a cigarette and offered one to Forgan.

"Accept, *Señor*," he said, "my sincere condolences in your tragic misfortunes. Nevertheless, I am here to apprehend those who do wrong, and there is no doubt that you are guilty of stealing Government property, namely, one bicycle. Indeed, you admit it yourself. It is a serious matter to steal Government property."

Forgan glanced at the clock again, nearly twenty-five minutes since he had laid the contents of his pockets upon the Sergeant's desk.

"*Señor*," he said, "the essence of a crime is in the intention. If, in passing your excellency in the street, I had the misfortune to trip over a loose stone and push against you in falling I should, of course, apologise and you would, no doubt, accept my apologies for an assault upon your person which was plainly unintentional. The case would be very different indeed if I were violently to push your Excellency with evil intent."

"Undoubtedly that would be so," said the Sergeant, "but——"

"And I submit, with respect, that the case of this bicycle is such an unintentional——"

"But," continued the Sergeant firmly, "I was about to say that though I am your jailor, I am not your judge. It is for the magistrates to decide, when they come to consider your case, whether the mitigating circumstances are such as to relieve them of the painful necessity of inflicting such punishment as the rules of law provide."

"If a man," argued Forgan earnestly, "were to fall down a well, and, in so falling, to save himself by grasping at a rope which hung from the well-head, could he be blamed for doing so even if it were not his rope? Even if he hung upon it for hours until he was rescued, thus depriving the rope's owner of its rightful use for the whole of that time, is not his excuse valid, that Necessity knows no law? With respect, *Señor*, that bicycle was my rope for, in truth and indeed, my life was in danger."

The hands of the clock appeared, to Forgan's anxious glance, to have stuck at the twenty-five minutes.

"I think, myself, that you have a case there," agreed the Sergeant. "If you put it as well to the magistrates as you have done to me, I should not be at all surprised if you were immediately released."

"But my argument is that there is not even a case to bring before the magistrates. Listen. Suicide is a mortal sin, is it not? If I had allowed that man to slay me with his long knife when there was at hand the means of escaping his fury, that would have been tantamount to committing suicide, would it not? Thus not only destroying this poor body but also endangering my immortal soul?"

"There is something in what you say," said the Sergeant thoughtfully, and laid down his smoking cigarette in the ash-tray while he thought matters over. Forgan risked another glance at the clock. Another minute or two to go, how accurate were those little things? They were old and presumably stale, would that make them take less time, or more?

"I did but borrow the machine," urged Forgan, "and now it is returned to the police unharmed. If I could pay for the loan and, of course, for the cost of returning it also, of course, for the time and trouble and kindly courtesy which you have expended upon my trivial and tiresome affairs——"

There was definitely more smoke curling up from the desk than was accounted for by the Sergeant's neglected cigarette. Any moment now——

"It was, naturally, obvious from the outset that a man with seventeen thousand francs in his pocket is not likely to steal a second-hand bicycle——"

There was a sudden noise, not a bang like an explosion but more like a lion's deep cough. The drawer in which Forgan's possessions had been put shot out of the desk for half its length and a bright hot flame leapt up and burned fiercely.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TOURIST

Forgan had been telling his story all through breakfast and while he was shaving and changing in Campbell's room, he continued it in Hambleton's room where they could be private.

"But," said Hambleton, "what in Heaven's name had you put in the poor man's drawer?"

"When we were in Jugo-Slavia," said Campbell, who had not spoken for so long that one could imagine his internal pressure rising to bursting-point, "we made a special effort, in accordance with what we thought be your wish, to get into touch with various shades of political opinion."

"Very various," said Forgan. "They ranged from the good old fashioned die-hard Monarchist to the ultra-scarlet die-hard Communist so extreme in his views that Stalin himself by comparison is a mere Whig."

"The only thing they all had in common," said Campbell, "was the die-hard bit."

"So long as someone else did the dying," put in Forgan.

"I don't think they were even too fussy about that," said Campbell. "They were all prepared for whatever might come and I wouldn't have stayed in the same house with some of their munitions of war for all the gold in the Kremlin."

"You are too hard upon enthusiastic amateurs, Campbell," said Forgan. "After all, in every branch of human endeavour somebody has to blaze the trail."

"Blaze is right," said Campbell. "Do you remember those fire-bombs they had stored in the communal bathhouse?"

"Most people," said Forgan, addressing Hambleton, "had a little something put by for a rainy day. You will remember that first the Germans swept over them and later retreated before the Russians sweeping over them. Well, all armies tend to leave odd bits behind. We met one dear old University Professor who ought to have been lecturing at Oxford upon the Greek particles. He showed me with immense pride three cardboard boxes full of one gross each of what looked like ball-pointed pens. They even wrote, for a short time. The rest of the space in the barrel, which ought to have been filled with ink, was taken up with two compartments filled with chemicals which, when they mixed, produced a brilliant and very hot flame which was practically inextinguishable."

"The Germans had something of the kind in the first World War," said Hambleton. "Von Papen's emissaries used to chuck them into the holds of ships loading munitions for Britain. The acid in them used to take about a week to eat through a copper plate—I think, I'm not very clear about the details—so when the ship was well out upon the broad Atlantic mysterious fires would break out among the cargo and cause alarm and despondency in the Mercantile Marine."

"These of mine were much more exact than those," said Forgan. "Some lasted two days before they went off, these had a Roman figure II on the barrels. Others only took half an hour and these were stamped point five—V. It just looked like a series number if you noticed it at all. The Germans meant to leave them behind for sabotage when they retreated, but the boxes became mislaid, as it were."

"He offered us some," said Campbell, "as mementoes, but we thought not. We like excitement, admittedly, but not temperamental explosives in the luggage."

"Until your letter came," said Forgan. "It then seemed good to me to provide myself with some form of violence in case the kidnapping scheme went wrong, as it did, of course. So my good old friend gave me half-a-dozen. All two-day ones except one which was a half-hour effort. To set it off, one pressed home a small knob in the back end of the pen. It looked like a refilling device."

"So it was that which the unfortunate Sergeant had in his desk," said Hambleton. "What happened after it went off? The petrol caught, I suppose."

"Not at once, strange to relate," said Forgan. "I rather thought it would. No. The sergeant was tilting his chair on its back legs, rocking himself while he talked, you know, and of course he went over backwards with a really resounding crash and became entangled in the bicycle. He put his foot right through the spokes of the back wheel, a large foot, and you know what spokes are. They persist, as it were. The constable naturally rushed to his aid, but the Sergeant roared at him to get the prisoner out of his cell—the earlier prisoner, that was—and get out by the back door. I had intended leaving at that point, I got as far as one door while the constable with the keys rushed out by the other, but I couldn't see the poor devil burning alive, he had been pretty decent to me. I dragged the desk away from him, it was well alight by then, and he struggled to his feet and made for the door, dragging the bicycle attached to one foot like a clog. I saw that he was going to make it all right so I did leave. I went up the street as hard as I could pelt and looked back when there was a roar and a lot of explosions. The petrol cans blowing up, of course. The

whole place was alight, flames coming out of the windows, most spectacular. The Sergeant was well out in the road but the bicycle had tripped him in the end, he was rolling about in the dust trying to kick the wheel off his other foot. My fellow prisoner came out of an alley somewhere and caught me up, he was yelling 'Fire! Fire! The police-station's on fire!'"

Forgan went on to describe how the village awoke. Windows were thrown open and heads put out, doors opened and emitted inhabitants in various stages of disarray. They fell over things, uttering pained cries, and all the village dogs joined in the uproar. The tall lean man, Forgan's fellow-prisoner, seized him by the arm.

"Come on," he said. "You want to get to France, yes? So do I. This way to France and Freedom!"

They ran up the road together, shouting "Fire at the police-station! Fire!" No one attempted to stop them since everyone was intent upon the other excitement; as the two men cleared the last houses in the village they heard the deep notes of a tolling bell and paused to look back. Above the roofs of the houses the night sky was all aflame and the tower of the village church was bright in its glare.

"Alas for my good petrol," said the tall man.

"Very sad," agreed Forgan, "but you can get some more where that came from, can't you?"

The man looked at him a moment and then laughed.

"I daresay," he said, "but not if we stand here waiting to be recaptured. Come, then, run!"

He seized Forgan by the hand and ran, he was thin and long-legged while Forgan was just the reverse. "I must have looked like Alice being towed along by the Red Queen," he said to Hambleton, "I'm sure my legs were trailing in the air behind."

Presently they left the road for a path across a field which led them to the river. Here Forgan's guide dived under a clump of bushes which overhung the water and there was a rowing-boat tied up to one of the stems.

"Good," said the man with a sigh of relief. "Pablo has left the oars. I was afraid that, if he had heard that the police had me, he might have taken them away."

They got in and rowed across the stream, on the farther side the man tied the boat again to a stump and walked on, with Forgan at his heels; every little while he stopped to listen and peer carefully into the shadows, for the moon was still bright. Forgan started to say something, but was abruptly checked.

"Silence—not a word! Here, they watch for smugglers," whispered the man. "Also, very soon we cross the frontier. Keep very quiet and do as I do."

They walked for an hour, sometimes stopping to listen, sometimes running; avoiding open spaces and taking advantage of every patch of cover. The ground began to rise more and more steeply and became rougher, Forgan neither saw nor heard a sign of any watchers, but once his friend pushed him down into a patch of moss and once they retreated hurriedly from some unseen danger. They spent another couple of hours climbing steadily up a mountain side growing progressively steeper and wilder, Forgan could see that they were going along the side of a valley leading into the hills, at the bottom of the valley there was a path leading up. At this point his companion stopped, touched his arm and pointed towards the path where a speck of light showed itself, flickered two or three times and went out.

"He lights his cigarette, that watcher."

The moon passed over towards the west, since they were on the western side of the valley they soon were walking in shadow, but if Forgan thought that this would make their journey easier he was wrong. His guide turned to him and whispered in his ear.

"Careful, now. Very tricky. Do just what I do and keep your head down. Stop if I stop and don't speak."

He then went down upon hands and knees and proceeded to crawl along a series of shallow grooves in the face of the hillside, sometimes going up and sometimes down. Some of the grooves were deeper and these were the bed of mountain streams; fortunately the weather had been dry for some days and these corries held no more than a trickle of water where, after rain, there would be leaping streams. Even so, at the end of twenty minutes Forgan was wet to the skin, plastered with mud and dripping with perspiration. His clothes, which were not what could be called dressy to start with since they had been chosen to suit the part of the Comrade from Spain, were soon such as would have been scorned by any self-respecting scarecrow. The trousers were torn at the knees, one so badly that it was simpler to complete the tear and discard the bottom half, his coat-sleeves were soaked and ragged to the elbows and the open front of his shirt had caught on a snag which had rent it to the waist. He was an active man and in good condition after his Jugo-Slavian holiday, but after an hour or more of this only obstinacy kept him going. He thought with homesick longing of a small dry cell in the police-station at Bosque del Rio, now in ashes, and a friendly fatherly Sergeant to give him supper. He had almost arrived at the point where his muscles refused to serve him any longer, when his leader rose to his knees, then to his feet, and said: "Ah. Now we are safe."

Forgan got up also and staggered, the tall man came to him and took his arm.

"All down-hill now, we can take it easy. Are you tired?"

Forgan admitted to a certain degree of fatigue but said that it would probably pass off again. "I am extremely grateful to you for all the trouble you have taken over me, a stranger. Without you to pilot me I should have been recaptured in the first mile."

"You would, without doubt. But I owed you that for getting me out of that jail. I could hear you talking to spin out time, those walls are only wooden partitions, you know, and I wondered what was coming."

"That was why the Sergeant was so anxious to get you out at once, then."

"That is why. My petrol was stacked against the head of my bed, as it were."

Forgan let the subject drop, he was too tired to walk and talk too, though now they were on a road and the going was a great deal easier. They plodded on together for another two miles when the man stopped.

"I turn off here," he said. "It is very dark now but in an hour it will be dawn. Then you will see at the foot of the valley the town of St. Jerais where you can get food and shelter. All right?"

"Perfectly, thank you," said Forgan. "I will sit down here and wait for the light, I think. You seem to have eyes like a cat in the dark, I envy you."

"Practice," said his friend with a laugh, "all practice. Yes, rest here till it grows light and then go on your way. By the way, do not enquire for me or describe me—I am sure you will not."

"I have never heard your honoured name," said Forgan earnestly, "I am already forgetting your distinguished features. In fact, the whole of our time together is assuming the fading character of a dream." He sat down wearily on a bank by the roadside.

"Sleep a little, it will refresh you, and when you wake your dream will have faded altogether. Thank you once more—sleep well—good-bye."

Forgan heard no sound of going but he felt himself alone, when he spoke again a few minutes later no one answered him. He ached with fatigue and his head was spinning with it, he leaned back and closed his eyes.

When he woke up it was broad daylight. He washed the mud off his face and arms in a stream, but it was a most disreputable figure which limped into St. Jerais at about noon, unshaven, ragged, hungry and completely penniless.

He went to the post-office and tried to persuade them to let him ring up Hambleton at the Astra Hotel in Paris on reversed charges, but they would not have it. He then tried to argue them into trusting him with the price of a telegram. The postmaster in person came to listen to this and told him to sit down on a bench and wait a little while. Forgan waited for ten minutes and then the police arrived and arrested him.

They took him to the police station where he refused to answer any questions till he had been fed, after a meal he was himself again and answered them willingly if not entirely truthfully. He was an Englishman and his name was William Forgan, he gave his London address. He had started a walking tour in the Pyrenees which had ended in disaster almost before it began. He had arrived by train at Hendaye the day before and started off to walk rather vaguely eastwards and upwards; he had lost his way and been benighted on the mountains. Some time between midnight and one a.m. he had come by chance upon a group of men who were sitting on the ground, apparently resting, they had some donkeys with them. He had gone up to them to ask if they could direct him to a village where he could get a bed and some food. Whereupon they had laughed not loudly but unkindly, laid violent hands upon him and stripped him of all his portable property. "My ruck-sack with a change of clothing, all my money, my papers including some private letters and my maps, my wrist-watch, fountain pen, cigarettes—everything. Then they told me to run away so I left them," said Forgan with dignity. After that he had lost what dim idea of direction he had had before, fallen into bogs and streams and generally had a most unpleasant night. "Eventually I was so tired that I just went to sleep, when I woke up the sun was shining and I could see this place in the distance. So I came here."

It was quite a good story and Forgan was both surprised and pained when it was not at all well received. He was accused of having come across the frontier from Spain.

"Spain? Oh, no. I told you——"

"We know what you told us. Last night a man answering your description escaped from police custody at a place called Bosque del Rio on the Spanish side."

"Never heard of it. I came from Hendaye, I tell you."

"In the course of escaping from custody you set the police-station on fire——"

"Good heavens! I assure——"

"After which you were seen running towards the river with another man who was also in custody. His name is Miguel Fernandez, called Tall Miguel, a well-known smuggler. A boat was used to cross the river, it was found on the north bank."

"Of all the far-fetched stories!" said Forgan indignantly. "Do I look like a man who would set fire to a police-station?"

"At the moment," said the police with some justification, "you look capable of any villainy."

Forgan, who had momentarily forgotten what he did look like, let that one pass.

"And what am I alleged to have done to be in custody at what-was-the-name-of-the-place at all?"

"Stolen a bicycle. A police bicycle. They telephoned, you see, to the police this side to look out for you and I think we have got you. Eh?"

"Listen," said Forgan. "You have got this all wrong. I am William Forgan of London——"

"You may be, we are not disputing that at the moment. The name you gave at Bosque del Rio was Pierre LaChaise, which does not convince us. It is too nearly the name of a cemetery, it is the sort of name a man might produce on the spur of the moment if he did not wish to give his own."

Forgan lost his temper, which was perhaps the best thing he could have done. He stormed at them, he demanded the British Consul, the British Legation, the British Ambassador in person. He told them what would happen to the mutton-headed inefficient half-witted police force of a miserable one-horse village at the back of beyond in a remote district of France when it was revealed that they had harassed and threatened an English gentleman in misfortune because he happened to arrive in this wretched place the night after a smuggler had escaped from Spain. "Where are your proofs of identity?" he roared. "A description? Because I am short and stout and dark? Are short, stout, dark men so uncommon, then, in these parts that there can be but one and I am he? Blistering fools! Ring up this number

in Paris and see if you can save your skins before I have you all dismissed the service!"

The police hesitated, as well they might. The proof of identity was their weak point as they knew perfectly well, and whether this stranger's story of having come by train to Hendaye were true or not it would be very difficult to check. Only by getting the Bosque del Rio police to look at him could they be quite certain, and that was not possible since even arson is not an extraditable offence, let alone bicycle-stealing.

They consulted, apart. "Better ring up this number he gives," said one. "If it is a bluff, we shall soon know it."

"Better put it nicely, too, when we speak to this Paris number. If it had been a man of any other nation his story would be absurd, wandering about alone getting lost on the mountains at night? But with the English, all things are possible."

They put Forgan back in his cell and took their time about putting the call through. As has been seen, they caught Hambleton at the Astra when he was on the point of going out and his immediate reply shook their confidence to its roots. When this was followed by a most peremptory message from the Sûreté at the Paris Préfecture of Police they climbed down at once and completely.

They released Forgan and apologised; they stood him a meal at the best inn in the place, still apologising; they lent him money until Hambleton's telegraphed remittance came through and they bullied the clothing-shop proprietor because he had nothing more suitable than white trousers and a striped jersey. When the money came through they rushed to Forgan, then in the barber's, to give it to him and finally turned out in full force to see him off by the bus which would take him to Hendaye to catch the Paris express.

"A good journey, m'sieu'. A happy return to all your friends. We trust that you will cherish no hard feelings towards poor overworked policemen trying to do their duty."

"Dear me, no," said Forgan graciously. "On the contrary."

## CHAPTER X

### SAMPLES

"I think," said Hambleton, "that you got out of that extremely well, Forgan. I will go further and pay you the compliment of saying that you are one of the readiest and most convincing liars I have ever met, and I am a man of experience with liars. Well, that's the end of your story, how about the beginning? We know about the lorry which abducted you and the elderly Renault which conveyed you to Rouen, but we didn't know whether you had really been taken away in a ship or whether they had taken you to Rouen on purpose to give us that idea."

"Oh yes, we went by sea all right. It was still quite dark when we got to Rouen and we drove into a timber-merchant's yard on the river bank. I expect the police found the car, didn't they? Yes, well, we got into a small boat with an outboard motor and chugged down the river till we were clear of the town where there was a small yacht lying at anchor. We went up a rope-ladder and I was immediately taken below and locked into a cabin. It was quite comfortable and a good size, it had a couple of bunks in it, an easy chair and a table and a little wash-place attached. No complaints at all. Only the portholes were blacked over on the outside so it was artificial light all the time and of course I couldn't see out. The meals were quite good and the cabin steward was civil, if only they'd let me come up on deck it would have been a nice little cruise. However, I was locked in and not only locked, there was a bar on the outside of the door, I used to hear it being slammed into place. Well, three days after we left Rouen two men came to my cabin and said that I was to come and see the Captain. I was delighted, and said so. Anything for a change. I was taken across a passage and into another cabin the mirror-image of my own except that the portholes were not darkened, and there was a sort of Committee waiting for me. The two men who captured me and a couple of others, Germans every one."

"Oh, were they," said Hambleton thoughtfully. "What was the name of this yacht?"

"I don't know, I never saw her name, it was dark when I went aboard."

"I did hope you would be able to identify——"

"Oh, we shall. You wait," said Forgan. "When I got into that cabin I did wish you'd told me more about the job in hand. I had nothing to go on except that these people were snatching Communists and that you wanted Pavel Dinnik handed back. I didn't know what they usually did with their captives, this might be the moment when they produced a plank and asked me to walk it. I needn't bother you with all that. I came in and stood in front of the table. One of the men acted as spokesman. He asked me if I were a Communist and I said no. He asked me why, in that case, I had addressed a Commy meeting. I said that I thought it would be a better idea if they first explained why they had abducted and imprisoned me."

The Chairman—Forgan explained that he called him that because he sat in the armchair at the head of the table and did most of the talking—the Chairman said that it was because they didn't like Communists.

"Then we should be friends," said Forgan amiably, "for I don't like 'em either."

The four men looked solemnly at him and then at each other.

"There is a mystery here," said the Chairman, "and we don't like mysteries."

"Unless we ourselves make them," added one of the others.

Forgan permitted an expression of gradual understanding to dawn visibly upon him.

"Ah," he said, "do I begin to guess? Are you the bright lads who've been abducting Commies all over the place? Of course, I ought to have guessed, I am not frightfully clever, am I?"

"That will do. It is not our identities that are in question, it is your own. The Russian radio in its French broadcast this evening announced that the alleged Comrades from Spain who addressed a Communist meeting in Paris the night before last were fraudulent tricksters unworthy of the name of Man."

Forgan beamed upon his audience. "Even Russian broadcasts must speak the truth sometimes, you see. How right they were? Except that my name isn't Mann, it's Forgan."

"It is what?"

"Forgan. William Forgan."

"Your nationality?"

"British, of course. Here's my passport."

Forgan took it from his pocket and handed it to the Chairman who opened it with ardent interest and the other three men peered over his shoulder.

"This photograph," said the Chairman, "does not resemble you in the slightest."

"It is a very good likeness, actually, only I've grown a beard," said Forgan, caressing his dark stubble, "since it was taken. I've been on holiday, you see, so I took a holiday from the daily scrape at the same time."

The Chairman turned over the pages and stopped abruptly at one of the entries.

"If this is your passport," he said cautiously, "you have been in Jugo-Slavia."

"That's right, I have. That's where I got all that stuff I talked at the meeting."

"You have not yet explained," said the Chairman sternly, "why you addressed the meeting at all."

"Just for a joke," said Forgan cheerfully. "What we call a leg-pull, you know. We wanted to make them look silly and by gosh we did. Were any of you gentlemen at the meeting? They got more and more excited until some hero threw a turnip at me and laid out the Chairman instead—I wouldn't have missed it for anything! Then the meeting got really tough and my friend and I thought it time to leave so we left, through the windows. It was an extraordinarily good rag, it was really."

"This is your idea of what you call a good rag? A practical joke, you call it?"

"Certainly. Went off very well, too, till you gentlemen butted in. I thought you were kindly offering me a lift," said Forgan to the man who had helped him to climb on the lorry.

"Wait here," said the Chairman, getting up abruptly. "Hans, stay here. Come with me," he added to the other two, and they went out taking Forgan's passport with them.

