Passers-By

by Anthony Partridge, 1866-1946

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Published: 1910/1911
US: Little, Brown & Co., Boston
UK: Ward, Lock & Co., London

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room.

„Have you nothing to say to him?“ he asked, pointing to the carriage.

„Look at the big man opposite, with the little girl in red. How he stares!“

She advanced with slow, hesitating footsteps toward the spot where the man was lying.

„Marquis of Ellingham!“ he cried. „Lord Ellingham, indeed!“

The weight of the girl was heavy upon his arm. She had fainted.

„I am not here to-night to pose as a person who by chance has stumbled across a secret.“

They were a *partie carrée*, dining out of doors in the courtyard of an ancient but fashionable Parisian hotel.

Chapter I

There was nothing particularly inviting about the dark, stone-flagged passage, nothing which could possibly suggest a happy hunting-ground for the itinerant seeker after charity. Yet the couple passing wearily along the Strand welcomed it as at least a temporary refuge from the constant admonitions of a very vigilant police. A word and a glance were all that passed between the girl and the atom of deformity who wheeled the small piano. They crossed the sidewalk, and made their way down the inhospitable-looking passage. It led by a somewhat devious route to the Embankment, but at the present moment passers-by were few. On the left-hand side were a couple of shops, dirty, ill-cared for, improvident. On the right, a blank wall; in front, a small section of a great hotel. About halfway down was a gas-lamp, burning with a dim, uncertain luster, feebly reflected through the dirt-encrusted glass. The place had an unattractive and deserted air. Nevertheless the man who had been wheeling the piano brought it to a standstill there, with a little gasp of relief. The girl stood by his side, and for a moment buried her face upon her folded arms, leaning upon the top of the instrument. With a prodigious yawn a small monkey, who had been asleep in a basket, awoke and shook himself. He looked around with an air of plaintive disgust, and would have settled himself down to sleep again but for a pat from his master.

“Sit up, Chicot,” the man ordered. “It’s a poor place, but God knows where one may rest in this city. What do you say, Christine? Is it worth while?”

The girl looked up and down the dark passage. Two boys passed, whistling, without a glance at them. A beggar woman selling matches was the only other person in sight. Nevertheless she produced a roll of music and glanced through it.

“I will sing,” she said. “I must. Some fool may pass this way. Who can tell?”

The man at the piano, deformed, with the long, worn face of a man and the misshapen body of a youth, drew in a little breath which sounded like a hiss, as his fingers wandered over the keys.

“Who can tell?” he muttered, in a voice which sounded singularly deep for such a small creature. “Who can tell, after all? It may be even here that the great adventure should come.”

She turned her back a little upon him, and as he struck the notes she began to sing a familiar ballad. She sang to the bare walls, to the deserted shops, to the rain-soaked flagstones. Chance seemed suddenly to have diverted into other thoroughfares even the insignificant stream of people that sometimes filtered through the little passage. Only the monkey listened, listened with his head a little on one side, and an air of intense, plaintive interest. When she had finished there was a dead silence. Not a soul was in sight.

No remark passed between the two. The woman pushed her hat a little farther back as she bent once more over the music, and one saw something of her face by the light of that ill-looking gas-lamp. She was dark, and whatever good looks might have been hers under normal conditions were temporarily, at any rate, unrecognizable, owing to the ill-kept hair which came low over her forehead, and the bitter, sullen lines of her mouth. She drew another song from the shabby portfolio, and once more she sang.

A messenger boy, passing through, lingered for a moment. A woman with a basket of apples propped it up against the wall, and gave herself a second’s rest, hurrying on, though, when she saw the monkey fingering the little tray that hung from a cord round his neck. Once more the girl finished her song, and as its echoes died away she swept the passage from end to end with her sullen, angry eyes. There was no one in sight. She leaned back against the wall.

Up on the fifth floor of the great hotel, a narrow section of which fronted the passage, a man suddenly pushed open a window and looked down. He saw the rain-soaked pavements, and turned back to the valet who was putting out his clothes.

“It’s a wet night, Fred,” he remarked. “I’ll have my thicker patent shoes, and my opera-hat.”