Forgan strolled across to look out of one of the portholes, but as there was nothing to be seen but blue sky and sparkling water, he did not learn anything except that it was a fine day and that they were heading South. He tried various subjects of conversation with his warder, but as the man made no answer at all Forgan gave it up.

At the end of ten minutes or so Forgan heard the three men coming back, there were voices outside the door and as it opened he caught the end of a sentence.

"——wrong man, our leader will be seriously annoyed."

They were speaking German which he understood perfectly well, perhaps they thought he did not as all previous conversation had been in French. They came in together and sat down again at the table.

"Listen," said the Chairman. "Your extraordinary story may be true, we have decided to give you the benefit of the doubt. You will be put ashore this evening and you can find your own way home. Let this experience be a warning to you not to play the fool in future with matters which are beyond your comprehension."

"What?" said Forgan blankly. "Are you annoyed because I pulled the legs of the Commies? I should have thought you——"

"You must understand that you have grossly inconvenienced us. Our organisation, which labours for the benefit of mankind, is not to be made the subject of practical so-called jokes by feather-witted Englishmen."

"That's your own fault," said Forgan indignantly, "nobody asked you to join the party. If you hadn't——"

"Silence. No arguing."

"You owe me an apology," insisted Forgan, and one of the other men broke into a laugh.

"If I may say so," he said, "I think the honours are about even. We have seriously inconvenienced each other, have we not?"

"Silly, isn't it," agreed Forgan, "when you consider that we're really on the same side?"

"You will sign this paper, please," said the Chairman, unbending a little. "It is only to say that you have not been ill-treated."

"Oh, certainly. Quite true, I haven't. Bunks clean and comfortable and food excellent. A little more fresh air wouldn't have come amiss, but one can't have everything, can one? Where do I sign?"

The Chairman pushed the paper towards him and Forgan ran his eye hastily down it. "I, William Forgan of Clerkenwell Road, London, householder, certify that I have no complaint whatever to make in any respect. Signed: \_\_\_\_\_"

The Chairman was trying to make his fountain-pen work, he shook it with no result.

"It wants refilling," said one of the others. "Take mine."

"No need," said Forgan, taking out three of his ball-point pens in a bunch. "Try one of my samples. I am a commercial traveller, gentlemen, and I carry my samples on me. I couldn't do that if I travelled in kitchen stoves, could I?" He signed his name with a flourish and wrote the date underneath. "They work very well, don't they? May I have the honour of presenting you with one?"

The Chairman hesitated but one of his friends spoke to him in a low voice and in German.

"Better take it. He might feel insulted and we don't want to annoy him too much."

"Thank you," said the Chairman grudgingly, "they appear to be quite useful."

"Take all three," said Forgan handsomely. "You may not be able to get refills very readily till we get our European markets organised. The firm pay for them, I don't," he added with a laugh.

He left them lying on the table and stepped back. "How soon am I going ashore?"

"In about two hours' time."

"Oh yes. And where?"

"You will soon find out when you get ashore."

"I see," said Forgan with another strident laugh. "One good joke deserves another, eh?"

"That is right."

"My passport, please?"

"Oh no," said the Chairman, "that is part of the joke."

"But it will be most inconvenient——"

"Exactly. That is the joke. Take him back to his cabin, Hans."

Forgan went, protesting, but to no effect, for he did not get back his passport. He was not really particularly worried because he had been allowed to keep everything else he carried including a fair amount in French money. Much can be done by a really experienced traveller who has plenty of money even if he finds himself unfortunately bereft of his passport; besides, if they were going to put him ashore on French soil he would not have to cross a frontier on his way back to Paris. He had, of course, no packing to do since he had no luggage; when the cabin steward came in with a meal on a tray Forgan greeted him with marked cheerfulness.

"I suppose you've heard I'm going to leave you shortly?"

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes indeed. They're putting me ashore in a couple of hours' time. I must say I shall be very glad to stretch my legs again."

"Yes, sir. No doubt."

"Although this cabin is very comfortable and I must add that you have been most civil and attentive, still the space is a little cramped for an active man."

"Certainly, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Oh, by the way. I'm sorry I'm not in a position to—er—express my appreciation of your services in the usual manner, but I have rather a nice ball-point pen which I should like you to have, if you will. It writes quite well, look." Forgan scribbled on the back of an envelope, replaced the cap on the pen and gave it to the man. "I travel in these, you see. Being samples, they are sure to be good."

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure. I did have a pen like this once before but I lost it. This looks a better one than what I had. Thank you, sir."

"You're welcome," said Forgan genially. "By the way, how far down are we now?"

"How far down——?"

"Down the coast."

"I couldn't say, sir, I'm sure," said the man and his eyes shifted.

"Oh well, never mind," said Forgan, adding "Liar," after the man had left the room.

When he came back half an hour later to take away the empty tray, he said: "Excuse me, sir——"

"What is it?"

"The Chief Engineer, sir, was admiring my pen and as you said they was samples you was carrying we was wondering if perhaps you had another one you could spare——"

"Certainly. Delighted," said Forgan with complete truth. "Please present this one to the Chief Engineer with my compliments." He handed over the last of his two-day pens, adding: "I've still got one left to show people, so that's all right."

"Thank you, sir, indeed. The Chief Engineer will be pleased. I hope as you didn't mind me asking——"

"Not at all—not at all——"

"Seemed a bit forward-like——"

"No, no."

"But I said to the Chief Engineer that you seemed such a nice gentleman I was sure you wouldn't take offence."

"Of course not," said Forgan blandly, "what a suggestion!"

About an hour later he heard sounds of activity on deck over his head, trampling feet and sharp orders. "Getting a boat out," said Forgan, "I hope," for he was not yet quite convinced that he was going to be released alive. A few moments later the beat of the engine changed, they were going at half-speed. This lasted for another quarter of an hour and there was another change, the boat slowed suddenly as the engines were put into reverse to take the way off.

"They wouldn't stop the ship," said Forgan, reassuring himself, "if they were going to throw me overboard."

Silence followed, broken only by creaking noises outside his portholes. Lowering a boat. Now he ought to be able to see the name on the ship.

But when the two Germans who had originally kidnapped him came into the room, the first thing they did was to blindfold him.

"Here, what's all this——"

"It is all right. It is only that we think it wise that you should not see too much. You shall have it off again quite soon."

He was led up on deck, he could feel the fresh air blowing about him. He was helped carefully down a rope ladder into a small boat which was rising and falling smoothly. He was guided to a seat.

"There," said a voice in the guttural French which they all spoke on that ship, "now you're all right. Calm as a mill-pool, you are in luck. No, don't touch your bandage yet."

A small motor started with a splutter, the outboard motor, of course. They began to move forward, picking up speed. Forgan could see a very little by looking straight down his nose, the light seemed to have faded and certainly the sunlight had gone. The boat chugged on. Presently one man said something Forgan did not catch, another voice agreed and the bandage was taken off his eyes. It was getting dusk, the sun had already set, leaving faint pink streaks in the western sky. The yacht was end-on to him as she lay and there was nothing to be made of her outline; ahead of him there was a long stretch of sandy beach and a few lights low down on the shore. There were only the two Germans in the boat with him.

One of them got up and went forward to peer over the bows; he signalled with his hand and the other throttled the engine back. The one in the bows pulled the boathook towards him and began sounding with it.

"Very shallow?" asked Forgan.

"Very. The beach runs out a long way. In fact, you will soon have to get out and walk, we cannot take you much nearer. Happily, the night is warm."

"Oh, quite," said Forgan, "though I imagine it would have been all the same if it had been freezing."

"It seldom freezes here, though it can be rough."

"Stop her," said the man in the bows, and the other obeyed.

"This," he said, "is where we say good-bye. Would you like to take your shoes off? It is only about knee-deep."

Forgan took off shoes and socks, rolled up his trousers and stepped carefully out of the boat. The water was not particularly cold and the sand was smooth and hard.

"Thank you," he said. "Good-bye."

He started to wade ashore and did not look round when the outboard motor speeded up again and the sound receded into the distance.

"You know the rest," he said to Hambleton. "I should think it was at least a quarter of a mile to the beach and it seemed twice as far. However, I got there in the end and sat down to put my shoes and socks on again. By that time the yacht was a mere blob on the skyline. I strolled up the beach and found that dear old man who sold me the cycle he'd stolen from the police-station specially for my benefit. Dear old man! I should like to see him again some day. Do you think I ever shall?"

"Hope is one of the Christian virtues," said Hambleton drily. "Tell me, did you think that this boat, ship, yacht or whatever she was, is habitually used for the transport of prisoners?"

"I do, yes. The bar outside my cabin door——"

"I was thinking of that."

"It had been there some time. I noticed that when I was taken back after my interview. The screw-heads had been painted over and it wasn't fresh paint, also there were marks on the door where the bar scraped when it was moved. I mean, the thing had obviously been there some time, it wasn't added hurriedly for my benefit. The paint on the glass of the portholes was not new, it was blistered in places and just beginning to peel at the edges. No, that cabin is a permanent lock-up and has been used before. Whether it will ever be again is another question."

"Your fire-bomb pens."

"There were five of them. They are due to go off to-day; some time this evening if they are all as accurate as the half-hour one I set off in the police-station."

"Of course," said Hambleton, "if they have reached wherever the place is they were going to and if the crew all go ashore taking their presents with them, the yacht will be none the worse."

"No, but there ought to be some rather spectacular fires in some little seaport town. Man, if you'd seen the one in the hop-shop! It wasn't just a blaze, it was Fire Itself. I tell you, it frightened me."

"They should be worth a paragraph in the papers, anyway," said Campbell. "Spontaneous Combustion in Trousers. Are Chief Engineers Inflammable? Mysterious Fire in Captain's Wardrobe. He Was Always Fiery, Says Wife."

"It might seem incredible," said Forgan rather anxiously, "that one could spend three days on a boat and never find out what her name was or even what she looked like. But it was pitch dark when I went aboard and then they blindfolded me——"

"Exactly," said Hambleton crisply. "They didn't mean you to have any information to give about her so you haven't, that's all. If they hadn't heard that Russian broadcast you'd have stayed in the cabin till you reached port."

"Surely," said Campbell, "they must have had their doubts before. I mean, anyone at that meeting who really knew anything about Communism must have seen that there was something wrong. They were at the meeting to start with, weren't they?"

"They were," said Hambleton acidly, "I saw them myself. They went out early, after having had a good look at both of you for identification purposes. At this point, Forgan and Campbell, I am going to point out that the whole trouble arose because neither of you took pains to learn the simplest thing about your subject. I should have thought that every educated adult in the whole world knew by now that the Jugo-Slav brand of Communism is very different from the Russian variety, and that it is the Russian variety which is being disseminated all over the world. If you had merely given the usual boring address on the usual lines, there would have been no riot and no confusion, the police arrangements would have gone according to plan and a whole lot of time and trouble would have been saved. When I say I want a certain thing done in a certain way, that is what I want and not a lot of tom-fool practical joking because you think it will be more amusing that way. You also altered your appearance without warning me, although it must have been obvious that the police would rely on my description."

He paused to light a cigarette, but as neither of his hearers said anything he continued.

"I am not here to be amused, I am here to find Pavel Dinnik, and you will get no bouquets from the Department for wasting three valuable days. I hope your fire-clues do turn up trumps, Forgan, for if not you can both return to London. I am doing a job, not running a kindergarten. Now, if you will excuse me, I have some writing to do."

The door closed gently and Hambleton found himself alone.

## CHAPTER XI

### HOTEL ARCADIA

Hambleton saw nothing of Forgan and Campbell that night or the following morning. When he passed through the lounge on his way to a rather late lunch they were sitting in the far corner surrounded by a lot of dishevelled newspapers. Hambleton knew that the expected news was not in the papers for he had already seen them himself. He merely nodded and passed on, before he had finished the first course the model-makers had quietly disappeared.

On the following morning there were paragraphs in most of the Paris papers on the subject of an outbreak of

fires at Flores del Sol, a small fishing village on the Biscayan coast of Spain, near Gijón.

Hambledon put down the papers for a moment's thought. Flores del Sol was the name on that hotel card he had himself found in the pockets of the blond young man who had been stabbed to death at Montmartre. The Hotel Arcadia, yes. So the card was significant and not accidental. He picked up his newspapers again.

Some of the paragraphs were brief and dignified and some were vaguely alarmist, but one newspaper had apparently been so fortunate as to have one of its staff somewhere in the neighbourhood at the time. This correspondent, Hambledon felt, had taken off his coat, squared his elbows and got down to it properly. He might be on holiday—he probably was—but this was a piece of cake. The item was headed: "Trouble among the Flowers."

Flores del Sol, that is, The Sunflowers, is the charming name of a fishing village on the romantic Biscayan coast of Spain. Normally its peaceful simple-hearted inhabitants have little to worry them but the monstrous rollers of the dread Bay thundering upon their coasts and the piscine vagaries of the sardine shoals which provide them with their frugal livelihood. To-day, however, Flores del Sol awakes to find itself in the news, for the dread hand of Arson is at work in its cobbled streets.

Late in the evening of the day before yesterday, consternation was caused in the harbour area by a sudden outbreak of fire in one of the upper rooms of a café which normally provides amusement and recreation for the less cultured Florians. The fire apparently burst out suddenly and with such inconceivable violence that such persons as happened to be upon the upper floors of the house had to cast themselves from the windows in order to escape burning. Several of them are said to have lost all their possessions. Scarcely had the population of Flores recovered from this shock when a fresh alarm was raised, a vessel at anchor in Flores' little bay was seen to be blazing furiously. Flames leapt the height of the masthead to incarnadine the water and paint with crimson the sombre hills around.

Half an hour later an even worse terror smote the hearts of Flores, already trembling. Their great hotel, the Arcadia, their pride and joy, which brings to this secluded spot the glitter and glamour of the gay world beyond its hills, was also seen to be on fire. The Florian fire-brigade, already perspiring and exhausted, rushed up the hill to where the great edifice smiles down upon its humbler neighbours, only to find that its overstrained equipment of a truly pastoral simplicity had given way under the strain imposed upon it.

Fortunately the Hotel Arcadia includes in its magnificent equipment a number of highly effective chemical fire-extinguishers and the three separate fires which started there were speedily overcome. It is understood that all three occurred in an unoccupied wing so that no detriment to the hotel's luxurious accommodation has been suffered.

There is great discontent in the town concerning its inadequate fire-fighting resources and the Mayor and Town Council are having to answer some inconvenient questions. As the triennial Council Elections are imminent, it will easily be seen that the fires could not have come at a more awkward time.

The harbour café, which was the first victim, was completely burned out and a collection is being attempted for the homeless. The vessel which was on fire in the bay burned to the waterline and sank, happily there was no one on board at the time. She was the Diesel yacht *Venganza*, owned by *Señor Kircher*, the proprietor of the Arcadia, an Argentinian.

As for the origin of the fires, who knows? Members of political parties tend to ascribe the crimes to their political opponents, while those with no particular party affiliations say, simply and frankly, that it was the Devil. Who shall say they are wrong? He was at home in the First Garden, we are told, why not among the sunflowers of Flores?

Hambledon drew a long breath of relief. Here at last was something definite. Three fires in a town, or two in a town plus one on a yacht, might conceivably be coincidence, but not five, especially as the name of the place and its hotel were those on the Montmartre victim's card. Flores del Sol was the place to which the kidnapped Communists

were taken, and they were taken there and not just dropped overboard on passage or Forgan would not have survived. What happened to them when they got there was another story, perhaps they underwent some kind of educational disinfection or perhaps they were just knocked on the head as soon as the Chief Organiser—Señor Kircher or another—had satisfied himself that he had the right man. Hambleton had been favourably impressed by the conscientious way in which Forgan had been put ashore; it would have been much easier to have dropped him overboard and safer, too, than letting him go home with his story. It was quite true that two of this gang had murdered the juggler, but that looked more like a private vengeance than the execution of an order.

Vengeance, that was the name of the yacht. Well, she would carry no more passengers in the darkened cabin with the bar across the door. "The little Revenge went down by the island crags," murmured Hambleton to himself, "to be lost evermore in the main.' I wonder why he named her Vengeance? That might be the key to the whole story, if one knew that."

He lifted the house telephone and asked whether Forgan and Campbell were in the hotel. They were, good. Sitting in the hall at that moment. Splendid. Let them come up to his room.

They came in together, still looking a little sheepish, but Hambleton greeted them cheerfully and asked if they had seen the long account by Our Correspondent. They said they had, it was nice, wasn't it?

"You two will go to Flores del Sol as Argentinians, you've got Argentine passports still, haven't you? You will be just back from the Argentine, I think you'd better go to London, fly out to Lisbon and pick up a Highland line boat there for Vigo. Or something like that. They will fix all that up for you in London. I expect there's an inn of some kind or you can get rooms. You will think up a reason for going to Flores del Sol, your forefathers came from there or something, you can select some from the tombstones in the churchyard. You might find some cousins in the place. I shall arrive there myself shortly, I don't know exactly how or when, but I hear from London that there is a faintly possible line that might be worth following. I am rather curious to know why, if that fellow is right, three fires broke out in an unoccupied wing. Must be a big place."

"Perhaps some of the tourist agencies here have some particulars of the Arcadia," suggested Forgan.

"Possibly. Well, the sooner you get away the better. Take the first London plane available, isn't there one about mid-day? I'll get through to London on the telephone and they'll be expecting you. I'm going out now to see Letord. We shall meet at Flores in a few days' time. You will, probably get there first. Anything you want to ask?"

"I don't think so, thanks," said Forgan.

"Oh, Forgan, be very careful if you come across any of the yacht crew. They had a good look at your passport photograph, remember. Before you grew all that hair."

Forgan nodded. "I will, of course. It should be easy to find out where they are now. I mean, Flores will talk about those fires for years."

"You will know how to find us, no doubt," said Campbell. "We just hang about the place until we see you."

"That's right. Anything else? Well, best of luck."

"Come on, Campbell. You can pack while I go to the Airlines offices."

"I have packed," said Campbell, "as soon as I saw those notices in the papers. The hotel bills here——"

"I'll see to those," said Hambleton.

"Thank you very much. We will meet among the sunflowers. Good-bye."

Hambleton went to see Letord and told him all the news.

"Flores del Sol," said Letord. "That was on that card in the pocket of that young man——"

"Whom the juggler stabbed up at Montmartre," finished Hambledon. "Did you ever find out who the victim was?"

"Never. It follows, does it not, that he had no roots in Paris. No home here, no relations. Presumably he was in rooms somewhere, or a small hotel. His friends would explain that he had been unexpectedly called away and pay his bill for him. Why should his landlady suspect anything? She would not, of course. We buried him, that is the end. You are going to this place, Flores del Sol, yourself?"

"Of course."

"And taking your two assistants with you?" added Letord in a casual and detached manner.

"That is so, yes."

Letord nodded and dismissed the subject. "I wish you all the good luck there is in the world in your search," he said. "You will bring back Pavel Dinnik if you can find him, I suppose. And the others who have been taken from time to time?"

"Good heavens, no, I am not a Communist-rescuing expedition. Give me Pavel Dinnik and you can keep the rest, I shall say. At least, that's the general idea."

Hambledon tidied up loose ends in Paris, packed his suit-cases and returned to London that afternoon by air in time to attend a meeting at the Foreign Office. At this meeting were several friends and at least one man of such public importance that even Tommy Hambledon called him "Sir." He heard Hambledon's story with the patient courtesy for which he is distinguished and then leaned forward in his chair with his elbows upon the table and his fingertips tapping lightly together.

"We have managed to get the United Nations Conference postponed, as you know, Mr. Hambledon. It is to take place at the Palais de Chaillot four weeks from to-morrow. I know the time is short but it will not be possible to have it postponed again. I am going to Paris myself four weeks from to-day to attend it and it will take place then whether Pavel Dinnik is there or not."

"I understand, sir," said Hambledon.

"Believe me, I don't want to be unreasonable or to demand more from you than is humanly possible——"

Hambledon made deprecatory noises.

"But you know very well how much hangs on this. If Dinnik has to be replaced by some other of his colleagues suffering under a sense of grievance——"

He made a small eloquent gesture of frustration and rose to his feet.

"You need no pep talk from me," he added with his charming smile. "I really said all that to get it off my own chest. We temporary holders of office soon learn not to dictate to Tommy Hambledon." He laughed, laid a hand on Tommy's shoulder in passing, and went out of the room.

"Well now," said Hambledon, "let's get down to brass tacks. This shadow of a possibility of a line you said you have, what is it?"

"This faint glimmer of a lead," said Charles Denton, "comes in a report upon the German colony in the Argentine. What should we do without that German colony? Don't tell me, I know. Well, it seems that some or one of them have or has been recruiting men for a job of some sort. Our informant had no idea what the job was, all he knows is that one recruit has been enrolled, a certain Karl Ardweg. He sailed from Buenos Aires on the Spanish steamer *Floria del Oceano*, a cargo boat carrying also a dozen or fifteen passengers, and he is booked to Vigo. That is, actually, her most northerly port on this run. She puts in at Las Palmas in three days' time."

"Any passengers leaving the ship there?"

"Three or four, yes. Further about Karl Ardweg," drawled Denton. "No idea what the blighter's horrid past contains but it seems he's blotted his copybook in Spain at some time so he's going in under another name on a false passport. If so be as his real destination is Flores del Sol——"

"Passport only got a Spanish visa?" asked Hambleton. "No others?"

"No others. Is it worth trying?"

"Why not?" said Hambleton. "Even if he proves to have nothing to do with our lot, that would still be quite a good way for me to get into Spain."

\* \* \* \* \*

The little town of Flores del Sol lies about the foot of a steep valley which runs through the hills down to the sea, in this instance the Bay of Biscay. Approaching from the sea, one would think the ship's Captain determined to cast away his ship, for there is nothing to be seen but rocky hills with the sea beating at their feet, a dangerous coast in this area. As one draws nearer to the land a break is seen in the cliffs; the ship comes round a point and through a narrow channel to disclose, with dramatic suddenness, the valley of Flores with a river brawling down and the colour-washed houses huddled together round an almost land-locked bay. Above the town, on a ledge of the hill-side north of the bay, is a large building of two storeys and so long that it looks low, the Hotel Arcadia.

Towards evening of a clear and sunny day, there were rather more people upon the quays than usual, the harbour-master's office was open and men were standing about waiting for something. Several of the town's ancient men who normally sit upon seats under the trees in the square were leaning against walls on the quay or sitting upon bollards. The *Star of the Asturias* was coming in, she had been seen from the point turning in towards the bay. She was a small cargo steamer which worked along the coast, bringing goods for the hotel mainly, and also for the town, from Santander and other places. Since there was no railway nearer than Gijon, it was easier to send supplies by sea.

The quayside audience looked towards the overlapping points of land which masked the harbour entrance. A small, tubby and rather dirty steamer came into sight, she had high sides, a shallow well-deck forward, a bridge and one stumpy black funnel.

She came slowly across the harbour; almost at once it was possible to see two men, with hats on their heads and suit-cases beside them, standing on the well-deck. As she came nearer still there floated across the water the sound of voices raised in anger.

The steamer approached the quay, moving more and more slowly, and it was soon possible not only to see what was happening but also to hear it. There was the Captain on the bridge together with a man at the wheel who may be disregarded as he did not say anything, there was an engineer who kept popping his head out of a porthole just below the bridge and disappearing again like a rabbit, and below him again the two men on the well-deck. There were also sundry sailors standing about with ropes and grinning widely. The gap of shining water between ship and quay closed gradually.

"Call yourselves engineers," the head at the porthole was saying, "I wouldn't trust you with a steam roller. I wouldn't trust you with a wooden engine on the nursery floor."

"That's what you got your training on, wasn't it?" said the taller of the two men on the well-deck.

The Chief Engineer said that all they knew about nurseries was the Home for Abandoned Children they had been brought up in. Sons of Satan, he added thoughtfully.

The shorter of the two men said that even that was better than the Home for Lost Dogs which had attended to the Chief Engineer's infancy.

The Chief Engineer vanished for a moment and returned with a supply of lumps of coal which he hurled at his tormentors. They dodged, the lumps burst and the fragments skittered about the decks. He added that a few days of their services would wreck a battleship and that his engines would never be the same again. As for his engine-room

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"Put a few goats in it," said the taller one. "It'll soon be home-like again."

The ship came gently against the quayside, ropes were flung and hauled in and mooring-cables looped over bollards. The two men skipped ashore and turned for a parting shot, but the Captain forestalled them.

"If I ever see you two within a mile of this ship again," he said, leaning over the side of the bridge, "I'll——"

"Sign the pledge," said the short man.

"You, Chiefy," said the taller, "don't you go breathing anywhere near the furnaces. You'll blow up."

They picked up their little suit-cases, plaited straw ones held together with spun-yarn, and walked sedately away. They spoke to each other, hesitated, and approached an elderly mariner propped against a bollard.

"We want a hotel," said one. "Not pricey, you know, but good. Not that place up there," with a jerk of his chin towards the Hotel Arcadia.

"At least the wine should be good," said the other. He stuck his tongue out and squinted at it. "Shrivelled," he said, "absolutely shrivelled."

"Come with me," said the mariner, setting a smart pace. "I know what you wants, come with me."

They went away and the audience relaxed all together as audiences do when the show is over.

The elderly mariner led the newcomers to a small Spanish hotel in the town, the Albergó del Espuela de Oro, the Golden Spur, a shabby cheerful place full of chattering slatternly servants. Here they slaked their thirst—and the elderly mariner's—had a meal and engaged a room. They told a long and indignant story of grief and humiliation suffered at the hands of a tyrannous Chief Engineer, they had only joined the ship, they said, out of pity because she was short-handed. They were going to work the ship to Vigo where the skipper could pick up some more engineers, and what was their reward? To be tossed ashore at half an hour's notice in a place where they knew no one and where there was probably no work for two industrious, honest and highly-skilled engineers. Truly, there was no gratitude in man.

"It is the sea," said the landlord. He had seen a roll of money in the hands of one of them and he was correspondingly friendly. "It is the sea which warps the hearts of men. I, to serve you, when I was a young man and foolish, signed on for a voyage in this very ship, all round the coast to Barcelona and back. I knew, after that, that I would never be a seaman, I have never been to sea since, not even in a fishing-boat."

"You are wise," said the shorter of the two strangers. "What it is, to have discrimination."

"I will tell you about seamen," said the landlord. "It is the little hard-shelled crabs of the sea, they crawl on board in the night and eat out the seamen's hearts and live there——" he smote his chest—"instead. Thus do seamen become as they are."

At that point the Captain of the *Star of the Asturias* rolled into the Golden Spur for a drink. The two engineers excused themselves hastily and went up to their room to unpack, they said. They sat down and grinned happily at each other.

"That went off very well, Forgan," said the red-haired one.

"Yes, didn't it? No one who saw that performance would believe we wanted to come here."

"You could always trust old Cristobal," said Campbell, referring to the Captain, a friend of many years' standing.

"He shouldn't have winked at us just now," objected Forgan. "Unwise. Inartistic."

"Nobody noticed it, it's all right. This doesn't seem to be much of a town, does it? There's only one place that

even looks like finding work for men like us."

"The Hotel Arcadia," said Forgan. "Well, that's all right, isn't it?"

"Couldn't be better," said Campbell.

## CHAPTER XII

### SPONGE-BAG TROUSERS

Hambledon was flown out to Gran Canary and booked in at an hotel in the town of Las Palmas before going down to the seaport where the ships come in, the Puerto de la Luz. Here he found the offices of the Spanish Gloria Shipping Company who owned no less than three ships all named the Glory of something or other. The offices consisted of a small room partitioned off with matchboarding inside the Gloria Company's warehouse by the Santa Catalina Mole and the staff was one elderly clerk. He made no difficulty about Hambledon's passage on the Glory of the Ocean; on the contrary, he was very pleased about it. Hambledon exuded an aura of wealth and importance and such passengers did not often come his way. Certainly the *Señor* could have a cabin replete with every luxury, of course it would have a fitted hand-basin. Well, no, not hot water, cold only was laid on but the steward existed only to bring hot water in large quantities whenever the *Señor* desired it. Every attention would be paid to his lightest wish. The *Gloria del Oceano* was due in to-morrow about mid-day, she would be alongside the Mole for about six hours to discharge and take on cargo; if the distinguished *Señor* would come aboard shortly before she sailed he would be spared the noise and bustle incidental upon—exactly, exactly. The clerk would charge himself with all that, he would himself speak to the Captain to ensure every attention——

The *Gloria del Oceano* chugged out of harbour next evening just as the sun was setting and the short twilight swept across the sea. Last of all the glow faded from the high tops of the island hills and the lighted town sank slowly from sight over the curve of the world.

Hambledon went down to dinner where, naturally, he sat at the Captain's table, and looked round at his fellow passengers. There were about a dozen all told but none of them looked in the least like a German with a regrettable past and a mysterious future. However, when the meal had reached the stage of indifferent cheese and quite marvellous fruit, the saloon door opened and a middle-aged man came in. He was short, running to fat about the neck and bald on the top of his head; he bowed formally to the Captain and sat down at a small table by himself. Hambledon cheered up, he had begun to wonder whether this passenger had gone astray in the South Atlantic or changed his mind at Pernambuco. This looked like the right thing.

Hambledon raised one eyebrow at the Captain who leaned towards him and murmured that that was the *Señor* Schmit, a wealthy German from Buenos Aires going to Spain on business.

"Indeed," said Hambledon. "I must make his acquaintance, we might have interests or even friends in common."

"He may consider you good enough to speak with," said the Captain gloomily. "As for me and the rest of the passengers, we do not exist. One would think us a crowd of peons and I the head *mestizo* for all the notice he takes of us."

"Oh, really," said Hambledon. "How very odd."

"You see, he sits alone," went on the Captain. "That was not my suggestion. I asked him to sit at my table and he refused. Did you ever hear of anyone refusing to sit at the Captain's table? You are an English merchant, the shipping clerk told me. I have no doubt you could buy both him and his business out of your petty cash account and not notice it, eh? Yet when I ask you to sit here at my right hand, you come."

"I regard it as an honour," said Hambleton, and rightly.

The Captain bowed and lifted his glass. "Yet, when I ask him, he says '*Danke*'. That is German for thank you, is it not? 'I prefer to sit alone at meals.' So I tell the stewards to put him over there, may all San Antonio's devils tear him!"

After which it was no surprise that Hambleton, making a casually friendly overture to Herr Schmit on deck next morning, found himself being heavily snubbed.

"All right," said Tommy after the German's retreating back, "you wait, my boy. You'll pay for that whoever you are."

Hambleton had started operations as soon as he came on board by calling up the steward, giving him a thumping tip and telling him that there was some more where that came from if he proved attentive, willing and intelligent. The steward, a foxy-faced little man with eyes too near a long sharp nose, said that he only existed for the purpose of fulfilling the distinguished English caballero's every demand whatever it might be.

"You'd better," said Tommy.

He sent for the man in the afternoon, the meeting with Herr Schmit having taken place in the morning.

"Come into the cabin and shut the door. I want to talk to you."

"Always to serve the *Señor*——"

"Now then. I am going to tell you something and if you tell anyone what I say you will bitterly regret it."

"I am so deeply honoured by the *Señor's* confidence that death itself would be preferable to betraying it."

"I'm not interested in your death but I can make your life very uncomfortable for you, believe me. What, exactly, was it that happened in Vigo last trip, or was it the trip before?"

As Tommy said afterwards, the remark was a fairly safe one. Stewards on small ships do suffer from boredom and take steps to alleviate it when they go ashore, also their enforced correctness of manner while on duty must bring its own reaction and finally this particular steward was not a good type. If it had not been Vigo it would have been Bilbao or Lisbon or Cadiz or Buenos Aires, he was sure to have been in some mischief somewhere. However, the result of this arrow at a venture surprised even Tommy, the man turned first white and then green and wilted at the knees.

"Dear me," said Hambleton to himself, watching this with interest, "whatever has the fellow done? Committed a murder?"

"I—I beg the *Señor's* indulgence—the affair to which the *Señor* refers was the merest drunken frolic——"

"That is as it may be," said Tommy darkly. "We will let the subject drop for the moment. Now then. I am, at the moment, passing as an English business man, a fruit importer. In point of fact I am nothing of the kind and not even English. I am a detective of the *Seguridad Extranjera* in Madrid." He paused for a moment to allow this to sink in and then continued. "There is a man on this boat who is suspected of being concerned in undesirable activities, I refer to the German who calls himself Schmit."

The steward, who seemed to have been struck speechless, merely nodded.

"I want to go through his cabin while he is not in it. During dinner to-night, for example."

"It is simple, *Señor*. I will speak to the saloon steward who is a friend of mine and was, in fact, concerned with me in that trivial affair of which the——"

"Trivial?" thundered Hambleton, "you call that a trivial offence——"

"For Heaven's sake, Excellency!"

"Be more careful, scoundrel! Get on with what you were saying."

"My friend the saloon steward," stammered the man, who seemed so frightened that he could not speak steadily, "will delay the service so that the meal shall take a long time. I, to serve your honour, am the bedroom steward and I will open that wicked man's door for you, I have a pass-key. Anything in this world that I can do will be done eagerly, *Señor*."

"See that it is," said Hambleton. "You may go."

Hambleton went through the Herr Schmit's cabin very thoroughly and found only two objects of interest. One was the passport which was certainly a fake and not a very good one, the other was something flat, like folded paper, under the lining of one of Herr Schmit's suit-cases. Tommy examined it closely, the lining had been cut and stuck together again.

He glanced at his watch, even the slowest meal must end at last or the impatient Herr Schmit might become impatient and omit his coffee. Hambleton tidied up after himself, switched out the light and went out to find the steward twittering in the gangway.

"I thought your honour would never have done——"

"Silence, fool," said Hambleton magnificently, and stalked away.

On the following night he went to the cabin again with a sharp pen-knife, a tube of adhesive and some sheets of blank paper folded to approximately the size of that which was concealed. A quarter of an hour later he was back in his cabin with a letter in an envelope bearing neither name nor address on the outside. Hambleton slit it open.

*My dear Gottfried,*

*The bearer of this letter is Karl Ardweg, late of Munich, though that is not the name which appears on his passport for reasons which he can tell you himself. He is rather old for the job but seems in other respects satisfactory. Your insistence upon men who could speak several languages in addition to German has limited the field of choice. I will try to send another man as soon as possible, I have one or two in view.*

*I hope you are keeping well, as we are. You are doing good work and have all our hopes and wishes for your success.*

*Frieda sends her affectionate regards, in which I join.*

*Your devoted brother  
Hugo.*

*Herr Gottfried Leiden  
Hotel Arcadia  
Flores del Sol  
Asturias.  
Espagna.*

"A long shot, Denton," murmured Hambleton, "but it came off. There's no doubt, Charles, you have a nose for things."

He put the letter carefully away upon his own person, drafted a message in code to an address in London and took it to the wireless operator for immediate dispatch. It gave some information calculated to be of interest to the Spanish immigration authorities about a man called Schmit whose passport was of dubious validity. After that he

went along to the bar and drank a silent but warm-hearted toast to Denton's nose. If only the Spanish authorities would play——

The next two or three days before the *Gloria del Oceano* was due in at Vigo passed without incident. They put in at Lisbon for a few hours to land cargo and half a dozen passengers, the dining-saloon looked half empty that night and the morose Herr Schmit more isolated than ever since there were so many vacant places at the long table.

The steward seemed to be affected by the memory of his crime, whatever it was, much as one in need of a dentist is affected by his aching tooth. He cringed at the slightest allusion to it and yet he could not leave the thing alone. Hambledon realised at last that the man was longing to tell him about it, probably in the hope of getting some sort of pardon from one whom he believed to be high in the ranks of the Spanish Police. Eventually, on their last night aboard, the steward brought hot water to his cabin at dressing time before dinner and remarked in a melancholy voice that to-morrow morning they would be in Vigo.

"I sincerely hope so," said Hambledon, dropping his jacket on the floor for the man to pick up.

"A beautiful place, Vigo. A charming city." The steward sighed gustily. "The theatres, the cinemas, the cafés, the women."

"Well, you'll be able to go ashore to-morrow night and enjoy yourself, won't you? Or do you think you'd better not?"

"It is plain that the *Señor* has a good heart, in spite of his profession. Would your honour have the infinite kindness to advise me——"

"What?"

"Whether it will be safe for me to go ashore?"

Hambledon looked sternly at him. "The story I heard was not such as would encourage me to revisit the place where it happened if I had been concerned in it. Nevertheless, it is possible that the account I received was exaggerated. Tell me yourself what actually happened and speak the truth, *por Dios!*"

"I should not dare to lie to your honour who knows all things already! The truth is this. Porfirio, the saloon steward, and I were ashore on our last free night before the ship sailed from Vigo the last time and, with respect, we got drunk. We were strolling about enjoying the air when we met a tourist, *Señor*. He also had been tasting our Spanish wines until he was overcome. He was worse than we were, for all he wanted was to lie down and go to sleep, while we were wide awake. *Señor*, he wore the most beautiful trousers of a very neat black and white check for all the world like your honour's sponge-bag there."

"Well?"

"I coveted his trousers, *Señor*. There was a builder's yard near by where we met him, with a large heap of sand in one corner. We supported him towards the heap of sand and he lay down upon it comfortably and slept like the dead. *Señor*, I acknowledge with shame that I had his trousers and then Porfirio desired his coat. His underclothes were of silk. Not to weary your honour, by the time we had done he was as he was born. We could not leave him like that almost within view of the street, decency forbade it. Humanity demanded that we, who had caused his condition, should remedy it. We are not barbarians, Porfirio and I, we are men of culture."

"I knew there was something the matter with you as soon as I saw you," said Tommy Hambledon, pointedly removing his cuff-links himself.

"*Perdone?*"

"Never mind. What did you do about it?"

"There was a poster stuck up upon the door, it was not firmly attached and we tore it down. We wrapped it round him, it was not large enough but we did our best. We tied it round him with string. Then, when all was tidy

and discreet and not before, we looked at the poster. *Señor*, it was a Communist poster!"

"Horrible! What did you do then?"

"*Señor*, we ran like rabbits back to the ship and we have not set foot ashore in Vigo since. Your honour sees, we were guilty of posting the thing in a conspicuous place and we do not wish to go to prison for life."

Hambledon was not familiar with the penalties imposed in Spain for posting Communist propaganda, they were probably stiff but "prison for life" sounded a little excessive.

"And besides, *Señor*," went on the steward, "it is true that I still have his trousers."

"I should think," said Hambledon judicially, "that unless you see the police obviously looking for you, it would be safe to go ashore. Provided, of course, that you do not wear his trousers nor Porfirio his coat."

"As though we should! It is the poster which troubles us."

"But you tell me you tore it down," said Hambledon, fitting his safety-razor together.

"So Porfirio said, *Señor*, but as your honour sees, we only removed it in order to put it in an even more noticeable position. That is posting, is it not?"

"Technically, yes. But is there anything to connect you with that crime? Did anyone see you?"

"Not to our knowledge, but someone must have been there since your honour knew all about it."

"No. The story I heard concerned quite a different matter, though equally serious. If you have told me the truth, my information must relate to some other steward, not you."

"*Señor*" said the man earnestly, "apart from that my whole life has been as unspotted as a newly-blown lily in the gardens of Paradise. You give me new life, you renew in me the age of innocence, you——"

"Oh, get out!" said Tommy Hambledon.

On the next day, at about mid-day, the *Gloria del Oceano* came up the estuary to Vigo to tie up alongside the quay. Hambledon looked up at the terraced streets clinging to the steep hillside above him and said to himself that certainly as far as its site was concerned the town of Vigo could have few rivals. He was standing near the place where the gangway would be run out and behind him was his steward with the luggage, for Hambledon had his own reasons for being among the first ashore. The six or eight Spanish passengers were standing near by, in a group, talking volubly; behind them in the shadow of a doorway there was the rounded form of Herr Schmit, still aloof and alone.

The ship came up to the quayside, touched gently and was secured, people on the quay moved towards her and there was a bustle about running out the gang-plank. Hambledon stepped back to make way and was seized by the elbow by his steward.

"What do you mean by——"

"*Señor!* See those two men by the custom-house door? Detectives, *Señor!* Police!"

"Are they, indeed," said Hambledon, very interested. "Are you sure?"

"Certain, I know them by sight. They have come for me! I am lost! Will the *Señor* deign to carry his own bags, I dare not go ashore, I dare not be seen, I shall hide myself——"

The agitated murmur ceased and the hold on Tommy's elbow was removed as the steward slipped away and was lost to sight, not even waiting for his tip.

Hambledon picked up his luggage which consisted only of two suit-cases, and went ashore. He passed in the

custom-house doorway the two men to whom the steward had referred and said to himself that the man was almost certainly right, they did look very like detectives. They took very little notice of him or of the Spanish passengers who came with him, but when Herr Schmit appeared last of all at the top of the gangway they said something inaudible to each other and watched him closely.

Hambledon put down his suit-cases just inside the door and stood there within earshot looking lost.

Herr Schmit came down the gangway followed by a man carrying his rather heavy luggage, the man was neither the bedroom steward nor the equally conscience-stricken Porfirio. Herr Schmit crossed the quay towards the custom-house, as he reached the doorway the two detectives moved out and stopped him.

"Your passport, *Señor*, if you please."

"What is all this? The other passengers were not stopped here."

"Your passport, please."

He gave it to them. "I do not understand this discrimination against me. I shall complain to the authorities." One of the detectives took a magnifying glass from his pocket and examined the passport closely. "Why are you doing that? This insolence shall not——"

"Because, *Señor*, we have reason to suspect your honour of being an undesirable person attempting to enter this country illegally."

Hambledon thought how very odd the customary polite Spanish phrases sounded in that context. No "Here, you!" about these people.

"This passport is forged," said the detective with the magnifying glass. He slipped it back into his pocket, shut the passport with a snap and they both closed in upon Herr Schmit.

"Nonsense! Ridiculous! You shall apologise——"

"With respect, we must ask you to do us the honour of accompanying us to the police station."

"I protest!"

"With respect, that is quite useless. Your honour——"

"At least, I must be allowed to send a message to my friends."

"Most willingly, *Señor*," said the detective who had not previously spoken. "We shall be most interested in any messages your honour may be pleased to send to your friends."

Herr Schmit took a step back. Although neither of the detectives had laid a finger upon him he looked exactly as though he had received a resounding slap in the face.

"That's stymied you, old chap," murmured Tommy. "I don't quite see you being encouraged to quote the Herr Gottfried Leiden of the Arcadia Hotel as a reference." He picked up his suit-cases and carried them towards the customs bench; as he went the little group of Herr Schmit and escort passed behind him towards the exit.

Herr Schmit was no longer arguing and his eyes had a slightly glazed appearance.

### CHAPTER XIII

## WEST WING

Guests of the Hotel Arcadia at Flores del Sol were met on arrival at the railway station at Gijon in the hotel's Hispano-Suiza saloon and conveyed the last fifteen kilometres of their journey by road. The road ran inland from the coast and parallel with it, only in the last three miles did it turn north over a low pass in the rocky hills to enter the valley of Flores. The big car, with Hambleton as its only passenger, bounced gently down the valley past orchards still in bloom, under trees already in leaf, then into narrow cobblestoned streets and over a humpbacked bridge into a little oblong market-place with gay striped awnings over the shops, an ancient church at one side and a prevailing smell of fish. From here they drove up a steep and terraced road with a couple of heart-shaking hairpin bends to a pair of excellent iron gates standing wide open. Inside these the drive passed through gardens bright with flowers to the main entrance of the hotel. The car drew up at the door, a brace of porters emerged in cheerful haste and Hambleton alighted.

He was a little surprised to find a thoroughly international air about the place. There was a group of people talking the English of England and several groups talking the English of various parts of the United States. French and German he also heard as he followed his luggage across the entrance hall to the reception desk at the back. The Arcadia was, after all, as he reminded himself, a perfectly genuine hotel and quite well known although it had not been open for more than three years or so. One could book rooms there at Cook's or the American Express Company. Most, if not all, of these cheerful people would be perfectly genuine guests.

The reception clerk looked up with a welcoming smile and Hambleton addressed him in German.

"You have a room reserved here for me, I believe. Herr Karl Ardweg."

"Certainly, *mein Herr*. If you will have the goodness to take a seat there for just a moment——"

Hambleton nodded and moved away, as he did so the company assembled in the hall advanced as one man and woman upon the desk with hopeful cries of: "Here's the post! The mail's in! *Voici la poste qui vient d'arriver! Die Briefpost ist gerade angekommen!*" A harassed little man with his hands full of letters had come out of a door behind the reception desk and began with astonishing speed to distribute the mail into a rack of pigeon-holes on the wall, numbered according to the numbers of the rooms. This was, evidently, one of the great moments of the visitors' day and Hambleton stood watching with a benign expression.