He was on the point of leaving the window when his eyes chanced to fall upon the little group below. He eyed them at first carelessly enough, and then, as he continued to look, a startling change took place in his face. He leaned forward out of the wide-opened window. His lips were parted, his eyes almost distended. He was like a man who looks upon some impossible vision, a man who is driven to doubt even the evidence of his senses. Intensely, with a rapt air of complete obsession, he stood there, perfectly, rigid, gazing at that little group. He looked at the man, sitting before the crazy instrument, his head bowed, the rain beating upon his threadbare coat. He looked at the girl, leaning back against the wall,

motionless as a statue, and yet with that touch of hopelessness about her face which was written large in the features of her companion. He looked at the monkey, who stood with a pitiful air of his own, shaking in his paw the little tray, and gazing up and down the empty passage. He looked at them all fiercely, incredulously, and then an exclamation broke from his lips.

"The girl, the hunchback, and the monkey!" he exclaimed softly. "In London, of all places!"

He turned abruptly back into the room, and without a word of explanation to the valet hurried out into the corridor and rang the bell for the elevator. In a moment or two he was in the passage, and with a whispered breath of relief he saw that the little company was still there. He had caught up a hat as he left the room, and to give himself more the appearance of a casual passer-by he lit a cigarette with trembling fingers, and strolled along the passage. As he came, the monkey, the man, and the girl turned their heads. The girl, with something like a despairing shrug of the shoulders, began another song. The man commenced to play. Even the monkey seemed to eye this newcomer hungrily. He walked steadily on, but as he was in the act of passing, he paused, as though aware for the first time of the girl and her song. He went on a few paces and paused again. Finally he took up a position a few yards away, and established himself as an audience. His coming seemed to bring better fortune to the little group. Several other passers-by formed a broken semicircle. The girl sang to them in a hard, unsympathetic voice, flawless as to her notes, but with an indifferent intonation as though the words were flung from her lips against her will. When she had finished, the monkey was on his hind legs before the little gathering of listeners. A few pennies rattled in his tin tray. He paused in front of the man who had descended so suddenly from his room. Gilbert Hannaway thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, only to withdraw them with a little exclamation of annoyance. He drew a step nearer to the girl.

"I am very sorry," he said. "I wished to give you something for your song, but I have left my money in my room. It is only a short distance off. If you will wait here for a few moments it will give me very great pleasure to offer you something perhaps a little better worth having than these."

He touched the pennies in the tin tray, and looked up at the girl. Her dark eyes searched his face for a moment doubtfully.

"Thank you," she said; "it doesn't seem much use stopping here. Perhaps you'll give us something next time."

"No," he said; "I wish to give you something now. Meanwhile, will you sing one more song?"

A faint surprise, not unmingled with suspicion gleamed in the girl's dark eyes. "Why do you want to hear me sing?" she asked. "My voice is impossible. You know that."

"I do not think so," he answered gently. "If you will sing one more song, I should like to listen. Then I will go to my rooms, and I think that I can satisfy you both." She looked at him steadfastly. "Where are your rooms?" she asked.

"Close by here," he answered evasively.

She pointed up to the window out of which he had leaned.

"Was it you," she asked, "who looked down at us from there?"

He hesitated for a moment, but denial seemed scarcely worth while.

"It was I," he admitted. "I was just going to change my clothes. That is why I have no money in my pocket."

"Why did you come down?" she asked.

"I wished to hear you sing," he answered.

The shadow of a new emotion was in her face. She was afraid. All the time the man by her side was listening with half-closed eyes.

"Was it that only?" she asked. "Had you no other reason?"

The man was called upon to make a decision, and he felt himself unequal to it. They were alone in the passage now, for the other loiterers had passed on. The deformed man, from his seat in front of the piano, the monkey, and the girl were all looking at him. And Gilbert Hannaway, because he was honest, spoke the truth.

"No," he said. "I had another reason."

A word, or was it only a glance, flashed from the girl to the man. He rose to his feet. His seat disappeared. Chicot jumped into his basket. With a slight gesture of stiffness the hunchback once more took hold of the handles of the barrow on which his crazy instrument was placed. The girl turned to join him.