Someone brushed against his arm with a murmured "*Perdone, Señor. Con permiso.*" Hambleton turned and looked straight into the face of Campbell, a hurried and preoccupied Campbell dressed in torn blue overalls and carrying a bag of tools. Campbell did not even glance at Hambleton, his eyes were upon another figure just in front of him who was trying with irritated patience to attract the clerk's attention; Forgan, with a notebook in his hand.

At last the clerk had a spare moment and Forgan seized upon it. Which rooms, please, had complained and of what? The clerk threw off a couple of numbers, both dripping taps, and the plumbers stood back. The under-manager, freed at last from his duty with the mails, lifted the flap of the desk and came to Hambleton.

"The Herr Karl Ardweg?"

"That is right," said Hambleton.

"Your room is ready for you, I will take you up myself. This way, please."

"Thank you," said Tommy, and followed the man to the lift, being followed in his turn by the porter with the two suit-cases. They rose together to the first floor and walked quickly along a carpeted corridor with bedrooms upon either hand. The far end of the corridor was closed by a door across the end.

About half-way along, the under-manager stopped, opened with his pass-key a door on the right and stood back to let Hambleton precede him. They all went in, the porter put the suit-cases upon luggage stands and Hambleton tipped him. He went away, shutting the door behind him and leaving Tommy and the under-manager alone together.

"A pleasant room," said Tommy affably, but the under-manager disregarded this opening.

"You have, I believe, come here to meet someone," he said.

"Your belief is justified."

"And you have, possibly, a letter."

"I have, possibly, a letter," echoed Hambledon, making no move to produce it.

The man nodded and went out of the door with Tommy, who did not mean to miss anything, close upon his heels. On the wall of the passage close to Tommy's door there was a chemical fire-extinguisher upon a bracket, just below this there was a small round keyhole such as serves a Yale lock. The man took a key from his pocket, inserted it into the keyhole and appeared to press upon it for a moment. Nothing happened; Hambledon, who had been expecting the panel to open or slide back and disclose something interesting in the way of a secret passage or a hidden staircase, was rather disappointed. They waited together in silence for nearly a minute.

"Now," said the under-manager, "if you will kindly walk along the corridor to that door you see at the end, it will open for you."

"Thank you," said Hambledon, and obeyed at once.

The door at the end of the passage was larger than the room doors on either side, it was of dark red Spanish mahogany and there was a carved border round its panels. Hambledon puzzled momentarily why a door so decorated should yet look so bare until he noticed that it had no door-handle. There was a very small recessed keyhole rather high up and that was all.

As Hambledon approached the door it opened and he walked straight in. There was a large and pleasant sitting-room with a thick carpet on the floor; comfortable chairs stood about small tables and gay chintzes made covers and curtains. There were pictures on the walls, good water-colours for the most part but one was a large oil-painting of a lady with a singularly gentle expression; before this picture there stood a bowl of flowers. In the middle of the room there was a writing-table so placed that whenever he who sat to write lifted his eyes, the picture was before him.

When Hambledon went in there was a man sitting at the table, a small stout man with gold-rimmed spectacles and the type of face which should have been jovial but was not. Instead, it was unutterably sad.

He turned in his chair to look interestedly at Hambledon as he crossed the room. Behind him, the door closed with a soft thud and Hambledon looked round sharply, thinking that someone had followed him in, but there was no one there. The little man smiled faintly.

"Did that startle you?" he said in a curiously level voice which seemed to have no vitality in it. "A simple mechanical device, no more. You are Karl Ardweg, is that right?"

He spoke German and Hambledon answered in the same language. "Yes, *mein Herr*, Karl Ardweg, formerly of Munich. I have the honour to address——?"

"I am Gottfried Leiden. I think you have a letter for me? Would you give it to me? Thank you."

He read the letter while Hambledon stood in an attitude of respectful detachment, and then looked up.

"I expect my brother gave you some idea of what your duties would be."

"He gave me a general idea, naturally. He said that you would, of course, fill in the details yourself."

"Tell me," said Leiden, "how was my brother when you saw him?"

"He seemed well, *mein Herr*."

"And his wife? And the child?"

Hambledon's sixth sense sat up at the back of his mind like a nervous rabbit and said: "Careful. There is a trap here somewhere."

"I have no means of knowing, *mein Herr*, I am not on visiting terms with the Herr's gracious family and I saw no child."

Leiden's brow relaxed, evidently the answer was right and his next words proved it.

"You must excuse my setting you a small test, my brother sent no photograph by which I could identify you. They have no children. You may sit down on that chair there. Your duties here, as you know, consist mainly in acting as warder to my rather miscellaneous guests, can you speak Polish?"

"Not well, I can get along in it. I should find it hard to converse in it but I can speak and understand simple sentences."

"That will do. I shall not want you to deliver lectures. Russian?"

"I can speak Russian fairly well though I am a little out of practice. I find it hard to read and I cannot write it at all easily."

"That does not matter. French? Good. And English? Very good. Now I must tell you that I am rather uncomfortably overcrowded here. You probably know what my plan is——"

Hambledon shook his head.

"My brother Hugo is the soul of discretion! I have a standing quarrel with the Communists, I have a private war against them." Leiden glanced up at the portrait. "Particularly Russian Communists, though any who preach their foul doctrines are my enemies. Most of my prisoners are Russian. I know of an island, I will not tell you where except that it is off the coast of South America. It is reasonably fertile and has an equable climate, the only reason why it is not inhabited is that it is so small and so remote from the usual shipping routes that it is not worth inhabiting. I propose to put my prisoners ashore there with a good supply of agricultural tools, the necessary seeds and so forth, to start a colony of their own where they can practise Communism on each other for the rest of their lives if they like. They will have to practise husbandry if they wish to live, they will not starve if they are prepared to work hard."

He paused and rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands, an habitual trick with which Tommy was to become familiar.

"Do them good," he ventured, since some reply seemed to be expected.

"Indeed, I think so," said Leiden. "But an unexpected obstacle has arisen. My yacht, which I had intended to send off with the first shipment quite shortly, caught fire at anchor here in the harbour, was burnt out and sank. It is not easy to buy just what I want at short notice and if one charters a vessel of any size the owners insist on sending at least their own Captain with her. You can see that that would not do at all."

"Of course not," agreed Hambledon, adding: "Mad. Quite mad," to himself.

"You probably think the scheme quite mad," went on Leiden, almost startling Hambledon into a heart attack. "Everyone does to whom I have mentioned it, but only at first. Given the island—and I was very lucky there, I was undoubtedly guided by Providence—the scheme is perfectly feasible."

"Certainly," said Hambledon heartily.

"But, owing to the loss of the yacht, I have as many here as I can house conveniently at one time and further operations are held up. However, I shall find a way out." He paused and looked attentively at Hambledon for a long minute. "You are, as my brother says in his letter, rather old for the job. Most of my warders are young men in their twenties, but your linguistic abilities will almost certainly counterbalance your age."

Hambledon said to himself that the whole interview was assuming a dream-like quality, due to the fact that this neat little man in his dark suit with his unemotional manner, monotonous voice and gold-rimmed spectacles, ought to be a bank manager recommending an investment in Consols, not the forcible founding of a Communist colony on an uninhabited island in the South Pacific.

"Just as in banking," continued the level voice, and Hambledon really did jump this time, but fortunately Leiden was not looking at him, "one weighs the pros and cons of this or that investment before deciding to put one's money in it, so must I with my employees. Your appearance is particularly good and I have no doubt that you can assume the manners of good society when you choose."

Hambledon bowed.

"I have a very good mind to let you stay on the other side," said Leiden, nodding towards the door through which Hambledon had come. "I sometimes wonder whether there is among my hotel guests someone who has come here to nose out my private interests. This is a perfectly normal hotel on the other side, I cannot pick and choose who comes. There is a certain curiosity about this wing, we are asked when it will be opened and how the work is progressing and sometimes visitors wander round this side and try to peer in at the windows. That is quite useless, as you will see when I show you round. If you were to mix with the guests as one of themselves you could get to hear if there was anything more than idle curiosity."

"I think I could manage that," said Hambledon, earnestly refraining from private thought of any kind.

"You could fit in your terms of duty as well."

"Certainly."

"Very well. I will speak to my manager about giving you a room on the other side and explain that you are ostensibly an ordinary visitor. You have an adequate wardrobe, I hope? We dress for dinner here."

"I think so. I did not know what I should be required to do so I brought a fairly full kit."

"That is good. Now come with me and I will show you round."

The room in which they were was at the corner of the building. Leiden led the way towards a door in the wall at a right-angle to that by which Hambledon had entered. Leiden's sitting-room had been full of sunshine but the door opened upon a long corridor lighted only by electric lamps. There were windows all along on the right-hand side but they were neatly and closely shuttered with sheet steel screwed to the window frames. At the far end there were some men busy, upon planks laid between trestles, painting the walls and doorways the same light colour as the rest of the passage.

"We had a little trouble with a small outbreak of fire," said Leiden, "the same night that my yacht was burned, but fortunately the damage was confined to a wardrobe destroyed and a good deal of smoke-blackening. My seamen are removing the traces."

"An unfortunate coincidence," said Hambledon.

"Yes," said Leiden. "Possibly. However, I hope we shall have no more trouble of that kind." He indicated the shuttered windows. "It is a tiresome necessity, this having to ensure that no light shows from any of these windows, but it has to be. You see, this wing is supposed to be unfinished, unusable and uninhabited."

"Like your island," thought Tommy, and promptly said it aloud.

"Yes," said Leiden, "yes. These rooms on the left are used by my staff of warders and also, at the moment, by the Captain and crew of my yacht who normally sleep on board. On this floor also we are rather over full."

They stood looking down the carpeted corridor. Some of the room doors were ajar, men's voices could be heard talking, and an occasional laugh. A man bounced out of a door nearby, a pleasant-looking round-faced young man.

"Guten Tag, mein Herr."

"Guten Tag, my good Moritz. Have you been out to-day?"

"Not yet, *mein Herr*, I have only just come off duty, but Hans and I are going down to bathe shortly."

"That is all right. Get all the fresh air you can. Continual artificial light is unwholesome for young men," added Leiden. "I insist that they all go out every day, if only for an hour."

"The air here is surprisingly sweet and fresh," said Hambleton, and it was quite true. "Air-conditioning, I suppose."

"Air-conditioning, yes. But it does not quite take the place of open air. It is quite good enough for the prisoners, however, and they will be able to make up for it presently."

Immediately upon their left and just outside the wall of Leiden's room there was a lift-shaft with a staircase winding round it. Leiden led the way upstairs; the young man called Moritz, who had been waiting to be dismissed, smiled at Hambleton and turned away along the passage.

The top floor was upon a different plan from that of the first floor, there was a central corridor, artificially lighted like the other. There were other differences considerably more surprising. A few yards along the corridor to their right there was a strong iron grille across the passage and it was closed. There was a man on duty outside it who came to attention when he saw Leiden; on the wall behind this man's head there was a panel with two rows of knobs on it like bell-pushes, eight red ones in the top row and eight black below. The passage walls were quite blank on either hand for the first fifteen feet or so of its length, beyond that there were more grilles where one would expect to find bedroom doors, four upon each side. These were fastened flat against the passage walls, not inset into the doorways; the effect was that there was not one inch of cover in the whole length of the passage until one came to the far end where there was an open door showing a man sitting at a table reading a book. When he looked up and saw Leiden he, too, stood to attention.

"I will briefly explain our arrangements," said Leiden. "This grille which shuts off the passage is locked at all times except when the inside warder, whom you see at the far end, is changed. There is only one key and I keep it. At the time when the guard is changed I come up here, unlock this grille myself and lock it again. The inside warder, poor man, is as much a prisoner as the prisoners, but happily only for his turn of duty. These knobs upon the wall panel here open the cell doors which are electrically operated, you see that they are numbered. When one of the prisoners is to be let out of his cell, the inside warder calls 'Number two'—or whichever it may be—the outside guard here presses the red knob and number two cell door slides open. But it is so arranged that one door only can be opened at a time, when one red knob has been pressed in the others are locked in place. This to prevent a mistake being made and several prisoners being liberated at once. You understand that, of course."

"Perfectly, thank you," said Hambleton, wondering how the meals were served if the main grille was only unlocked every eight hours or however long the turn of duty lasted.

"The meals are served," began Leiden, and Hambleton told himself firmly that it was just coincidence, the prisoners' meals would have to be mentioned some time, "on American-pattern meal trays with little partitions for meat, vegetables, pudding and so forth. They are fairly long but they are both narrow, and shallow, I dare say you have often seen them. I was lucky there, I bought some American army surplus stores and they slide quite well through the openwork pattern of not only this main grille but those of the cells also."

"I have seen them," said Hambleton. "They have the further advantages that they don't break like crockery."

"That is so. Now," said Leiden, turning away from the passage, "the space over my sitting-room below is taken up, as you see," he opened a door and Hambleton followed him through it, "by a small kitchen where the prisoners' and the warders' meals are cooked." There was a small compact galley with shining pots and kettles, a pile of meal trays and an electric cooker. "Next to that is the warders' sitting-room, you see it is comfortable and pleasant."

It was; there were easy chairs, a writing-table, bookcases full of books and a miniature billiard table. A man got up from one of the chairs when they entered and Hambleton recognised him at once, it was the taller of the two

Germans who had knifed the juggler in the café of the Honest Lobster.

"Werner," said Leiden, "this is a new member of our staff, Karl Ardweg. Ardweg, this is Ernst Werner."

They shook hands, Werner said that it was a pleasure to meet Ardweg and Hambledon said that the pleasure was entirely his.

"Now," said Leiden, "we will go downstairs again."

Hambledon followed him down and Leiden did not speak until they were once again in his sitting-room.

"You must excuse my not showing you the prisoners," said Leiden in a curiously breathless voice. "You will see enough of them presently and your confrères will tell you their names. I do not care to look at them myself—I can hardly bear it. I want to do them some mischief—I want to hurt them." His voice shook suddenly, he took out his handkerchief to wipe his face and Hambledon observed that he was trembling. "I cannot do so, of course, because they are in my power." He looked intently at Hambledon. "I do not know whether or not you have suffered or how much, but I must tell you this. It is an evil thing to requite upon those in your power whatever they may have inflicted upon you. To behave like a beast is to become a beast yourself. Remember that. I will have no cruelty here, no torture, no deaths. Remember and promise."

"I promise," said Hambledon solemnly, and meant it. He felt also, rather to his surprise, a growing respect for this odd little man who had evidently had to endure—and seemed still to be enduring—something quite past bearing.

"I do see them once a week," said Leiden. "I go up there for a tour of inspection and to hear complaints, but I am always thankful when it is over and I have done nothing of which I need be ashamed. It is a strain," he sighed suddenly, "I wish that I could get them away."

"I will let you go now," went on the lifeless even voice, and Hambledon realised that the voice also was part of the iron control the little man kept upon himself. "You were seen to arrive, you had better show yourself among the other guests this evening. By the way, you had better think of a pretext for disappearing from view for hours at a time. When you are on duty, you know."

"Of course," said Hambledon. "I could be writing a book, perhaps? That would also give me an excuse for talking to all and sundry and asking them questions. Collecting local colour, you know."

"Excellent. You shall be a budding author, Ardweg. Nothing could be better." Leiden walked across to the door and opened it for Hambledon. "I wish you a pleasant evening."

Hambledon thanked him and went out and the door closed with a soft thud behind him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LADY IN BLACK

Hambledon returned to the bedroom to which he had originally been taken and found the key hanging in the lock. He went in, taking the key with him, everything looked just as he had left it, including his suit-cases. He was not anxious; anyone could go through his suit-cases and find nothing suspicious. He crossed to the window and looked out. This room was at the back of the hotel and faced the courtyard enclosed between the two wings; the one on his right—the east wing—had open windows, cheerful curtains and even a holiday-making face here and there, the other on the left, the west wing from which he had just come, showed no life at all and the window panes were obscured with whorls of whitening such as are used during building operations when windows are newly glazed to warn other workmen that there is glass there to-day even if there were none yesterday.

The courtyard was any hotel courtyard, paved, with a pool in the middle and a fountain playing. There were formal flower-beds and a few small tables with wicker chairs set about them. The far end of the east wing on the ground floor was evidently staff quarters and tradesmen's entrance, for even while he looked a sort of flat cart came in drawn by a donkey and stopped at the back door to unload vegetables. Two men came out from the door carrying an armchair between them which they set down upon a trolley. One of the men wheeled the trolley away, the other looked after him for a moment, it was Forgan lending a kindly hand to a fellow employee. Forgan turned and went in again.

The bedroom door opened without any preliminary knock and the under-manager entered. "My name is Nagel," he said abruptly. "I am to tell you that you are to keep this room. It is one of our better rooms but more convenient in some respects for your purposes. I understand that you are to appear and to be treated as an ordinary guest."

"Thank you," said Hambleton. "Those are, indeed, the instructions I have received——"

"The orders you have been given," corrected Nagel.

"The orders I have been given," repeated Hambleton, repressing an inclination to box the little man's ears. "Have you also been informed that I am a writer?"

"Writer?"

"Writer," said Hambleton and kindly spelt it. "I have come here to write a book."

"Indeed. What sort of a book?"

"Oh, I should think a thriller. Murders, you know. Mysteries, secrets, sad *señoritas* and daggers in the night."

"Indeed."

"So if any of my fellow-guests want to know what sort of a fellow I am, that's the sort of fellow I am."

"Oh, I see now," said the under-manager.

"So glad," said Hambleton. "Well, if I'm to stay here I may as well unpack. What time is dinner served here?"

"There is, within this frame upon the wall, full information about the hotel arrangements," said Nagel icily.

"Splendid," said Hambleton. He drew back the lids of his suit-cases and began to hang things up in the wardrobe, tut-tutting over a misplaced crease in his evening trousers. Nagel watched him for a moment and then went away.

"And I hope there's a drawing-pin on your office chair," said Hambleton.

His bedroom was airy and pleasant, probably cooler than those in the front which had the full sun. There was a small private bathroom attached, it gleamed with chromium plating and pale green tiles and Hambleton thoroughly approved. He bathed, shaved, changed and went down to the lounge for a drink.

The hotel was very like any other first-class hotel and the company were such as one would find anywhere. Some were pleasant and amusing, some pleasant but dull and some frankly boring. There were tennis-courts in the grounds and talk of a putting-green next season, there were walks on the hills, fishing and bathing in the bay and deck-chairs on the terraces. At night one danced in the lounge, played cards in the card-room or wandered in the gardens with or without feminine company. There was a large florid man with expansive manners who was circulating among the guests giving information about excursions, smoothing out difficulties and listening to grievances or funny stories with equal attention. Hambleton leaned across to the bar-tender and said; "Is that the manager or somebody?"

"Yes, sir, that is the manager, Señor Kircher. A very nice gentleman. Has he not spoken to you yet?"

"Not yet, but I've only just arrived," said Tommy.

He was approached by an elderly and respectable Englishman and asked if he would care to share a car and make an expedition to Oviedo. "We—my wife and her sister are with me—we are interested in church architecture and I understand that there are several ancient churches in Oviedo which well repay a visit. Of course, one can get there by train from Gijon, but while one is driving to Gijon one might just as well go the whole hog and drive all the way and save the ladies the fatigue of railway travel. We are no longer so young as we were—that is my wife and her sister on that couch over there—but we consider ourselves uncommonly spry for our ages, my dear sir, uncommonly spry, believe me. Of course, it may well be that ancient churches are not one of your no doubt numerous interests, but, believe me, there is——"

"It is not, believe me, my dear sir," said Tommy earnestly, "a lack of interest in archaeology which deters me from accepting your extraordinarily kind invitation. It is a matter of principle. I am a Mohammedan."

He heard a muffled snort from just behind him and turned to find the manager, Kircher, hastily straightening his face. The elderly Englishman smiled uncertainly and withdrew.

"I was about to rescue you," said Kircher in an amused voice, "but I see you are more than capable of rescuing yourself."

"Thank you for the kind thought anyway," said Tommy, finishing his sherry.

"And, by the way, if you are a Mohammedan why are you drinking sherry? Have one with me, do."

"I have a special dispensation from my Hakim, of course. Thank you, I will."

Kircher gave the order. "You are Mr. Ardweg, are you not? I thought you must be, I was not about when you arrived. I hope you will like this place."

"I am sure I shall." They were speaking English, the space near the bar was reasonably thronged and there was no doubt that they had an attentive audience.

"There was one thing I was going to ask you," went on Kircher. "You would like a writing-table put in your room, would you not?"

"Oh, thank you very much," said Tommy gratefully. "If it's not too much trouble, I should indeed."

"No trouble at all, it shall be done. There is a writing-room of the usual type in that far corner, it's all right for letters but I know what you authors are. Privacy behind several locked doors and heaven help the house-maid when she comes in to tidy up."

"Oh, come," said Tommy. "I'm not so Mohammedan as all that."

Kircher bubbled with laughter which was plainly genuine, Tommy stood him "the other half" and there was a general drift towards the dining-room.

When he went up to bed that night there was a writing-table in his bedroom with even a green-shaded table lamp upon it, an inkstand and a large blotter.

"Commendably thorough," said Hambleton. "I must go into town to-morrow and be seen to be buying foolscap paper." He walked across to the writing-table and then he noticed a white envelope lying upon the white blotter. Inside was a note:—

*Your first turn of duty is from sixteen hours to midnight to-morrow. You will be fetched from your bedroom.*

*G.L.*

He was awakened the next morning by clanking and hammering sounds from the small private bathroom attached to his room. It sounded like plumbers at work, but there had been nothing wrong with either bath or hand-basin the night before. Tiresome, he wanted his bath. Perhaps the work was not really being done in his bathroom at all, sound travels remarkably well along pipes. He got up, put on a dressing-gown and opened the intervening door.

There were two men apparently unscrewing the water-trap underneath the hand-basin; even in blue overalls and violently checked shirts their figures were familiar.

"Good morning," said Hambleton. "Glad to see you, but what are you doing with my hand-basin?"

"Reported blocked," said Forgan cheerfully, "at least, that's our story."

"It seemed a good way," said Campbell, "of enjoying the pleasure of your company in private."

"Excellent indeed," said Tommy. "What I really meant was how did you get the job?"