"We do not want your money," she said. "Please go away."

Gilbert Hannaway planted himself obstinately before her. "Look here," he said, "you must not send me away like this. I have been searching for you for years."

"Absurd!" she declared. "You do not even know who we are."

"I do not know your names," he answered. "They do not concern me. And yet I have searched in many places for a hunchback who played the piano, a girl with black hair who sang, and a monkey. Send your thoughts backward a little way. Do you remember the afternoon when you sang in the Place Madeleine?"

Only the girl's eyes moved, but it was enough. Her companion quietly relinquished the handles of his strange little vehicle. He took a step backward. The newcomer saw nothing. His eyes were fixed upon the girl.

"I have a question to ask you," he repeated, "and I think you know what it is."

Then the world spun round with him. The little dark passage began to wobble up and down. The thunder of the sea was in his ears, the girl's face mocked him. Then there was darkness.

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When he came to, he was sitting with his back against the wall, the center of a little group of idlers. A policeman stood by his side, and another, who had been performing first-aid work, was on his knees.

"Feeling better, sir?" the policeman asked.

Hannaway raised his hand to his head.

"I wouldn't touch it, sir," the man said. "You have a nasty scalp wound. How did it happen?"

Hannaway, still dazed, looked around him. There was no sign of the hunchback or the monkey or the girl. He drew a little breath and collected his thoughts.

"The pavement is slippery," he said. "I was hurrying, and I fell. My name is Gilbert Hannaway, and I live in the hotel there. If you will give me your arm, I think I can get back to my rooms."

He staggered up. With a policeman on either side of him, he made his way slowly back into the hotel from which he had issued a few minutes before.

Chapter II

Out once more into the Strand, unnoticed, unsuspected, the little company wound its way. The man, bent almost double, so that his deformity was even exaggerated, pushed his barrow and forged ahead at a speed which was almost incredible. The girl walked by his side with swift, even footsteps, and with downcast head. The monkey slept.

Once the man paused, but the girl shook her head.

"Not again to-night," she said. "We may as well starve at home as in jail. You strike too hard."

"It was the wrong man?" he muttered.

"It was the wrong man," she assented, in dull, lifeless tones. "You know that."

Down the Savoy hill, along the Embankment, and across Waterloo Bridge they made their unhesitating way. Near the farther end, the girl for the first time paused. She turned around and looked across the river, inky black, to the long sweep of lights which bordered the Embankment. She looked beyond, to where the two great hotels seemed to vie with each other in a blaze of light, reflected far across the gloomy waters. Farther still, to where the Houses of Parliament shone with a somewhat subdued glory. Across the sky beyond hung the golden haze of a million lights, the reflection from the great seething heart of London caught up and mirrored in the clouds. She looked at it steadfastly, with a scowl upon her sullen face.

"So this is London!" she muttered. "I wish—oh! I wish—"

Her companion dropped the handles of the barrow with a little gesture of weariness. He was glad of the moment's rest. "You wish?" he murmured. "Go on!"

She raised her arms with an impulsive gesture. Her face was suddenly illuminated with a bitter transfiguring light.

"I wish I were a prophetess from behind the ages," she cried. "I wish I could call down fire and brimstone upon every street and house whose lights go flaring up to the sky. They are not men and women any longer, these people who walk the streets, who jostle us from the sidewalk. They are beasts! They have the mark of the beast upon their foreheads. They throw their pennies with a curse. They hunt for pleasure like wolves. Not one smile, not one have I seen to-day!"

The man, too, looked up at the reddened sky. "And yet," he muttered, "somewhere underneath there lies fortune—fortune for you, Christine. Gold, rest, luxury," he added, glancing at her stealthily.

"And for you, too, Ambrose," said the girl, with a faint softening of her tone.

He picked up the handles of his barrow, avoiding her gaze. "Perhaps," he muttered. "Perhaps."

They continued their pilgrimage; the end was not far off. The man turned up a passage with the piano. The girl entered a small shop and made some humble

purchases. They met, a few minutes later, in the stuffy hall of a neglected, smoke-begrimed house, in the middle of a row of similar buildings. Silently they made their way into a back sitting-room. The floor was bare of any carpet, the paper hung down in strips from the walls, the wooden mantelpiece knew no ornaments. The table in the middle of the room was covered with a sheet of hard oilskin, stained in many places. The two cane chairs were of odd design. One had only three legs; the other had a hole in the middle, where the cane had worn away. The only sound article of furniture was a horsehair sofa, and of this the springs were almost visible. The girl threw herself upon it with a little sob.

The man watched her for several moments, apparently unmoved. In the room his deformity seemed more apparent. He was less than five feet high, and his head and features were large for a full-grown man's. His face had gone unshaven for so long that his expression was almost unrecognizable. Yet his eyes seemed soft as he watched the girl, shaking all over now with her sudden storm of grief. Her hat, with its poor little cluster of flowers, had fallen to the floor; her black hair was streaming over her face, pressed hard into the round unsympathetic pillow. Chicot jumped upon the man's shoulder as he stood and watched; the man caressed him with gentle touch. The girl he left alone.

Presently Ambrose abandoned his watch and commenced to busy himself about the room. He lighted an oil-stove, opened the parcel which the girl had been carrying, and placed its contents in a small frying-pan. From a deal cupboard he produced a tablecloth and some articles of crockery, every one of which he carefully rubbed over with a cloth. Then he slipped out of the room for a minute, and returned with a small bottle of red wine and a bunch of violets, which he arranged in the middle of the table. When all was ready he touched the girl on the shoulder. ristine," he said softly, "there is supper ready."

"I will not eat," she answered sullenly. "It is a pigsty, this place."

Nevertheless she sat up, and for a moment her face softened when she saw the preparations which he had made. She seated herself ungraciously at the table.

"Wine!" she protested. "It is ridiculous! To-morrow we shall starve for this. Give me some, please. I am shivering."

He filled her glass. "You should take off your wet jacket," he urged.

"I cannot," she answered bitterly. "I threw away my last blouse yesterday. There is nothing on my arms underneath, and they are cold."

A spasm crossed his face. "We cannot go on like this," he muttered. "To-morrow I shall steal."

She shook her head. "It is not easy here," she said gloomily. "The police are everywhere. Ambrose," she added, looking across at him steadfastly, "do you think that you hurt him very much this evening?"

Ambrose shook his head. "He was only stunned," he answered. "He will recover quickly. I saw his face as I struck. I think, Christine, that there will be trouble. He will search again for us."

She shivered a little. "I am afraid," she muttered. "Give me some more wine, Ambrose. It warms my blood."

Obediently he filled her glass. His own was as yet untouched.

"It is—the other one we want," she continued, dropping her voice a little. "Think what he owes us, Ambrose. He is free and he is rich. I hate him—I hated him from

the first; but he shall pay for it. All this time he has hidden, and we have starved. Think of it, Ambrose, think of it!"

The hunchback moved in his chair uneasily.

"We shall never find him," he muttered. "With four million francs, a man can live like a prince anywhere—even in the far corners of the world. Think of the countries which we can never visit,—South America, the United States, Brazil, Chile, Peru! Our search is a mad thing."

"I do not believe," she said, "that he is in any of those places. Ambrose, is London a very large city?"

"The largest in the world," he answered. "One man in it is lost like a berry upon the hedges. One may seek for a lifetime in vain—and meantime one starves."

She shook her head. Her expression was sullen but determined. "I will find him," she declared. "I will seek and seek until the day comes when I see him standing before me."

"And then?" Ambrose asked softly.

She leaned back in her chair and looked up at the ceiling through half-closed eyes. "And then," she repeated, "the great adventure! It must come then! It shall come!"

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Gilbert Hannaway spent his evening in bed, his head bandaged and still painful. Toward midnight he awoke from a long doze and rang for a drink. He was young and strong, and already he was beginning to feel himself again. When the waiter had left the room he lifted the receiver from the telephone which stood by the side of his bed.

"I want the residence of the Marquis of Ellingham," he said. "It is in Cavendish Square, I believe."