"Simple," said Forgan. "This hotel always employed an engineer and his assistant to keep everything running as it should and they left. Apparently the manager went for them like a tiger because, he said, those fires here were due to their smoking on duty and dropping cigarette-ends about. He was rude and they took offence and walked out."

"It's the beginning of the season," added Campbell, "and they knew of a better job elsewhere. So they went."

"And when we were cast with every circumstance of public contumely from off the *Star of the Asturias* upon the quay, we thought we'd better look for work."

"We asked," continued Campbell, "whether there was any work in Flores for two industrious, intelligent, highly-skilled—if we might say so—engineers. We were recommended to go up to the hotel and ask for a job."

"We hesitated," said Forgan. "We said we did not come here to be insulted."

"We said," added Campbell, "that we had had to deal with a foul bullying-mouthed foreman in Buenos Aires. His place is, we said, now marked with a cross."

"They assured us," said Forgan, "that this under-manager is not as a rule over-zealous, but on this occasion he allowed himself to be carried away."

"We said that that would happen again if he were overbearing with us and we thought we could deal with him. We looked at each other and uttered sinister laughs."

"It was the son of the proprietor of our inn who told us about it, he works in the kitchens here. So here we are."

"So long as nobody sees you who saw you on the yacht, Forgan," said Hambleton.

"It's only to exercise reasonable care," said Forgan. "The west wing people don't come on this side and we don't go over there."

"And what on earth had you been doing on that ship?"

"Oh, that was nothing. Your London office found out for us that she called in here pretty often so we joined her at Bilbao. Then we had a stroke of luck, because the skipper turned out to be a man we'd known years ago. He was second mate with one of the South American lines when we first knew him, he was a lad in those days. We used to see him sometimes when he came into Buenos Aires."

"After that," said Campbell, "the only thing wrong with the trip was that it was too short."

"And, possibly, a little on the wet side," said Forgan. "We confided in him far enough to explain that we wanted a reasonable excuse for landing here. I think Campbell hinted at some kind of currency irregularity."

"He is a most practical man," said Campbell. "He always was, I remember. He said that the most obvious reason for landing at any place would be the refusal of the ship's company to carry one any further. So we were put ashore with, as Forgan said, public contumely."

"So we've been working here for nearly a week now, looking hopefully for your coming."

Hambledon told them in brief outline how he had come there in the place of Karl Ardweg, now presumably languishing in a Spanish gaol.

"You're in a strong position," said Forgan. "The thing now looks simple. You have only to lead away the gentle Dinnik and we can all go home."

"You're quite wrong," said Hambledon, "the thing doesn't even look simple." He detailed Leiden's precautions against the escape of prisoners and Forgan's face fell. "Notice also," went on Hambledon, "that the precautions are not only directed against the prisoners, they work equally well against the guards. I have not yet the least idea how to get any of the prisoners out except by combining with at least one of the guards and even then I should have to have Leiden's key to the main grille. As for combining with the guards, I wouldn't combine with Ernst Werner to steal the cheese out of a mouse-trap. There was also a fellow whom Leiden called Moritz who looked a thoroughly decent type, I don't think he'd lend himself, as they say, to anything of the sort. I couldn't tell what the warders on duty were like because they only stood there and looked wooden. I don't know how many more warders there are, and the crew of his yacht are living there too. By the way, if you have an interview with Leiden, be careful."

"Why? Is he a terror?"

"Not in the way you mean. Yet he is, in a way, rather terrifying. No, that's not the right word. The important thing to remember is that he knows what you're thinking."

"I call that completely terrifying under any circumstances," said Forgan.

"Surely you're not serious," said Campbell. "A thought-reader? There's no such thing."

"I suppose it could have been coincidence," said Tommy, and told them about it. "Three times he came out with just what I was thinking."

"Coincidence," said Campbell firmly.

"We're not very likely to have any conversation with him," said Forgan uneasily. "He seems a queer bird. All this desert-island business, it comes out of story-books. What's the matter with him?"

"He has suffered frightfully at some time at the hands of the Russian Communists, he told me that much and read me a lecture on the evils of revenge," said Hambledon. "I like him," he added unexpectedly. "I'm sorry we burned his yacht for him. Now he's landed with his wretched prisoners and can't get rid of them. Oh, well. Are you two sleeping on the premises?"

"Oh, yes, we have two rooms in the basement. I nearly said two cells."

"But, unlike normal cells, the inmates keep the keys," said Campbell. "They're all right only they're next to the engine-room and Forgan was wondering whether the smell of diesel-oil made one fat."

"We'd better be going," said Forgan, "we've been here a long time." He gathered up his tools.

"I go on duty from four p.m. to midnight," said Hambledon. "I shall know more about how the place is run after that."

"We must arrange to meet somewhere," said Forgan. "Your bathroom can't always be going wrong. But if you want us urgently, ring up the office and say your bedside lamp is defective and we shall be sent up to fix it."

"I'll go for a stroll in the garden when I come off duty at midnight," said Hambledon. "There'll probably be

some pub in the town where we can meet. You'd better go now."

Later on that morning he explored the town and the harbour, bought some manuscript paper and strolled up the steep hill to the hotel for lunch. Hungry visitors were beginning to gather in the lounge for sherry, cocktails or tomato-juice and Hambledon was among them when there came to the door the Arcadia's Hispano-Suiza bringing a new guest from the station, a graceful figure in deepest mourning even to a heavy veil which entirely covered her face and which she did not lift even when she signed her name in the hotel register. She was conducted through the hall, followed by her expensive luggage, and vanished upwards in the lift without, apparently, having looked to left or right or even raised her head.

One of the English visitors, a Midland manufacturer who, with his wife, was paying his first visit to Spain, came across to Tommy.

"Golly, did you see that?"

"Of course I did," said Hambledon. "Definitely. One couldn't help noticing it among all these gay dresses, a bit of a contrast, isn't she?"

"Like a crow among the canaries. Makes you wonder what the face is like under all that black stuff, doesn't it?"

## CHAPTER XV

### A COCKED HAT FOR SUNDAYS

Nagel, the under-manager, came to Hambledon's bedroom just before four o'clock that afternoon. He tried the door but it was bolted, so he had to knock; it had occurred to Hambledon that the messenger might be Nagel.

"Come in!" called Tommy but only the repeated rattle of the lock followed, naturally. He walked across quickly and opened the door. "Oh, it's you, Nagel. Come in."

Nagel came in, shut the door behind him and stood against it. "I have brought you your orders," he said. "You will go out of this part of the hotel by any door you please and go round the building either way to the west wing. You will find a door on the outer side of the wing towards the far end, it corresponds with a similar one in this east wing which you may have seen. The grille is kept locked but there will be someone there to admit you. The important thing, and I am to impress this upon you, is that nobody must see you go in. If there are people about within view you are to wait until they are gone. It is better to be late than to be seen entering that door. This applies every time you go in at or come out of that door, not only to-day. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, thank you," said Hambledon. Nagel instantly opened the door, went out and shut it behind him.

"You know," said Hambledon to his dressing-gown, still swinging a little from its peg on the door, "anyone would think I didn't smell nice."

He went round the hotel north-about, that is, round the end of the wings and the courtyard instead of across the front where he would probably be delayed by friendly fellow-guests. He met no one except a few servants who barely glanced at him, and turned the end of the east wing to find himself in that part of the garden which ran along the east side of the hotel.

Most of the hotel garden consisted of green lawns and incredibly gay flower-beds, very bright and open, but on this side the place was practically a shrubbery with tall trees here and there and a few neglected paths wandering through. It was not fenced off in any way but it was not particularly inviting for visitors, overgrown bushes and tangled undergrowth suggested torn stockings and soiled skirts. Hambledon paused at the corner to look and listen but there seemed to be no one about. There was a short and weedy drive which led from the back of the hotel as far

as the door to which he had been directed, after that it turned into a footpath and went off into the bushes.

Hambledon glanced up at the windows which here also were obscured with whitening, all except Leiden's room at the far corner. He came to the door and found it more of a gate than a door; a grille, like those upstairs, of the beautiful wrought-iron work which the Spaniards do so well. Inside the door there was a man waiting to let him in, the pleasant-faced young man whom Leiden had called Moritz, he opened the door to let Hambledon in.

"Thank you so much. I hope I'm not late."

"Dead on time," said Moritz cheerfully. "Look, before we go up, let me show you how to let yourself out. This is the key, it hangs on this hook always. You take it down, unlock and open the gate and immediately hang the key up again. Then you walk out and shut the gate behind you, it locks itself. The important thing is never to walk off taking the key with you because that is a serious crime and all hell pops. The rest of us are locked in unless we go and ask the Chief for the duplicate and then of course he wants to know how and why and particularly who." Moritz smiled. "I said that all hell popped, it is we who do the popping, not the Chief. He has his own way of making you wish you hadn't. Dear old chap. Did you know him before?"

"Before I came here? No, I never saw him until yesterday."

Moritz nodded and led the way up the stairs at a smart gallop which, Hambledon thought, might have been put on to test his wind. However, neither of them were even breathing faster than usual when they reached the top floor where Leiden was waiting for them.

"Since you are new to this duty, Ardweg, you will be outside the gate to-night. You will see how everything is done and how the inside warder deals with the prisoners."

"Very good, *mein Herr*" said Hambledon.

The inside warder was waiting inside the gate to be released, he was the other of the two Germans in Paris, Ernst Werner's companion. Leiden unlocked the grille, the German came out, Moritz went in and the grille was locked again. Moritz, who was carrying a book under his arm, went straight down the passage to the little room at the far end.

"Goertz."

"*Mein Herr?*" said the German.

"This is Karl Ardweg."

They shook hands, Leiden seemed to expect it.

"Go off now, Goertz. You will be going out, will you not?"

"Very shortly, *mein Herr*, thank you."

"That is right." The German went down the stairs and Leiden turned to Hambledon. "You will not leave this post for more than a few moments at any time during your turn of duty. If anything goes wrong, if you or Moritz are ill, for example, or any of the prisoners, there is a man in the sitting-room there ready to relieve you. You will go and fetch him. You may sit down here but try not to go to sleep. You may get yourself a book, if you wish, from the sitting-room."

"Thank you, *mein Herr*."

"That is all," said Leiden abruptly, "Good night." He turned away without waiting for an answer and ran down the stairs.

The time passed much as Hambledon had expected. The prisoners talked to each other across the passage through the open grilles which were their doors, but they seemed placid and resigned. At seven o'clock suppers were

served, there had been busy noises from the kitchen for some time. The meal trays were brought to Hambleton one at a time and he passed each one through the grille to Moritz who took it along the passage and slid it through the grille of a cell. There were twelve altogether, five of the cells received two trays each and the remaining two cells one each. Last of all came Moritz's supper and Hambleton's own. The meal was a leisurely affair, why hurry when they had all the time there was? Presently the trays came out again as they had gone in. After that, in slow rotation, the prisoners were let out one at a time, towel in hand, to go along to the bathroom which was through Moritz's guard-room at the far end. Hambleton pushed knobs as directed and was fascinated by the way the quite distant doors slid back in response.

The cell doors nearest to Hambleton were those which contained one prisoner each. Hambleton had never before seen Pavel Dinnik in the flesh but he had been shown many photographs and even a short Soviet news-reel showing Dinnik laying the foundation-stone of a new Technical College at Smolensk. There was no mistaking the round almost boyish face, the cockatoo-like crest of fair hair, the slim form and jerky walk. That was Pavel Dinnik all right, in the first cell on the left. He slowed up on his way back to stare at Hambleton through the bars, even a strange face among the warders is a matter of interest to a prisoner.

When the prisoners had all been returned to their cells Moritz went along the corridor turning electric light switches, one off and another on, at each door. He ended by coming to talk to Hambleton.

"Bed-time," he explained. "We turn off the main lights and put on the pilot-lights instead. Can't have them all in the dark, can't see what they're doing."

"There isn't much they can do, is there?" said Hambleton. "Do they sleep much at night?"

"Oh, yes. We put a little drop of something harmless in their soup."

"What do they do all day?"

"Talk, mainly. *Herrgott*, how these Russians do talk. We serve tea in glasses at intervals all day, that seems to keep 'em happy. Some of them do embroidery, some of the old hands, sort of cross-stitch, you know, but mainly they just talk."

"What about exercise?"

"They're a bit short on that. You see, it was never intended that they should be here for long, but losing the yacht has put the Chief in rather a hole."

"So he told me, yes."

One of the prisoners called out and Moritz went to see what was wanted. Hambleton glanced at his watch and was surprised to find that there was only half an hour to go.

Moritz came back and said: "Nearly over. Are you bored stiff?"

"Oh, no. Of course it's a novelty at present, all this, and there seems to be something happening all the time."

"The dull turn is the midnight to eight watch. Usually we all go to sleep till about six when the prisoners start to wake up. One doesn't sleep very soundly in a chair, we always wake at once if anything happens."

"What usually happens?"

"One of the prisoners having a nightmare. They talk in their sleep quite a lot at the best of times, there's one now, listen."

There was a dull murmuring sound from somewhere along the passage and Hambleton was on the point of asking what they usually talked about when he heard steps behind him and turned to find Leiden and three relief guards. There seemed to be no ceremony about this changing of the guard, one man turned into the sitting-room and another came out; Ernst Werner and a man named Muller took over the warder's duties. Leiden locked the grille

again, said a rather vague goodnight to nobody in particular and went downstairs again. Hambleton and Moritz strolled down together.

"How many of us are there?"

"Eight, counting you. There are three shifts every twenty-four hours as no doubt you've worked out for yourself, having eight of us means we get a different shift every time. You'll be told when you come on again but it will probably be midnight to-morrow night—no, I mean to-day—in twelve hours' time, anyway."

Hambleton let himself out into the garden, having first peered and listened through the grille to make sure that there were no visitors wandering about. It was dark on that side, though looking towards the front of the hotel he could see plainly the radiance from flood-lighting and strings of coloured lamps on the terraces. He turned that way along one of the winding paths, he had gone only a few yards before he heard a sound as of someone snapping their fingers. There was a tall tree there, and, leaning against its trunk, the dim forms of Forgan and Campbell.

"We thought you might emerge there," said Forgan. "Two of the yacht crew went in that way half an hour ago. They did not, naturally, see us."

Hambleton gave them a detailed account of how the watch upon the prisoners was arranged. "There are a lot of people in that wing," he said. "Seven warders and Leiden, that's eight, and the yacht's crew however many they be. Somebody cooked supper but I don't know who he was. He may be one of the warders or the cook from the yacht or someone extra who does nothing else."

"There's only one way that I can see," said Forgan, "to keep them all quiet at once and that's to dope their coffee. I suppose they all have coffee at the same time from the same source? Then they can all go bye-byes at once, including Leiden, and we can borrow his key."

Campbell glanced over his shoulder at the west wing, dark as a cliff above him. "Behold the palace of the Sleeping Beauty," he said.

"Something like that will have to be done, I think," said Hambleton. "But the first thing to do is to arrange for getting Dinnik away. We talked about that before I left London. An English yacht will put in for a couple of hours, just cruising, you know. She could tie up alongside to take in fresh water. When I tell them that Dinnik is definitely here, arrangements will go forward."

There was a brief silence, broken by Forgan.

"May we have this clear? Do you propose to get Dinnik and then whistle up the yacht, or does the yacht arrive and then we get in a hustle and extract Dinnik?"

"They will tell me when to expect the yacht," said Hambleton, "but the actual time of day of her arrival will be left to me."

"But once you have said 'between ten and twelve p.m. on Thursday the 24th,' or whatever it is that will be finally settled?"

"That's right."

"There'll have to be some careful timing over this, won't there?" said Campbell.

"There will indeed."

"Dear me," said Forgan thoughtfully.

"By the way," said Campbell, "about a place at which we can meet. About half-way down the hill there's a dirty little pub on the left, the Albergo del Cabron Suave. It's got a sort of arbour at the back where it's cooler than you'd believe possible, even in the siesta hour when there's nobody about."

"If you want to see us," said Forgan, "shut the left-hand halves of both your bathroom and bedroom windows, leaving the right-hand halves wide open."

They parted, Hambledon went forward through the shrubbery towards the front of the hotel while the others vanished towards the back regions. Hambledon came round a clump of rhododendrons, paused to make sure that there was no one near enough to see where he had come from, and drew back when he saw the dark-robed figure of the widow silhouetted against the terrace lights. She was standing still when he first saw her and he thought she was looking up at the blank windows of the West wing, but it was impossible to follow the direction of her gaze because her long dark veil still covered her face. The next moment she turned and walked past within six feet of him along the edge of the shrubbery and as she went he heard her sigh deeply.

"Poor soul," thought Hambledon automatically. "Wonder why she came to a gay place like this if that's how she's feeling? I should have thought a nunnery would have been more suitable. Don't suppose she'll stay."

Hambledon sent off his message to London, saying that he had found Pavel Dinnik, and several days passed without any particular incident. He took his turn on duty and soon found it boring enough; his fellow-guests told him he ought not to work so long at his writing, Flores del Sol was a place for recreation, not such hard labour. He did not wish to become on intimate terms with any of his fellow-guests, instead of staying about the hotel he made a habit of strolling into the little town and talking to anyone he happened to meet. Being Hambledon, he soon made a number of acquaintances and one day found himself involved in an argument about a new fire-engine.

"Of course we need a new fire-engine," said one man. "I live only two doors from the estaminet of the high-souled Señora Unojo which was burnt out the other day. If the battered old wreck we have now had broken down but one little half-hour before it did, I and mine would have been burnt in our beds."

"Why?" asked another. "Since you had only to get up and walk out!"

"And half the town with us," persisted the first speaker.

"Another round," said Hambledon to the bar-tender. "Who is going to pay for the new fire-engine?"

"It will go on the taxes," said the second speaker gloomily. "It is we that will pay for it."

"Not at all. It will be provided——"

"By whom?"

"By the Government. That is what Governments are for, to provide what is needed by those who cannot afford to pay for it themselves."

"Not for us. The Government is too far away, it has never heard of us."

"Then the rich man up yonder," with a lift of the chin towards the Hotel Arcadia, "must pay for it."

"Why? He has patent fire-machines of his own, which put out the fire when one presses a button."

"Why cannot we have fire-machines like that and save the expense of a new fire-engine?"

"Even they must be paid for."

"Are these things very dear? Does the *Señor* know them?"

"I have seen them," said Hambledon. "They are only suitable for small fires, if you should be able to catch one before it grew big. They would not put out a burning house. Also, they want new intestines every time they are used."

"I, to serve you," said an old man, "am a fisherman as your honour knows. I spend my days out in the Bay risking my life to bring in food for the town. When I am away, the town should guard my house for me, it is only

just since I leave home for the town's benefit. I will not pay for any fire-engine."

"Nor I. I am a fruit-grower——"

"Nor I."

"Then you won't get a new fire-engine," said the pessimist of the party.

"Then we'll make do with the old."

"I have heard a rumour," said a quiet man in the corner, "I cannot say if it is true but I had it on good authority."

"What is this rumour?"

"That the new engine has already been ordered and is now on its way."

"Then it will have to be paid for," said the pessimist, while Hambleton murmured an enquiry into the ear of his nearest neighbour. "Who is the quiet man in the corner who hears rumours?"

"The postmaster, to serve your honour."

"Oh. Oh, is he really. I see."

"They will not get one peseta out of me," said the fisherman obstinately. "Those who ordered can pay."

"Who ordered it?" asked Tommy.

"The mayor and town council, naturally," said the postmaster. "At least, so I hear on good authority."

"An idea has visited me," said the man who had started the argument. "We will go to the Mayor and say 'You ordered this thing and you will pay for it. Then we will all vote that you be made Mayor again. If not, we will all vote against you but you will have to pay all the same because you signed the order for it.' Eh? That is what we will say."

"So he'll have to pay either way," said Tommy.

"Why not, if your honour pleases? He has been Mayor for three years, he does not do that only to wear a cocked hat on Sundays."

"No, I suppose not!"

"We must have a new fire-engine——"

"Then we shall be taxed for it."

"I will not pay one peseta——"

Hambleton went on duty at midnight that night as he expected; he spent the latter part of the evening among the hotel guests and merely disappeared unobtrusively when the time drew near. He slipped through the bushes for a short meeting with Forgan and Campbell and was standing still to listen for them when he heard a brushing sound and stepped back off the path. There was no moon but the stars were very bright, in their gentle radiance he saw before him the dark form of the widow, her long robes sweeping the grass. She stopped, by the tilt of her head she seemed to be looking up at the stars. She murmured something Hambleton did not catch and then walked on and was lost to sight.

Hambleton went on and found his friends waiting for him under the hanging branches of an acacia.

"Anybody about?" he asked in a low murmur.

"Only the widow," said Forgan in the same tone.

"Walking about sighing," said Campbell, "just as you said."

"In my opinion," said Forgan, "she's getting into training for haunting a house."

"She's got rooms along my corridor," said Hambleton. "Almost opposite mine, in fact, but she doesn't seem to come out during the day."

"That's right," said Campbell. "The chambermaid told us about her. Her old man was killed in a motor accident and she got her face all cut about. She's here having a rest between operations of plastic surgery. She doesn't let anyone see her face, not even the staff. They put the meals in her sitting-room while she's in her bedroom and make her bed while she's in the sitting-room. She tips them heavily so they don't mind."

"She certainly seems to have got something to sigh about, poor wretch," said Hambleton. "I only wish she'd go and do it somewhere else and not haunt this part of the garden just when I want to go in at that door."

"Anybody would think," said Campbell, "that she was taking an interest in it herself."

"Oh, she only comes here to be quiet," said Hambleton. "This is the only quiet part, they're wearing paper hats and false noses just round the corner. Well, now I think I can——"

He stopped abruptly as Forgan laid a hand on his arm. The widow, seen almost clearly against the light wall, was walking along close to the house.

"Shall I creep up behind her and say Boo?" suggested Campbell.

"Certainly not. She'd only scream, and rightly. You can follow her and make a rustling noise in the bushes, that might scare her off."

Campbell disappeared and a moment later sounds of his passage through the shrubbery were plainly audible. The widow came hurrying back close to the wall and glancing behind her. She went out of sight towards the front of the hotel and Campbell materialised again at Hambleton's elbow.

"Thank you," said Tommy, "that seems to have done it. I'm going in now. Keep out of sight of the door, there's someone waiting to let me in."

He went to the iron gate and Moritz opened it for him.

"I'm late," said Hambleton. "There was one of the hotel guests hanging about."

"I saw her," said Moritz, "she passed the door twice. A widow by her dress."