In a moment the bell tinkled. He took the receiver once more into his hand.

"This is Lord Ellingham's house," a quiet voice said. "What do you want?"

"I want to speak to Lord Ellingham," Gilbert Hannaway answered.

"Who are you?" was the reply. "I am Lord Ellingham's secretary. I can give him any message."

"I must speak to him personally," Hannaway answered. "He would not understand if I told you my name. The matter is an important one."

There was silence for a moment. Hannaway heard the sound of voices at the other end. Then some one else spoke, briefly, imperatively.

"I am Lord Ellingham. What do you want?"

"To give your lordship some valuable information," Hannaway said. "Listen!"

"Who are you?" the voice at the other end asked.

"It does not matter," Hannaway answered. "Listen while I tell you what I saw this evening, in London, within a mile of Cavendish Square. I saw a dark-haired girl singing in the streets—a dark-haired girl, a hunchback, and a monkey!"

Hannaway heard the receiver at the other end go clattering down. There was silence for some moments. Then a voice again, the same voice, but it seemed to come from a long way off.

"Who are you," it demanded. "For God's sake, tell me who you are!"

“An unknown friend, or enemy, whichever you like,” Hannaway answered. “I have no more to say.”

“Stop!” the voice insisted. “I must know—”

Hannaway laid down the receiver, disconnecting it with the instrument. Then he turned over on his side. “In London!” he muttered softly to himself. “What will come of it, I wonder? Lord, how my head aches!”

Nevertheless he closed his eyes and slept—slept better by far than the great statesman with whom he had been talking.

Chapter III

In what corner of that squalid lodging-house Ambrose Drake slept no one save he and Chicot knew. At seven o’clock the next morning he appeared from somewhere underground, and with a little package under his arm turned breakfastless into the street. Half an hour later he was selling matches under one of the arches of London Bridge. For some time the stream of people was constant, and the pennies he received were fairly frequent. When the passers-by began to thin he left his place, and crossing the street, bought a cup of coffee and a roll at the stall upon which his hungry eyes had been fixed for some time. Afterward he walked back to the lodging-house, and turned into the little sitting-room where he and his companion had sat the night before. With the air of one used to such duties, he lighted the stove, made coffee in a scrupulously clean pot, and arranged it, with the rolls and butter which he had bought on his homeward way, on a tray. Then he went to the door and called out, and presently a small child, ill-dressed and ragged, came into the room. He pointed to the tray.

“Take it up carefully,” he said. “See that you do not spill the coffee. Tell the young lady that it is wet, and that she had better rest. Say that I am gone out for an hour—perhaps longer.”

The child took up the tray and carried it up the bare stairs. Once more Drake left the house. This time he turned northward, crossed the bridge, made an inquiry of a policeman whom he approached with some hesitation, and followed the directions given. In a few minutes he found himself inside a large public library. The assistant behind the desk handed him the book he asked for with a smile. He took it to a table in the reference-room, and began his search. In less than five minutes he had found what he wanted. He drew a little breath between his teeth. There it was, easy to read, easy to understand—“Francis William George Cuthbertson Ellingham, Sixth Marquis.” He passed rapidly over the titles and honors set forth in nearly half a page of black type. He took no interest in the country-seats or pursuits of the man whose pedigree was here blazoned out. The town address, 11 Cavendish Square—that was what he wanted.

He closed the book, returned it over the desk to the young man, who looked at him once more with a faintly curious smile, and walked out into the street. Presently he found himself standing upon the doorstep of an imposing mansion, and enduring the surprised stare of a very dignified person in plain black clothes.

“His lordship is at home,” the man admitted, “but he is not up. In any case, he sees no one without an appointment.”

The man would have closed the door, but Drake’s foot was in the way. “His lordship will see me,” he said. “Let me speak to his secretary, or some one by whom I can send a message.”

A young man, smooth shaven, well dressed, came strolling down the hall, evidently on his way into the street. He looked with surprise at the queer little object who was standing just inside the door.

“Who is this, Graves?” he asked.

“A person inquiring for his lordship, sir,” the servant answered. “I was just closing the door.”