"That's right. I expect she comes round here to be quiet but I thought she was never going. So I made a noise in the bushes and she went off in a hurry. By the way, I wonder whether I ought to report all that."

"Why?"

"Herr Leiden put me on the other side mainly to report if any of the guests took a more than normal interest in this wing. None of them do, so far as I can see, except this lady."

"I shouldn't think she does, really," said Moritz. "A woman like that. I agree with you, she just comes here to be quiet. There's a carnival dance on to-night, isn't there?"

Tommy nodded. "I'll leave it alone, then."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GRACIOUS LADY

The following afternoon was Forgan's half-day off duty and he was alone, for Campbell was expected to be available in case of emergency when Forgan was out, and vice versa. Hambledon was in his bedroom, putting the siesta hour to a good use in making up for some of the lost sleep of the night before. Forgan dressed himself in his going-out suit, bought locally; a thin blue serge tight in the waist, padded square in the shoulders and decidedly floppy as to the trousers. He wore a pink shirt, an electric-blue bow tie with white spots, white canvas shoes not impeccably clean and a black felt hat on the side of his head. He added a flower to his buttonhole as he passed through the gardens and satisfied himself that he looked very unlike the down-trodden hurrying plumber in torn overalls, for he met several of the guests who knew him quite well and they all looked blankly at him.

He was strolling down the road debating whether he should drop into the Albergo of the Gentle Goat for one for the road or go straight on into the town, when he heard quick light footsteps behind him. He stepped out into the road to allow the lady, whoever she might be, to overtake him on the path; when she did so he saw to his surprise that it was the widow, still in her dense mourning in all that heat.

"You know, your mother was a Salamander," he murmured. "I wonder where you're going in such a hurry."

He quickened his pace to keep her in sight and forgot all about the Gentle Goat. She led the way into the town and then slowed up, looking about her, till they came into the square. People were strolling about still although their numbers were thinning, for it was the hour of siesta and the shops were shutting their doors, only the cafés remained open. The widow wandered along, dejection in every line of her long cloak, until a man came out of a chemist's shop and began to stroll idly along the pavement, looking into the shop-windows as he passed. Forgan recognised him as one of the Germans from "the other side", he had seen him come out of the door in the West wing. The widow apparently recognised him also for her air of dejection vanished and there was alertness in her step.

The German went and sat down upon one of the public seats in the square in the shade of the trees. He took off his hat to wipe his head.

The widow went immediately to the nearest café, a rather superior place with tables outside upon the pavement, and a waiter came out to take her order.

Forgan propped himself against the side of an archway, lit a cigarette and looked at nothing in particular.

The waiter came out again from the café, bringing the widow not a glass of wine but a sheet of paper and an envelope. She gave him something; to judge by his repeated bows the tip had been handsome. He stood by the table while she wrote upon the sheet of paper.

Forgan crossed his legs over the other way, tilted his hat over his eyes and scratched his right ear.

The German put his hat on the back of his head and stooped to pick up small pebbles from the ground. He tried repeatedly to flip one into the central fountain but they all fell short.

The widow finished her note, folded it and put it into the envelope. She gave it to the waiter and Forgan could see her indicating, with a gesture, the German sitting about twenty yards away. The waiter bowed again and started towards him; the sunlight, falling through the leaves, flickered on his white coat as he went. The lady got up and walked gracefully into the café and out of sight. Forgan, as though remembering that he was thirsty, detached himself from his archway and strolled in after her.

Inside, the place was pleasantly dim and almost cool. There were two alcoves on either side of a short passage leading to a large room beyond, there were small tables in each alcove and the widow was sitting in the second on the left, the first being vacant. The first table on the right held a large tray full of used glasses and the second was occupied by a small elderly man reading the Flores del Sol Weekly Intelligencer, with a glass of wine before him. Forgan murmured an apology and sat down at his table, the man lowered his paper and said he was welcome.

The waiter came in, nodded an assent to the widow and took Forgan's order; the elderly man, who appeared to be bursting to tell somebody something, asked Forgan if he had seen the paper. He shook it as though it had annoyed him in some way.

"Not yet, this week," said Forgan. They were, naturally, speaking Spanish. "Is there, then, something of interest?"

"There is, indeed, something to horrify all men of public spirit. It is this affair of the fire-engine. You have heard about the proposed fire-engine?"

"Certainly," said Forgan. It was, indeed, quite impossible to spend even ten minutes in bars and places where men talk without hearing about the fire-engine.

"It is a scandal. I, to serve you, am a fruit-grower, my name is Moreno. My orchards are——"

The doorway darkened and Forgan missed the next sentence or two because the German marched in, bowed before the widow and said; "The *Señora* wished to speak to me?"

"I did, yes. Please sit down."

"——say the fire-engine has definitely been ordered. Indeed, some say that it has actually arrived. Brought here under cover of night. That just shows that they are ashamed of what they have done, why not bring it here by day?"

Forgan said it was scandalous even as, out of the tail of his eye, he saw the German tilt his head in their direction.

"We will speak German," said the widow in that language. "It is true I can only speak it slowly but these Spaniards do not know the language. These are only locals discussing their fire-engine."

Forgan was horrified. Spanish was his second language, he had used it daily for many years, but his German was by no means so good and here he was, condemned to listen to two different languages simultaneously, a thing to paralyse the brain.

"Scandalous!" snorted Moreno. "Worse than that. Far worse. I told the Mayor myself. I said, you should call a public meeting——"

"The gracious lady," said the German, who was Ernst Werner, "deigns to threaten me, I think?" He spoke slowly and distinctly, conveying sarcasm.

"——that those who have to pay should be consulted——"

"Mine are no empty threats," said the widow. "I can prove who murdered the juggler at the café of the Honest Lobster in Paris and I think the police might be interested."

"What do you think?" demanded Moreno. "Tell me, what do you think?"

"I think something should be done about it," said Forgan.

"I agree. I will tell you what I think ought to be done."

Moreno proceeded to do so at some length, enabling Forgan to abstract his mind and place it at the service of the conversation opposite. There had been a short pause, then the German said: "But they might not believe you."

"I said: Proof!" snapped the widow.

Werner hesitated and looked down at his hands. In point of fact, he was a good deal more alarmed than the widow realised. He was not much afraid of the Spanish police but he regarded Leiden with respect amounting to terror as a man one could neither argue with nor turn from his purpose. At present Leiden knew nothing about the

juggler's death; if he did know he would almost certainly hand over Werner to the French police. If this woman informed the Spanish police they would go straight to Leiden and the fat would be in the fire.

"I suppose, like all women, you want money," said Werner at last.

"You are wrong. All I want is to speak to one of the prisoners for ten minutes."

"You want—what did you say? What is this childish talk of prisoners?"

The widow laughed. "I am much better informed than you think I am. You have there——" she mentioned several names—"among others, and, of course, the illustrious Pavel Dinnik."

"——make him sign a document," said Moreno in the pause which followed that remark. "A document, properly signed, witnessed and attested, acknowledging responsibility. Do you not agree?"

"Absolutely. Completely. Utterly," said Forgan, nodding his head like a mandarin.

"I am a just man," continued Moreno. "If those who wish for an expensive new fire-engine desire to subscribe towards it, I would not deny them. What I will not stomach at any price is that those who do not want it should be forced to——"

"What in the devil's name do you expect me to do about it?" said Werner desperately. "You are mad, it is impossible, they are guarded like the crown jewels."

"Listen. Pavel Dinnik is a rich man, and he has money stowed away in several countries for his use when he can escape from his Russian masters. It was he who——"

"Now I know you are mad," said Werner. "He is one of the leading Communists in Russia, he had a great future before him, he might have succeeded Stalin."

"If he had lived to do so, but his life was not worth that," said the widow, and snapped her thin fingers. "There have been four attempts to kill him this year and it is now only March. He told my—he told someone I know that a live dog was better than a dead lion and that the thought that every meal might be poisoned was giving him gastric ulcers. He was going to address this Paris meeting and then disappear."

"Well, he's got his wish," said Werner.

"——new uniforms for the fire-brigade also," said Moreno. "New brass helmets, to serve you!"

"Preposterous," said Forgan faintly.

"It is Dinnik's doing that I am a widow. He led my husband into his plots and so to his death. Am I to starve, then, while this man lives in luxury? No. I have a certain hold over him. If I can see him I will make him tell me where at least some of it is hidden. There will be pickings," she said, "and I am not ungenerous. Now, will you play? The police, or a share of Dinnik's money?"

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Very well," said the lady, drawing her cloak about her as she rose. "The police-station is across the square, is it not? The waiter will tell me."

"Stop. Sit down again. Waiter! Bring me—what will the *gnadige Frau* take?"

She shook her head but sat down again and Werner gave the waiter an order. Moreno also called to him. "The *Señor* here will drink with me. What will you have the courage to drink in this place?"

Forgan repressed an impulse to ask for six aspirins and a bag of ice to put on his head.

"Whatever your honour recommends."

"What do you want from me?" said Werner hoarsely.

"First of all, a description of the place. Where exactly the prisoners are kept, how are they guarded, how many locked doors and so on. Do not lie to me, I know a great deal already but not in enough detail."

The waiter returned with the orders, when he had gone again Werner began a careful description of the lay-out of the West wing. Forgan permitted himself to disregard this part and gave Moreno the whole of his attention, it was like a holiday to hear only one language for a time.

"I and others like-minded with me," said Moreno, "are going about talking to people to make sure that they know the results of this rash act of the Mayor's. Then, when public opinion is sufficiently instructed, we will call a meeting ourselves if he will not and see if the voice of the people will convince him of his error. The Voice of the People," said Moreno magnificently, "is the Voice of God."

"Only two keys, then, are needed," said the widow. "The key of the outer door and the key of the grille across the prison corridor."

"But, alas," said Forgan, "men do not always listen even to the Voice of God."

"Only one key," said Werner, "for I myself will admit you by the outer door. But Leiden keeps the key and brings it up himself to open the grille three times every twenty-four hours. He keeps it in his safe," he added hurriedly.

"Does he not sometimes hand it to you to open the grille for him?"

"Sometimes."

"It is simple, then. A small piece of wax in the palm of the left hand upon which you will press the key, and we shall have it."

Forgan was so interested that he could not spare even a part of his attention for Moreno, and merely said yes or no at random whenever there came a pause in the monologue.

Werner was thinking that it did not matter much if the woman did have the key, the guards would stop her long before that. Unless, of course, she had thought up some scheme for dealing with the guards.

"And it will be the right key," said the widow, tapping the table with a long fingernail enamelled dark red. "I know what it looks like. I have had it described to me," which was a lie though Werner could not know that. "No monkey-tricks, mind. And I will have both keys, please. You might not be available when I wanted you. Also, I am in a hurry. You will have them ready for me here to-morrow at this hour."

"That is completely impossible," said Werner decidedly. "I do not go on duty again until eight hours to-morrow and I come off again at sixteen hours. The locksmith here will want a full day to make two keys."

"Nonsense. He can do them to-morrow night if you pay him well enough. Bring them to me here at this hour," she glanced at her watch, "at fifteen hours the day after to-morrow."

Forgan became aware that Moreno had been silent for several moments and was looking at him with pained surprise.

"I was thinking over what you have just said," explained Forgan.

"It seemed to me to be quite clear and simple," said Moreno in an offended voice.

"It is clearness itself," said Forgan. The widow got up and trailed gracefully out of the café leaving the German staring blankly after her. "Tell me," continued Forgan, merely for something to say, "this public meeting, when do you expect to hold it?"

"Shortly. Within a week. There will be notices placarding the town. You will be present?"

"For that I would miss also my own wedding! One more glass to the success of all your schemes. Waiter!"

Forgan detached himself as soon as possible, returned to the hotel and told Campbell what he had heard.

"Hambledon," said Campbell. "Wonder where he is."

"Still asleep if he's got any sense," said Forgan. "I'll get into overalls and we'll go up. What's your guess as to who the lady is?"

"Same as yours, I expect. But her husband—if she is the juggler's widow—was a friend of the Commies, wasn't he?"

"I expect she was lying," said Forgan, "when she said she wanted to screw money out of Pavel Dinnik. She probably wants to set him free."

"Relays of people trying to rescue Pavel Dinnik?"

"Well, he is rather a big noise, isn't he?"

Hambledon, always a light sleeper, awoke at the first tap upon his door and got up to unlock it.

"By permission, *Señor*" said Forgan apologetically, for the benefit of a couple of visitors strolling along the corridor, "did not your honour complain about your bedside light being out of order?"

"I did, yes," agreed Hambledon. "It flashes off and on. Most disconcerting, when one is trying to read."

"A loose connection," suggested Forgan as Campbell sidled in with his bag of tools and closed the door after him.

"I don't think it matters whether she is the juggler's widow or not," said Hambledon at the end of Forgan's story. "The point is that she is going to have the keys. At least, that's what she thinks."

Forgan nodded. "He is giving them to her at fifteen hours the day after to-morrow."

"Well, let him. Then we must get them from her."

Campbell coughed and Hambledon looked at him.

"Suppose," said Campbell, "she keeps them inside her corsets or whatever they call the things. Do women wear corsets in these days?"

"I have not the remotest idea. There will, however, be moments when the keys are not inside her problematical corsets. When she is having a bath, for one. When she is just going to use them, for another. Some solution will doubtless present itself. What puzzles me more is how she thinks she will get past the various guards."

"She didn't say, but if anyone could, she will."

"I heard to-day," said Hambledon, "that the English yacht which I mentioned to you will be coming in to the harbour here in five days' time. Next Saturday, in fact."

"And the time?" said Forgan anxiously.

"She will come in about midday and stay for twenty-four hours if needed. I don't always know in advance when I am going to be on duty."

"Have you found out about the coffee?" asked Campbell.

"Oh, yes. It is made in the West wing canteen for all the warders and anyone else who is at home, the staff, the yacht's crew and so on. Everyone except the prisoners and——"

"And who?"

"And Leiden," said Tommy unwillingly. "He brews his own with one of those coffee-machine things and a spirit stove."

"What time of day is this?"

"There's coffee for breakfast at seven-thirty. At about eleven in the morning, but that wouldn't be safe because there's a lot of coming in and going out then. I mean, if the whole household went sound asleep at eleven a.m. and even one man came back from a walk at eleven-fifteen it would be tiresome."

"Yes, wouldn't it?" said Forgan.

"Again just after lunch," went on Hambledon. "At about half-past one. I think, myself, that's the best time. People aren't walking briskly about at that time and it's getting hotter every day now."

"What about night-time?" asked Forgan.

"That's rather tempting because they do serve us guards on duty coffee at about eleven at night, but there again you have people wandering in and out, the same risk as at eleven in the morning."

"Spaniards never seem to go to bed," said Campbell, "I suppose it's the afternoon siesta."

"And the German guards have caught it," said Forgan. "Parties down in the town, no doubt."

"How do the late birds get in?"

"The relief man who's normally sound asleep in the softest armchair in the staff sitting-room slips down by arrangement. But Leiden's coffee can't be doped."

"He keeps the grille key in his safe in between times," said Forgan. "At least, that German said so. Ernst Werner, is he?"

"Oh, help," said Hambledon dismally, "that's torn it. It's a combination lock on that safe, I noticed it when I was in his room. No key, just figures."

"So it wouldn't help to dope Leiden," said Campbell, "except, of course, to keep him quiet while Pavel Dinnik walks downstairs."

"He'd be lying down anyway in siesta time," said Forgan.

"Yes. But now we've simply got to have the widow's keys," said Hambledon.

"Wherever she keeps them," said Campbell gloomily.

"I shall be on duty at the same time as Ernst Werner to-morrow from eight a.m. until four," said Hambledon. "I shall be able to see if Leiden hands him the key."

"You speak of a third man on duty in the staff sitting-room," said Campbell. "Don't you take your turn at that too?"

"No, I'm let off that. It only happens on the night shift and merely consists, as I said, of sleeping soundly in two large armchairs pushed together instead of in one's bed. I don't think there's even a regular rota for that, they just take it roughly in turns. I sleep on this side because I'm supposed to keep an eye on the guests."

Two days later Campbell had his free afternoon and went down into the town just as the time of siesta was

beginning. Hambledon was quite right, it was getting hotter every day. In the early afternoon there comes the time when the sun's heat has sunk into walls and roofs and paving stones until they can hold no more and have to give it out again in shimmering waves, when man and beast give up even the pretence of work and retire to sleep in patches of shade, and even the birds are silent. No one is out and about unless it is unavoidably necessary and the lost time is made up by earlier rising and later going to bed. In the afternoon, one sleeps. If Ernst Werner and the veiled widow had been Spaniards they would not have made the appointment for that hour.

Campbell plodded down to the square, found himself a seat on a bench in the shade of the trees and apparently went to sleep. At about half-past two the German arrived, perspiring visibly, and went to the locksmith's shop, a tiny place sandwiched between the hairdresser's and the bakery. Apparently he was expected for the door was ajar, he pushed it open and went in, shutting it behind him. Some time passed and Campbell nearly went to sleep in earnest. Just before three he saw the widow, walking with slow dignity, cross the square to the café she had visited before; she went inside and disappeared from view. Three o'clock struck from the church and was repeated from somewhere down by the harbour and still the locksmith's door remained shut.

It was ten minutes past three when it opened at last and the German came out, hurrying. He dashed across the square and entered the café. Ten minutes later she came out and walked away towards the hotel, a few minutes later Werner came out also and went down towards the harbour.

Later that afternoon there was a conference in Hambledon's room.

"I should imagine," said Hambledon, "that she'd make her attempt to get at Dinnik in the small hours. About three or four a.m. She may possibly count upon the guards being asleep at that hour and, what is more, she wouldn't be far out. But we only have upright chairs without arms to sit in and nothing to lean upon, and you don't sleep soundly like that. If you do, you roll off on the floor, Moritz did the other night."

"She doesn't know that," said Forgan. "Besides, for all we know, she may have some stranglehold over some of the others as she had over Werner. Who's on duty to-night, do you know?"

Hambledon mentioned two names. "I don't know them well, I've never shared duty with them. The point is that if she goes out of her room at all this evening, a search must be made for the keys. I'd better do that myself, I think."

"Lord, no," said Forgan. "If she came back and found you there you'd be thrown out on your ear, and rightly. Out of the hotel, I mean, and then good-bye Pavel Dinnik."

"Whereas if we're caught," said Campbell, "we are hotel servants doing a repair job. Even if there was a frightful row and we were sacked, all is not lost."

"I suppose you're right," said Hambledon. "In fact, I know you are. But you must search thoroughly and without leaving traces, and even then they may not be there."

"If they aren't," said Campbell.

"Then we shall have to waylay her when she makes the attempt, that's all."

"We look like having an interesting evening," said Forgan. "So long as it doesn't end in a strip-tease act——"

"There is no need to be coarse," said Campbell.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MAN CALLED SORROW

Soon after nine that evening the widow left her room and went along the corridor; Hambledon, who was in his room with the door ajar, saw her go past. He came out of his room and stood in the passage, ostensibly hunting through his pockets for something; the widow rang the bell for the lift, it came and she was carried down out of sight. Hambledon went back to his room.

"Now's your chance," he said.

Forgan and Campbell got up at once, crossed the corridor and opened the widow's door with their pass-key. They had a bag of tools with them. The door closed behind them and all was quiet.

For some minutes Hambledon kept his door ajar, but guests began to come up after dinner and he shut it. He had no wish to be engaged in sparkling conversation by anyone just then. This sort of activity never lasted long, women collected wraps before going out or powdered their noses and then went down again. He would reopen his door later.

The widow's suite consisted of a sitting-room with a door almost opposite to Hambledon's, a bedroom opening from the sitting-room with another door further along the corridor, and a bathroom beyond which had no outer door. Campbell was searching the sitting-room and Forgan the bedroom when there came the sound of a key being fitted into the sitting-room door. Campbell dived into the bedroom where Forgan, with great presence of mind, switched off the light. The sitting-room door opened to admit, not the widow, but the German Ernst Werner.

The connecting door was half open and they could see him perfectly well. He looked round him impatiently, glanced at his watch and then just stood and waited. It was quite obvious that he had expected to find the lady there and Forgan and Campbell moved nearer together.

"This door," breathed Campbell, but Forgan shook his head.

"He's brought the keys. Look."

Werner, while he waited, was tossing something into the air and catching it, two keys tied together.

The door opened again and the widow came in, Werner bowed from the waist and showed her the keys.

"So you have them," she said.

"I stood over the wretched man until he had finished."

"Thank you," she said, and took the keys from him. She looked at them for a moment and then put them on a table and dropped a handkerchief over them. Forgan and Campbell glanced at each other.

"Now, perhaps," said Werner, "the gracious lady will forget who knifed that juggler fellow at the Honest Lobster."

"Oh yes," she said quietly. "In ten minutes' time I shall have completely forgotten and so, no doubt, will you. A glass of wine before you go, to seal the bargain."

"Thank you, *gna' Frau*."

She opened a corner cupboard to take out two glasses and a bottle of wine; she filled the glasses, gave him one and held the other in her own hand.

"To your beautiful eyes," said Werner impertinently, and drained the glass. "But are you not drinking also?"

"Oh yes. Just a moment."

She set the glass down and used both hands to throw back the heavy veil which covered her face and the watchers saw that it bore no scars at all. The German took a quick pace back and caught his breath audibly.

"You know me, don't you? You are quite right. I am the widow of 'that juggler fellow' you knifed at the Honest Lobster." She picked up her glass and her hands were shaking so much that the red wine ran down her fingers; her voice, too, was shaking and the words came out uncertainly, in gasps. "I have a toast too. Pedro; my beloved. My only love." She drank, and turned to put the glass down; when she looked round again the watchers in the bedroom shrank when they saw her face more terrible than with any scars.

"As for you," she said, "you may go. If I were you, I'd say my prayers. You have about three minutes—I think—to live. When you see Pedro—in three minutes—you can tell him—I paid his debt."

The gasping voice stopped but the German did not answer. He went towards the door, stumbling a little, opened it slowly and went out. The widow went to the door, looked after him a moment and shut it. Then she sat down in a chair and began to giggle, long runs of low chuckling laughter that went on and on, with murmurs in between.

"So easy. Pedro, what a fool! So easy, Pedro——"

"Let's get out!" muttered Campbell. "She's as mad as——"

"No," murmured Forgan. "The keys. Get over behind the bed, if she comes in we'll dive under it."

She got up suddenly, wiped her eyes with the backs of her hands like a child and picked up both glasses. Campbell went to ground instantly under the bed and next second Forgan rolled under beside him, the carpet was thick and their movements all but inaudible.

The widow turned on the bedroom light, came through with the glasses to the bathroom and switched on that light also. They heard her running the tap, a minute later she came back through the bedroom and they heard the glasses jingle together as she went. The bedroom light went out and there came the sound of a cupboard door being opened and shut.

She moved restlessly about talking to herself, but in a tone too low for them to distinguish any words until she said: "I must see. I must make sure."

The sitting-room door into the passage opened to admit Hambledon's voice saying: "Just a moment. Now," and immediately the woman screamed. Not a loud scream, merely a cry of horror.

"One moment, Madam!"

"That's Kircher, the manager, surely," whispered Forgan.

"Even at such a moment his voice is still fruity," agreed Campbell.

"Oh—oh! It's a dead man!"

Shuffling sounds and then a door shutting. Then the manager's voice again.

"I assure you, madam, there is no need to distress yourself. A gentleman was taken ill and fainted in the passage. That is all, I assure you."

"Oh no, he's dead, I saw his eyes. Oh dear, oh you are funny; 'don't distress yourself! I'm not distressing myself, I—oh!"

She burst out laughing, began to sob, produced an extraordinary crowing noise and went into hysterics.

"Ardweg!" said Kircher.

"Coming," said Hambledon. The voices and the sobbing entered the sitting-room together and the passage door was shut.

"Come on out," said Forgan, rolling out from under the bed. "Where's the tool-bag?" He switched on the

bathroom light. "We've been working here. Why not?" He looked through the doorway. "The keys are still there."

"Madam," said Kircher urgently, "control yourself, I beg," but the lady only whooped more loudly.

"Pour some water over her," said Hambledon in a contemptuous tone, for he always loathed hysterics.

"Get some will you?" said the manager. "In a glass, to drink."

Hambledon switched on the bedroom light and came face to face with Campbell who seized him by the arm.

"On the table in there, under a handkerchief, the keys!" he whispered.

"Right," murmured Hambledon. He filled a tumbler at the bathroom basin and strode back with it, shutting the intervening door after him. Forgan and Campbell immediately escaped into the passage by the bedroom door and walked purposefully along, Forgan leading the way with a preoccupied frown and Campbell trailing behind carrying the tool-bag. There was a group of women strolling together, guests in bright evening dresses.

"This is the one," said Forgan in Spanish to his mate with the bag. "It is the highest, so the air collects in it." He had stopped by one of the corridor radiators.

"Surely," said one of the ladies, "you are not going to turn those things on in this hot weather?"

Forgan laughed politely. "No, *Señora*, indeed not. By permission, it is only that there is water-hammer along here sometimes. It is the air in the pipes, *Señora*."

The guests lost interest and walked on.

"They must have dumped him in Hambledon's room," said Campbell, selecting a wrench from the tool-bag.

"I want to see what happens next," said Forgan, throwing the tool back in the bag and taking out another.

The widow's door opened, the manager rushed across the passage, entered Hambledon's room and shut the door behind him. The widow's door remained open but no sound came out.

"She's left off whooping, anyway."

"Probably Hambledon slapped——"

The manager came out again and once more crossed the passage and the housemaid on the evening shift came hurrying along from her lair behind the lift. The manager met her at the widow's door and said that madame was hysterical, if she continued to be upset he would ring up the doctor. The maid went in, Hambledon came out, and the widow's door shut once more. Hambledon and Kircher came along the corridor together.

"Oh, dear," said Hambledon audibly. "These ladies."

"Come and have a drink," said Kircher. "I'm going to."

They passed the industrious workmen without a glance. Kircher only dealt with the guests; had it been the under-manager he would have wanted to know what they thought they were doing, but had it been he, Forgan and Campbell would not have been in sight.

They waited about for a few minutes more and then the service lift, almost opposite to them, whined to a stop and the iron gates slid back. Two men, dressed like furniture removers in green baize aprons, came pushing between them a box divan on castors. They ran it along the corridor to Hambledon's room and went in.

"The old stunt," said Forgan, "for removing the corpses without agitating the customers."

Campbell nodded. "We'd better move off. Those fellows know radiators don't need attention this weather."

They walked slowly away with the carefree manner of workmen who have finished for the night. Before they reached the end of the passage a door behind them opened and shut. They did not look round, but one of the divan's castors squeaked a little. The service lift gates clashed together again and the lift whined down.

"You know, they ought to oil that castor," said Forgan thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't suppose they use it every day," said Campbell reasonably.

Hambledon went on duty at midnight that night and his fellow warder was the German called Goertz who had been Werner's companion in Paris. Perhaps because his friend had just died he did not settle down to read a book or doze the hours away, he seemed to feel the need of human companionship. He came down the passage to lean against the wrought-iron grille and talk through it in a low voice. He told Hambledon that Werner's death was a severe shock to him. "These heart failures, they attack even the strongest among us. I'd known him for years, we were in the Army together. In fact, it was he who brought me here."

"He's been here some time, then," said Hambledon.

"Oh yes, he was one of the first to join this organisation, he and his brother Leonhard."

"Oh yes? His brother isn't here now, is he? I haven't met another Werner so far as I know."

"No, he came to grief in Paris some time before you joined us."

Hambledon foresaw a possible ray of light upon events in Paris which had hitherto remained mysterious.

"I have visited Paris when I was younger, it is a place where it is possible to come to grief," he said with a reminiscent chuckle. "What was it, a lady?"

"Only indirectly. It was like this," said Goertz. "Leonhard had a crush on a girl who lived up at Montmartre. Leonhard was like that, he was always falling for some girl or other. Ernst was that way, too, he'd have got in dutch with the Chief one of these days if he'd lived. Well, one of our lot, a Frenchman who lives in Paris, heard all about this. In fact, Leonhard told him. He told us all, he always did."

"Not very wise, perhaps," said Hambledon, thinking that the deceased Leonhard, when in life, had wanted kicking.

"Oh, I don't know. Anyway, this girl lived with an aunt who was an absolute dragon. *Herrgott*, what a woman! Well, Antoine found out all about her and played a joke on Leonhard, sent him a note as from the girl asking him to visit her at a time when she'd be alone in the house. Actually, the girl would have been out and only the aunt at home."

"I see," said Hambledon, laughing. "Antoine, no doubt, would be lurking in the shadows somewhere to watch Leonhard getting the bird."

"That's right. Actually, he saw Leonhard run up one of those infernal long flights of steps with a man running up behind him. Just before they passed Antoine in his dark door-way the second man threw a knife into Leonhard's back. Just under the shoulder blade, you know. Poor Leonhard rolled down the steps, dying as he went, and the man ran on past Antoine and out of sight round a corner."

"Never discovered who he was, I suppose," said Tommy, giving Goertz a cigarette and lighting one for himself. "Or why he did it? Had Leonhard been chasing his girl too?"

"Oh, no, the crime was political," said Goertz gravely. "Antoine knew the man all right, he was a public character, a juggler. Did a knife-throwing act, very clever. We all knew him by sight."

"That accounts for it, of course. The accurate throw, I mean. But why political?"

"He was a Commy, the juggler, and we'd just pinched Pavel Dinnik. How the juggler—Don Pedro, he called

himself—managed to link up Leonhard with the snatch I'll never know, but there's no doubt he did."

"I see. What happened next, didn't Antoine do anything?"

"He wasn't armed, he let Don Pedro go. Very wise, too, probably the fellow had his pockets full of knives."

"He wouldn't have had only one," agreed Hambleton. "In case he missed with the first, you know."

"Quite so. That's what Antoine thought." Goertz began to laugh. "It was rather funny, really. Antoine stayed where he was till a crowd began to collect round Leonhard's body at the bottom of the steps, and then tittuped lightly down just in time to see some other poor boob being roped in by the police for the murder. Antoine said he went away round a corner and laughed himself silly."

Hambleton, having been the poor boob in question, remembered perfectly a young man running down the steps to join the crowd.

"Enough to make anyone laugh," he agreed. "What happened to him?"

"Who? The prisoner? Who cares?"

"The prisoner, perhaps," suggested Hambleton, and Goertz laughed. "And the juggler? You could have denounced him to the police."

"What, and call attention to our little lot sculling round Paris? Not—likely!"

"I wonder Ernst Werner just let it go, though," said Hambleton gravely. "After all, the fellow'd killed his brother. I should have thought our Ernst was a man who'd know what to do next, if you get me."

"Oh, he did," said Goertz. "He paid off the juggler the next night. It doesn't matter saying so now he's dead. But if our respected Chief had known what happened to the juggler, Ernst would have been out of a job five minutes later."

"Herr Leiden has very definite views about violence," said Hambleton quietly.

"He has, yes." Hambleton noticed that even Goertz' harsh voice softened when he spoke of Leiden. "He has had rather too much of it himself, you see. Did he deliver you a lecture on how to treat prisoners when he engaged you?" Hambleton nodded. "He always does. Did you notice a picture of a lady in his sitting room?"

"A big oil-painting? Yes."

"That was his wife and they had one daughter of about fifteen or so. They lived in Berlin, he was a merchant of some sort, pretty well-to-do. He had to be away towards the very end of the war and couldn't get back in time before the Russians broke in." Goertz paused to cough and went on in a whisper. "It wouldn't have mattered so much, I expect, if only they'd disappeared without trace. Been blown up or shot or something. But there were too many people who knew what happened, and they told him, unfortunately. Why can't people hold their tongues? Actually, his wife died in hospital but the girl was dead when they brought her in."

Hambleton muttered something and Goertz went on: "So now you know why he hates Communists, particularly Russian ones. Of course, that's why he calls himself Leiden."

"Why?" said Hambleton, genuinely surprised. "It's quite a common name. I suppose it comes from Leyden in Holland."

"Not this time," said Goertz, straightening himself and preparing to move off. "I can't remember, now, what his real name is, but Leiden is a perfectly good German word with a perfectly ordinary meaning, so he calls himself Leiden. Well, thanks for the yarn, it helped to pass the night."

He strolled away towards his little room at the far end, leaving Hambleton deep in thought. The poor little man

who would not allow himself to lay a finger on his prisoners; Leiden, the man called Sorrow.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SLEEPING BEAUTIES

Hambledon had a bath, shaved, changed and went down to breakfast. When he came upstairs again there was some activity in the corridor, the doors of both widow's rooms were wide open, the head chambermaid was scurrying about being helpful and the porter was standing outside the bedroom door, waiting. Even as Hambledon approached, the chambermaid handed out suit-cases to the porter who ambled away with them to the service lift and the next moment the widow came out, very composed and stately. The chambermaid, who had evidently been well tipped, was following her with floods of thanks and good wishes.

"And I do trust the *Señora* finds her keys safely at home," she said. "They must be there, *Señora*, they are certainly not here."

"Evidently not," said the lady. "Do not trouble yourself further, my kind Marietta. Good-bye."

She walked gracefully away towards the lift, Hambledon flattened himself against the wall and bowed as she passed and she bent her head slightly in reply. Considering that he had been burning brown-paper under her nose, or rather, waving it dangerously near her impenetrable veil only twelve hours earlier it was, he felt, the least she could do. The performance, oddly suggestive of waving burning joss-sticks before an idol, had at least been effective; she had stopped whooping at once. Perhaps she was really afraid of being scarred in earnest. Kircher had asked what on earth had inspired him to such a peculiar remedy and Hambledon had replied vaguely that he thought that that was what one did when ladies were taken unwell. He could not see any smelling-salts about and there didn't seem to be any feathers either.

"Feathers?" said Kircher, staring.

"To burn. Instead of the brown paper."

"My dear Ardweg! Tell me, am I right? You are not married and never have been?"

"Well, it stopped her, didn't it?" said Hambledon indignantly.

So he stood back in the corridor and let the lady pass by while Marietta watched with an expression of kindly concern.

"Lost her keys, eh?"

"Oh, *señor*! The hunt that there was almost all night! Serafina, who as your honour knows was on night duty last night, thought the poor lady was going out of her mind. 'My keys! The keys of my beautiful flat, they are lost! They are behind the cupboard—in the curtains—deep in the chairs—under the carpet!' Santissima, what a night for poor Serafina! Then, quite suddenly, the lady said that she must have left them at home and she must go away at once, early in the morning, to see if they were safe. So she packed up all her things, indeed, they were ready when I went in with the breakfast, and she ordered the car and now she's gone. I only hope she will not find robbers have been in and ransacked her beautiful flat. What things one hears of nowadays, *señor*!"

Hambledon disengaged himself, went into his room and shut the door behind him.

"'Beautiful flat' is right," he said unkindly.

This was Friday and the yacht was due in at midday on the following day. Also, Hambledon would be on duty

from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday.

"And that's providential," he said, "for if I hadn't been on that shift it would look a bit odd if I rolled in casually and hung round the kitchen. Getting at the coffee is simple, the fellow makes it well beforehand and leaves it in a big jug at the side of the stove to keep hot. The guard outside the gate is always drifting into the kitchen for a snack of something or a yarn with the cook. I said, the guard outside the gate. But if Leiden says: 'You go inside, Ardweg,' it's going to be awkward."

"Why?" said Campbell. "Can't you make an excuse for being outside for preference?"

"Easily," said Hambledon, "with any other man, but he's got a horrid trick of knowing what one is thinking. I told you that before and I'm not the only one who has noticed it. It's common talk among the guards."

"Then you won't have to think about escaping, that's all," said Forgan cheerfully. "Concentrate on how you loathe the prisoners, he'd get that one."

"Or that it gives you the jim-jams being locked up for eight hours on end," said Campbell. "It would me."

Hambledon nodded. "That's the best one, for the bare thought of going inside to-morrow gives me acute claustrophobia. The trouble with that little man is that one must tell him the truth."

"He's put the wind up you properly," said Forgan.

"I've never been so terrified of anyone in all my life," said Hambledon frankly. "However, let that go, I'll manage somehow. You are quite clear about your part? I want you in case anything goes wrong, but you must wait until I come down to the gate for you. The coffee might be late or get upset—heaven forbid—you can't come in till they're all asleep. But you must have the outer door key in case someone goes off with the one that hangs there, it does occasionally happen. But you must not on any account come in before you see me."

"And suppose we meet Leiden on the stairs?"

"We shall use the lift," said Hambledon. "He will hear it if he's awake but it won't bring him out. He won't come up. You will be outside the side door from two o'clock onwards."

Hambledon reported for duty at eight the following morning and found that his companion was Goertz again. They talked for a few minutes together with the two guards who were coming off duty and then Leiden came up the stairs with the key dangling from his fingers and wished them all good morning.

"You, Ardweg," he added, "will go inside, please." Before Hambledon could speak Leiden looked closely at him and said: "On second thoughts, no. Goertz, you will go inside."

"I was inside last time," said Goertz sullenly.

"I will make it up to you in the immediate future."

Leiden unlocked the gate, the inside warder came out, Goertz went in without another word and walked along the passage to the far end. Leiden asked the last guards whether they had anything to report.

"Nothing, *mein Herr*."

"Very well, you may go."

They went downstairs and Leiden turned to Hambledon.

"I have an idea that this place is rather getting on your nerves," he said. "It is, actually, more of a strain to be inside than to be outside the gate, is it not?"

"Frankly, *mein Herr*, it is, but I have no wish to evade any part of my duty," said Hambledon.

"No. No, you are not the type to evade your duty however unpleasant, but when I told you to go inside just now I could feel repugnance flowing from you like a cloud."

"I must control my clouds better in future," said Hambleton with a smile.

"You know, I sometimes feel that you will not be with me much longer," said Leiden, swinging his key.

Hambleton said afterwards that one's heart really does come up in one's throat, he could feel it thumping just under his Adam's apple.

"I hope, *mein Herr*, that you are not dissatisfied with——"

"Not at all. Quite the contrary. I like you and I wish you would stay. No, it is a question of temperament. Our good Goertz, who was country-bred and followed the plough when he was a lad, would never notice anything, but a man of sensitive nature and intelligence is certainly affected by the psychic atmosphere up here. The hatred against us—that is natural—the evil wishes, the cruel memories," he shivered, "you feel them do you not? I do, very strongly."

"I do feel them, yes. Not so strongly as you, but the feeling is there."

"Yes. Tell me at once, Ardweg, if you feel you cannot go on. I will not keep you here against your will."

"I think you are kindness itself," said Hambleton impulsively.

"Oh no. Oh no, Ardweg. If only you knew what I should like to do——"

Leiden turned from him abruptly and hurried down the stairs.

The first part of the morning shift was busy; the prisoners had cleaned their cells earlier but they had now to go in turns for the morning wash—they were not allowed to shave—and then breakfasts were served and books or writing-materials or work given out for the day. Then the time dragged until lunch brought another period of activity and there were the usual grumbles about not enough onion or too much salt. The trays came out again and the smell of coffee drifted out of the kitchen door.

Hambleton strolled idly across to the kitchen—a matter of six or eight paces—and leaned against the doorpost talking to the cook. He was, actually, the cook from the yacht and a Swiss; Leiden's original idea of having the cooking done by the warder staff in rotation had not been a great success. The coffee, freshly made, was in a very large brown jug at the back of the stove, keeping hot, and the cook was counting out cups and saucers on trays.

"Everybody in to-day?" asked Tommy.

"Oh, I expect so. Not that anyone sees fit to tell me how many to make coffee for, oh dear, no. But they don't go out much this time o'day now. All bar that Ernst Werner, more tomcat than man if you ask me. Did you go to the funeral?"

"No. Did you?"

"Nor me. Why should I? Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. Only fifteen saucers, there was sixteen yesterday. Where's the other one?"

"Somebody's broken one," suggested Hambleton.

"It 'ud be an odd day if somebody didn't break something. Maybe it's been left in the sitting-room."

The cook dashed out of the door and plunged into the staff sitting-room; Hambleton made one stride towards the coffee-jug and emptied the contents of a small bottle into it. This part of the business had not caused him much anxiety; the cook, a man without method, was always dashing out of the kitchen for something which ought to have been there and was not. When he returned from the sitting-room Hambleton was back on his post at the grille.

The coffee was served. Goertz, who seemed still to be clouded with a grievance, came to the grille for his cup and carried it away at once to his lair at the far end. Hambleton received his and the cook carried a loaded tray into the staff sitting-room where seven or eight men were lounging about in a semi-torpid condition. It was very hot on the top floor of the Hotel Arcadia in spite of the air-conditioning.

"I do think," said the cook, returning with the tray, "that they might at least come upstairs for their coffee, 'stead of sprawling on their beds expecting me to wait on 'em 'and and foot. Think I'm a ruddy bedroom steward, I suppose."

He slammed the lift doors angrily open, carried his load in, slammed the doors even louder and slid down out of sight. Hambleton seized the opportunity to empty his cup down the sink and returned in time to see Goertz empty his down his throat.

The cook was a long time. Surely it could not take all this time to serve seven men with coffee the way the cook served it. Someone had detected a funny taste and an enquiry was in progress. Hambleton looked at his watch. Twenty minutes past two, the coffee was later than usual. Goertz, at the far end of the passage, pushed his empty cup away from him, put his arms on the table and laid his head on them. One.

The lift gates clashed below and the cook returned, Hambleton grinned amiably at him and the man almost smiled.

"Well, that's that for a couple of hours," he said. "I'll just have my own and then take it easy for a bit. This your cup on the side 'ere?"

"That's mine."

"Like a drop more?"

"I don't think so, thanks. Not to-day."

"All the more for me," said the cook. He filled a large mug for himself and stood leaning against the kitchen doorpost, to drink it. This was the last man to receive the dose; when he went to sleep the others should be safely under. He emptied the mug at last and looked thoughtfully into it.

"Tastes a bit odd, to me," he said.

"Have you been eating onions?" said Hambleton, who had noticed that that was, in fact, the case.

"Yes, why? Does that affect the taste o' coffee?"

"Always," said Hambleton solemnly.

"Oh, really. Mus' remember that." He yawned suddenly. "Hot up here to-day."

"Very hot."

The cook turned and went into his kitchen, there was the scrape of a chair on the floor, indeterminate sounds of things being moved and then silence. Hambleton waited a few minutes and then moved across to look at him, he was sprawled half across the table sound asleep. Goertz had not moved. Hambleton opened the sitting-room door, there were seven men there in attitudes of complete relaxation, one upon the floor with his head on a week-old copy of the Frankfurter fitting. He snored gently and the clock on the wall said that the time was half-past two.

"The Palace of the Sleeping Beauty," said Hambleton happily, and launched himself down in the lift to the ground floor. He ran along the passage to the side entrance; the moment he came into sight Forgan and Campbell emerged from the bushes and he let them in.

"Everything all right?"

"So far," said Hambleton. "Is the yacht in?"

"Oh yes," said Campbell. "She came in on the stroke of noon all very smart and brass-bound. She's tied up alongside taking in water. And there's an eye-ful of Jaguar Javelin in the front of the hotel here, number FPE 857. Just arrived."

"Did you see the driver?"

Forgan nodded. "All got up fit to kill in a Palm-Beach suit, grey suede shoes and a monocle. We did not speak."

The driver of the Javelin was Charles Denton of Hambleton's department, sent out in support in case of emergency. Pavel Dinnik was a very big prize indeed.

The lift reached the top floor, Forgan and Campbell walked out and stared curiously about them. Hambleton made a rapid survey but all the sleepers still slept.

"So this is the bird-cage," said Forgan.

"Yes. Now, if this key fits——"

It did. It was a little stiff but it turned, and the grille opened. Hambleton pressed the button which corresponded with Dinnik's cell, the door slid back and he walked quickly towards it. Dinnik was lying on his bed reading a book, he laid it down and looked round when Hambleton came in.

"Dinnik. I am a friend of yours and I have come here on purpose to get you out of this. Get up at once please, and come with me, there is not a minute to lose."

Dinnik sprang to his feet and began to snatch up a few small personal possessions and thrust them into his pockets. Then he stopped suddenly and turned a face full of suspicion upon Hambleton.

"This is probably a trick," he said. "You will entice me out and then beat me or shoot me for attempting to escape."

"Nonsense," said Hambleton sharply. "I came here as a warder for the express purpose of getting you out."

"All the other warders——"

"Are sound asleep. Look at the man at the end of the passage."

Dinnik poked his head out cautiously and then ventured into the passage. Goertz' snores were quite audible.

"How did you manage it?"

"Doped their coffee. Now come on."

But the man in the cell opposite Dinnik's had, of course, seen everything and heard most of it. He was standing pressed against his cell bars and he called to Dinnik in Russian.

"Comrade Pavel Dinnik! Are you escaping? Take me with you, don't leave me behind."

As though his words were a signal all the other cells awoke to life as men rushed to their grilles and tried to see through them what was happening in the passage; the two nearest could do so. Immediately the cry ran from one cell to another. "Escaping—getting away—Dinnik—escape—escape—don't leave us—escape—let me out, let me out!" They shook their cell bars and kicked them and the voices rose from speech to shouting; in twenty seconds the quiet passage was pandemonium and getting worse.

Hambleton swore violently, seized Dinnik by the arm and hurried him away. As he passed Forgan and Campbell by the main grille Hambleton told them to quieten those fellows down. "Do something—anything you like, only stop that din. They'd waken the dead, let alone—this way, Dinnik. We go down in the lift."

In the meantime Charles Denton, having parked the glittering Jaguar in a handy position for a quick departure, was ordering coffee in the lounge. Since it was the hour of siesta there were few people about and only one waiter on duty, the service was intolerably slow. Probably the pantry staff were asleep. A Citroën saloon drove past the door, the owner parked it just behind the Jaguar and came running up the steps into the lounge with his car keys still in his hand. He made straight for the bar and was served with something green in a long glass.

Denton idled about, outwardly placid but inwardly fidgeting. His part was to wait in the lounge until Hambleton strolled past the windows and back again and then go out, start up the Jaguar and go slowly down the drive. Hambleton and Dinnik would be waiting for him in a clump of rhododendrons near the gate and he would take them down to the harbour where the yacht waited. If anything had happened to the yacht he would have taken them out of Spain by road, he even had a nice set of papers for Dinnik to show the frontier officials. Denton went to the window and looked out for the fifth time, the car park attendant had arrived back from lunch.

He was a thin anxious man in a white coat with brass buttons and beautiful gold epaulettes and a white-topped cap with gold braid round the peak. He looked a little, but not very, like an admiral. He was worried and annoyed. He had strict orders to keep the apron before the front door clear of cars and there were two, a Jaguar and a Citroën. A man could not take a quarter of an hour off for lunch without people leaving their cars all over the place. Why could they not line them up beside the dozen or more already in two neat lines? He looked into them. The Jaguar's keys dangled from the fascia board, the Citroën's were not there. He bounded up the steps into the lounge and looked about.

The tall elegant figure in the Palm-beach suit would belong to the Jaguar, undoubtedly. The Citroën was elderly and its mudguards were not 'as new', a less exquisite person would be—ah. Over at the bar. He walked across and engaged the owner—a Frenchman—in conversation. Denton stood by the window, looking out for Hambleton, and his eyes were next assailed by two young gentlemen on a tandem bicycle. They wore berets, wide-open shirts, very brief shorts and socks and dusty shoes and their bicycle was painted turquoise blue picked out with crimson. They parked it against a stone vase at the foot of the steps and came up into the lounge. The sun had impaired their skins and they were perspiring freely.

The solitary waiter appeared at once—though without Denton's coffee—and approached the cyclists, who ordered beer, rolls and butter; took the haversacks off their shoulders and threw them upon chairs. The carpark Admiral hurried out with the keys of the Citroën and the waiter said that he was desolated but that it was impossible to serve the *Señores* at that hour. Nothing was being served.

The *Señores* looked across at the Frenchman at the bar who was having another long green one, and said nonsense. The waiter must do what he was told at once. But, at once.

Denton looked out again in time to see the car-park attendant, with every sign of repugnance, wheeling the tandem away from the sacred portals of the Arcadia. Tandem cycles are not the easiest things to wheel, he became entangled with the pedals and acquired a smear of black grease from the front chain on his trousers. However, he passed away out of sight towards the shrubbery.

The argument between the waiter and the cyclists was becoming heated, he was recommending various places in the town which would receive them with joy and they were demanding to see the manager. "At once. We are not to be treated in this manner."

The waiter backed away from them and Denton intercepted him. "Is my coffee never coming?"

"In one moment, *Señor*, in one moment."

"Please bring it to that little table in the window."

"*Par servir*," said the waiter distractedly and turned away, but the cyclists intercepted him in their turn.

"That gentleman is being served. Why cannot we be served also?"

"The gentleman is a resident," said the waiter untruthfully, for he had seen Denton arrive.

"So are we. That is, we are about to book in."

"The hotel is, with regrets, completely full," said the waiter.

"Bring the manager here at once," said the larger cyclist, and the waiter fled. They then turned upon Denton.

"By permission, *Señor*. Is this hotel in fact so completely full?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I have not counted."

"Counted? The guests or the rooms?"

"Neither."

"But why," asked the smaller cyclist, "did that man treat us in that rude manner?"

Denton allowed his eyes to travel slowly over them, one after the other, from head to foot.

"I can't think," he drawled.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LAUNDRY VAN

Nagel came through a door at the back of the lounge and the waiter with Denton's coffee followed him. The under-manager took one horrified look at the cyclists.

"You were quite right," he said in an undertone to the waiter. "These persons are not of a type to be received here. The Hotel Arcadia—with five stars—is not a holiday camp." He advanced upon the cyclists.

"I regret infinitely, *Señores*. The hotel is completely full and all our rooms are booked in advance for weeks to come."

"Nonsense," said the larger cyclist ominously. "A place this size can always make room."

"The *Señores* did not book in advance?"

"Well, no. But it is so early in the season——"

The waiter carried Denton's coffee to the table in the window and Charles followed him. No sign of Hambleton yet, but the Jaguar had been removed from the apron and parked away at the end of the line of cars with the Citroën backed in in front of it.

"Waiter. That car-park fellow has moved my car. Send him to me."

"By permission, *Señor*, he has orders to do so. The apron has to be kept clear."

"I don't care if he has a Papal Dispensation to do so, I shall want the car in five minutes. Send him to me."

The waiter scuttled away and Denton looked at his watch, it was ten minutes to three and Hambleton had said he hoped to be out at two-thirty or a little after. Twenty minutes late.

Hambleton had spent the last ten minutes or so—it had seemed much longer—in the shrubbery at the side of the hotel trying to pacify Dinnik who clung to him and refused to let go.

"Listen," said Tommy. "I am just going to walk across the front of the hotel and back as a signal to the man who is going to drive us away in a car. I shall not be two minutes and you can watch me all the time."

"I am coming with you."

"Oh, no you aren't. You would be seen from the windows."

"You are going to leave me—it is a signal for my assassination," said Dinnik, and the whites showed all round his eyes.

"Let go of my arm——"

"I won't. They will not dare to shoot while I keep close to you."

"Hell to you!" exploded Tommy, losing his temper. This was a mistake, for Dinnik was thereby convinced that he was right. Hambleton was nearly desperate, he had left that intolerable uproar going on upstairs, how Forgan and Campbell were to deal with it he could not imagine, and now this idiot was being obstructive when at any moment the hue and cry might begin. Hambleton would have knocked Dinnik out at once except that one is so conspicuous carrying a body about in front of a large hotel even in the hour of siesta which, by the way, was practically over. He looked at his watch, it was five minutes to three.

He towed Dinnik through the shrubbery until they could peer out upon the gravelled apron and see the two lines of cars under the trees straight ahead. There was the green Jaguar with a Citroën backed up against its bonnet and, even as they looked, two hotel guests complete with decorative wives came out of the hotel and strolled languidly across to their car. The siesta was over and Leiden would be awake. If he came out of his room——

Something brightly coloured among the bushes caught Hambleton's eye and he moved his head to see what it was. A tandem bicycle, shamelessly gaudy in turquoise and crimson, thrust away where it could not offend the eyes of distinguished visitors.

"Can you ride a bicycle?" demanded Hambleton.

"A little. That is, I could at one time. Five years ago——"

"Come on!"

The bushes closed behind them and a moment later the tandem also had gone.

Denton, convinced by now that something had gone seriously wrong, did not know what he ought to do. Hambleton might yet come or send Forgan or Campbell with a message. The car-park attendant had vanished, he had actually gone in pursuit of the Frenchman to return the Citroën's keys and the waiter had gone to look for him. The under-manager had at last convinced the cyclists that their title to the Hotel Arcadia was vain, and had escorted them down the front steps when trouble broke out again.

"Our bicycle! Where is it? We left it here, leaning against this elegant amphora."

Nagel guessed at once that the car-park attendant had taken the offending object away out of sight, but where was the man? Nagel looked anxiously about him and Denton lounged out to the head of the steps.

"This is all part of an intention to insult us! I shall summon the police!"

"*Señores*, I beg. One moment, and your honours' valuable machine—*where the hell is Jaime?*"

Denton, standing several feet higher than the disputants below him, had his attention caught by a flash of colour from a point where the drive from the back of the hotel met the main drive near the gate. He looked carefully, it was undoubtedly the missing tandem being ridden uncertainly but with ever-increasing speed towards the gate. Even at that range he recognised without difficulty the broad shoulders and spare frame of Thomas Hambleton who seemed to be wrestling with something on the handlebars. Probably the brakes. Behind him sat a slim, almost boyish form

with a cockatoo-like crest of fair hair blowing in the wind of their passage.

"They'll break their necks," said Denton, remembering the steep road and the hairpin bends he had come up less than an hour before. He ran down the steps and strode across to his car. The cyclists and Nagel, at ground-level, had seen nothing and he did not enlighten them. He released the brakes on the Citroën, managed to push it forward enough to wriggle the Jaguar out from behind it, and set off in pursuit.

All down the steep road into the town there were little groups of people looking over walls or peering out of doorways after something which had passed, while in the road itself little coils of dust were still dropping and settling to rest.

On the last stretch of descent before the road dipped into the town, a confused noise reached his ears and he stopped the car to lean from the window and listen. There were yells and shouts, the bellowing voice of a man trying to make himself heard above the uproar, gong-like sounds as of metallic objects being struck with blunt instruments and the crash of breaking glass.

"That cannot possibly be Hambledon's doing. Unless, of course, he has arranged a diversion——"

His eye was caught by a flamboyant poster on the wall of a house just ahead of him. "Protest Meeting," it said, in scarlet letters upon a yellow ground. "Ratepayers of Flores, Unite! Repudiate, Reject, Resist the fraudulent Attempt of a corrupt Administration to saddle you with a FIRE ENGINE which you do not want and for which YOU WILL PAY. Saturday, in the Plaza, at fourteen hours thirty. Ratepayers of Flores, COME!"

"A Ratepayers' Meeting?" said Denton incredulously. "Oh, really!"

The noise continued and was punctuated by several shots from small-arms of some kind. Probably revolvers. Denton released the brake and let the car roll on. It would be as well to avoid the Plaza if possible, there must be other routes to the harbour without becoming entangled with Ratepayers. He slid quietly through narrow deserted alleys, deserted because the residents were demonstrating in the Square, and emerged upon the quayside. The yacht was preparing to cast off, Denton looked her over carefully but could see nothing of Hambledon or Pavel Dinnik. He was not anxious, they were aboard all right, for against the back wall of the customs shed there leaned a gaudy but undamaged tandem bicycle.

Forgan and Campbell, having been left behind to pacify the Communists, held a brief conference together and then parted. Campbell went down in the lift and Forgan advanced boldly along the corridor.

"*Señores!*"

Shaken heads and indications of non-comprehension.

"*Messieurs!*"

That was obviously little better.

"Gentlemen!"

Quite useless.

"Blast you, can't you understand any civilised language? *Meine Herren!*"

A hesitating voice from the far end answered him in German, "I can speak German slowly a little."

"Splendid. Tell your friends," said Forgan, speaking slowly, one word at a time, "to be quiet or they will wake up the guards who are all asleep. Got that?"

The man said that he did, and uttered a sentence which was evidently understood by his comrades.

"Gut. Now then. Tell them that we have come to set them free but they must be quiet."

This also was repeated and a hush spread along the corridor.

"My comrade has gone to fetch a conveyance——"

"Please?"

"A vehicle, a—a van, a motor cart, an autobus——"

That got through and was translated.

"When my comrade comes back we will lead you away. Have you anything to bring with you?"

Every man, however long he has been a prisoner, has personal possessions, and several minutes were happily passed in collecting them. When this was done, Forgan continued.

"There are eleven of you."

"*Ja.*"

"The lift is small."

The word 'lift' proved to be difficult so Forgan mimed walking into it, closing the doors and sinking slowly to the ground with a dying howl. The interpreter's face lit up.

"We go into guard room and kill them all?"

"Heavens, no! *Nein, nein!* A very small room which goes up and down. Instead of stairs."

The interpreter got it that time.

"So we go down in two parties."

That also penetrated the curse of Babel and at that moment Campbell returned.

"I've backed it up against the door. It just about fits, I had to squeeze to get past it and now the doors at the back are open it's fine."

"Take six down," said Forgan, "and stow them in, I'll follow with the other five. That hook-nosed blighter in the green shirt can speak a little German, you'd better have him. Now then, which buttons do we push? They're numbered, so they are."

The lift whined down and, after a pause, up again. Another pause, and it went down once more, leaving the prison corridor quiet and empty but looking perfectly normal. All the cell doors were shut and the main grille closed and locked. Goertz stirred in his sleep, for he had been dreaming that he was in barracks again and that it was the hour of reveille. He turned his head upon his arm enough to glance sleepily along the corridor, but there was nothing unusual to be seen; he sighed and went to sleep again.

The hotel laundry van was large, as was to be expected, but it was a fairly tight fit for eleven men when the doors at the back were closed. They were fastened together by a bar which was operated by a lever from the driver's seat, for laundry vans are too often subject to pilferage. The van had been backed up against the side door of the North wing which it fitted so well that Campbell had to go forward a little before Forgan could get out. He shut the grille behind him and was walking round the van to the front when there was a sort of scuffle in the shrubbery and Hambleton came out on the weedy drive wheeling a tandem cycle which was being pushed from behind by Pavel Dinnik. Hambleton was in too desperate a hurry to ask idle questions about the hotel laundry van, he got upon the tandem with Dinnik behind him and Forgan gave them a helpful push to start; wobbling wildly, they rounded the corner of the hotel and were lost to sight. Forgan got into the front seat beside Campbell and the van set off in pursuit.

"Well, what's happened to the Jaguar?"

"Been stolen? That'll do them just as well if——"

"If they don't crash."

There were, of course, no windows in the sides or back of the laundry van, but there was an unglazed opening in the partition behind the driver. Forgan turned in his seat, set his face in the aperture and proceeded to give his passengers a rousing address.

"Workers of the World, unite! You have but now cast off your chains, rise now to liberate your brothers who still groan in captivity!"

"Pardon?" said the interpreter. "If you would speak more slowly I could understand. Also, simpler words, please?"

"Now, wouldn't that cramp the style of Demosthenes?" groaned Forgan, reverting to English.

"Who was he?" asked Campbell.

"One of Winston Churchill's ancestors." Then, in German: "Listen, you sons of misfortune. You are now free. Translate that."

It was done. "But we do not feel very free at this moment," added the interpreter plaintively.

"You will be. I am taking you where the Battle for Freedom is now going on. Your Communist brothers wait for your help. Tell 'em that."

"But where are we? We do not know even in what country we are."

"In a land where the souls and bodies of the down-trodden proletariat writhe and strive against the evil forces of ——"

"Pardon?"

"Sorry. Good Communists fight bad non-Communists. You will help? Yes?"

Campbell wrenched the van round the first of the hairpin bends and his passengers fell together like corn before the reaper.

"Careful," said Forgan, "you'll have us over. Besides, you're distracting their attention from me. Well?"

"We will help our brothers," said the interpreter, and was interrupted by Russian remarks from his friends. "They say: 'Show us the enemy and we will battle them. And victory.'"

"Splendid. There are no soldiers. Only civilians and police."

"We are accustomed," said the interpreter loftily, "to be dealing with civilians and police. We battle them. We victory."

"Magnificent," said Forgan.

"Where are the rifles?"

"At the mee—, that is, at the battle. Waiting for you. Besides, there are plenty of stones."

"There's Hambleton," said Campbell, pointing over the low wall by the last hairpin bend. "Just going—he's gone between the houses. I say, there's something going on already. Listen."

Forgan stuck his head out of his side of the van and heard the sounds of tumult.

"The meeting seems to have got out of hand already. That bellowing voice is the mayor, he started his career by selling fish." He turned his head to address his forces once more. "Comrades, we are almost there. The moment your doors are open, leap out and rush into the fray. Attack, attack, attack!"

The van shot down the last hill into the town, along two short streets and into the square which was filled with people. There were two or three individual combats in progress but fighting was not yet general, the mayor was on a balcony addressing the meeting in a voice which required no amplifying although he had several competitors in other parts of the square. Drawn up in front of the municipal fountain was the new municipal fire-engine, glorious in scarlet and brass, and round it were grouped all seven members of the fire-brigade with their Captain one pace in front. They all wore brilliant brass helmets and the Captain had gold epaulettes as well upon his blue uniform.

Hambledon and Dinnik were in the act of remounting the tandem; judging by the dust upon their clothes they had recently fallen off. They threaded their way through the crowd with Hambledon ringing his bell incessantly.

"Let them get well out of sight," said Forgan, "before we let our party loose or they'll follow and all join the yacht. What a day Flores is having."

The door of the police-station, on the far side of the square, opened to disclose the Floreal police force, all six of it. It came out, marching steadily in single file towards the fire-engine, and at that sight the tumult rose to a point which even drowned the voice of the mayor.

"Now," said Forgan, scrambling out of the van, "let 'em go." He ran round to the back of the van as the doors opened.

"There," he said, pointing at the police, "behold the enemies of the people," and the Communists leapt out.

"There's one thing about these Commies," said Campbell's voice at his shoulder, "they don't waste time, do they? Up with the cobblestones and at 'em."

"They've started it off properly," said Forgan. "Everybody heaves cobblestones. They'll start hitting each other—I thought so. My fat friend from the café's got one in the wind."

"Why doesn't somebody throw at the mayor? Ah, that's it."

There was a resounding crash of glass from the back of the balcony and the mayor ducked. Only his cocked hat showed above the parapet until another thrown bottle removed it. The police, faced with a squad of eleven total strangers howling in an unknown tongue, drew their revolvers and fired in the air as a warning; it did cause a hush long enough to permit of sounds from the fire-engine sector to be heard. The Deputy-Captain, distinguished by gold braid on his cuffs, was repelling boarders with the brass nozzle of the fire hose and imploring his men not to imperil their new brass helmets, and the men were drawing their axes.

"Somebody'll get hurt in a minute," said Campbell.

"Let it not be us," said Forgan. "Retreat in the direction of the harbour."

They abandoned the laundry van, which was being used as cover by several prudent rioters, and withdrew to the corner of a side street. The Communists, reinforced by several Floreal malcontents, renewed their attack on the police.

"They're going back," said Campbell. "The cops, look. Up the steps to their own front door—I thought so. Now they fire over the heads of the crowd——"

There was a scattered fusillade.

"Somebody fired low," said Forgan, "there's one of the Commies got one in the arm. You wouldn't think a fat man could hop like that, would you?"

"Somebody else dancing," said Campbell. "The Captain of the fire-brigade."

"He's signalling to the police to fire elsewhere. I think they must have punctured his new engine——"

"The people are scattering, it must be the——"

"The petrol tank. Now, if somebody throws a lighted match——"

"They have."

There was a sudden flare of flame, visible even in the strong sunlight, and all those near the fire-engine ran in all directions. The middle of the square cleared in an instant, leaving only the figure of the Captain shielding his face from the heat and roaring for water. "The pump! Get out the pump! Extinguish me my engine!"

"Well, it's stopped the fighting, anyway," said Forgan. "People don't scrap if they've got a good fire to look at."

"The police know that," said Campbell. "Look, they're coming out. They're arresting our Commies. Oh look, there's Greenshirt being hauled in, and the thin one, and old Bald-head——"

"They're giving up," said Forgan. "Hands up, all eleven of 'em."

"Let's go," said Campbell, "we've seen the best of it."

They turned away and began to walk fast in the direction of the harbour.

"I should like to be in that police-station," said Forgan, "provided nobody would see me. I'd like to hear those blighters explaining in Russian to the Spanish police how they come to be in the country without passports or any other papers."

"They've got to find out first what country they are in. They don't know that yet."

"Or where they've been——"

"Or who kept them there, or why they joined in a riot and violently assaulted the police. I should think they'd get ten years each, wouldn't you?"

"Life," said Forgan solemnly, "life at least."

"One of our more successful efforts," said Campbell complacently. "I should like to thank them. Their collaboration was beyond all praise."

They rounded a corner and came out upon the waterfront. There was a wide stretch of shining water between the yacht and the quayside and her bows were swinging towards the harbour mouth. Just aft of the bridge two figures leaned contentedly upon the rail and one of them lifted a hand in farewell.

"Well, they've made it all right," said Campbell.

"While we've missed the boat."

"It was worth it. You don't see a scrap like that every day."

They turned away and saw the Jaguar being expertly backed and turned in the shade of the custom-house. They ran towards it and Denton put his head out.

"You fellows are going back to the hotel, aren't you?"

"We were going to," said Forgan. "We intended to give in our notices and leave normally."

"But now," said Campbell, "we think we'd better leave at once."

"Why? Did you start that shindy in the Square?"

"Oh, no. That was started by the indigent but carefree natives. We only—is 'exacerbated' the word I want, Campbell?"

"Exacerbated is, I think, correct, Forgan."

"Get in," said Denton resignedly, and reached back to unlock the rear door for them.

"It was our good deed," said Forgan, as the car gathered speed. "We have relieved poor Herr Leiden of his surplus Communists. He wanted to get rid of them, you know."

"So now," said Campbell, "he can be perfectly happy starting all over again and collecting some more. Philanthropists," he added earnestly, "is what we are."

As the car went steadily up the long road out of the valley, he and Forgan turned to the rear window for a last look at Flores del Sol, with a tall column of black smoke rising from the market-place into the unclouded blue of a Spanish sky.

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*By the same Author*

DRINK TO YESTERDAY  
PRAY SILENCE  
THEY TELL NO TALES  
WITHOUT LAWFUL AUTHORITY  
GREEN HAZARD  
THE FIFTH MAN  
A BROTHER FOR HUGH  
LET THE TIGER DIE  
AMONG THOSE ABSENT  
NOT NEGOTIABLE  
DIAMONDS TO AMSTERDAM  
DANGEROUS BY NATURE  
NOW OR NEVER  
NIGHT TRAIN TO PARIS  
ALIAS UNCLE HUGO

London  
HODDER & STOUGHTON

[End of *A Knife for the Juggler*, by Manning Coles]