“You had better tell me what you want,” said the young man, addressing Drake. “I am the Marquis of Ellingham’s secretary.”

“My business is with the marquis himself,” Drake answered, with something in his tone which was almost a snarl. “Look at me. Look at me well. Now go and tell your master that the person whom you can describe is here to see him. Don’t flatter me. Tell him what I am like.”

The young man was on the point of making a curt reply. Suddenly he paused. He remembered how, the night before, he had seen the telephone slip from the nerveless fingers of the marquis, and his face suddenly grow white as though with fear. He wondered for a moment if the coming of this strange individual had anything to do with that mysterious message. He turned on his heel.

“Keep this person here for a few minutes, Graves,” he said. “I will go up and see his lordship.”

The marquis, who by reason of a long residence abroad had acquired Continental habits, was sitting half dressed in a sitting-room leading out from his sleeping apartments. On the round table by his side was a light but daintily arranged breakfast tray, a bowl of flowers, and a pile of letters. He looked up as the young man entered.

“Not gone yet, then, Penton?” he asked.

“I am just leaving, sir,” the young man answered. “There is a very strange person down in the hall, who insists upon seeing you. He would not give a name, and he wished me to describe him to you. I am afraid I ought not to have troubled you, but he is such a queer little object, and he seemed so much in earnest.”

The marquis sat quite still in his chair, and his eyes remained fixed on the young man, who stood, hat in hand, upon the threshold. His face seemed suddenly to have become almost rigid, expressionless, and yet there was something in the set, helpless gaze which spoke of fear. The young man noticed that the long white fingers which held the newspaper were shaking. He came a step farther into the room and closed the door.

“Shall I see this person for you, sir?” he asked slowly. “He is not exactly a pleasant-looking individual.”

The marquis found his voice, and with it regained some of his self-possession. “So I should imagine,” he said, “from your description. I think I know what he wants. I will see him myself. You can bring him up here, and then go on to the city.”

The young man withdrew. As he descended the stairs a frown darkened his good-humored features. He was fond of the man whom he had served for the last three years, and he recognized surely enough the coming of tragedy in those pale, somewhat worn features. What it meant he could not tell. He had no clue whatsoever, yet he did his errand with marked unwillingness.

"The marquis will see you," he said to Drake. "You can follow me upstairs to his room."

Drake showed no sign of exultation. Never once did he look around him, although his surroundings must have seemed in strange contrast to the wretched little lodging-house from which he had come. He was heedless of the rich carpet pressed by his muddy, gaping boots. He passed without a glance the famous pictures which hung upon the walls, the many evidences of wealth and luxury by which he was surrounded.

They reached the door of the marquis's room. His guide opened it and ushered him in.

The visitor came, unbidden, a little farther into the room.

"This is the person who wished to see you, sir," he said.

The marquis folded up his newspaper and nodded. "You can go, Penton," he said. "Remember that I expect you back before eleven."

Illustration:
The visitor came, unbidden, a little farther into the room.

The door closed behind the young man. The visitor came, unbidden, a little farther into the room. As though his eyesight were at fault, he shaded his eyes for a moment with his hand, and looked fixedly at the man whom he had come to see. The marquis pointed to a chair. "Sit down, if you like," he said.

"I prefer to stand," Drake answered.

"As you will," was the quiet reply. "Tell me, in as few words as you can, exactly what you want of me."

Chapter IV

A ray of winter sunshine came stealing through the high windows of the room, glancing for a moment upon the faces of the two men, faces as far removed from any likeness to or kinship with one another as the poles of life themselves. Drake was dressed in the shabbiest of blue serge suits, a suit made for a boy, short in the arm, high in the neck, mud-stained, and shiny with wear. His boots had holes in them. His low collar and scrap of tie were negligible things. His face was of a length out of proportion to his size; the chin stubbly, the complexion pallid, and bearing traces of his daily privations. Only his eyes were soft, of a gray which deepened sometimes almost into blue. At this moment, however, they were overcast with a heavy frown, which seemed to gather in intensity as the seconds of silence passed.

The man before whom he stood had presence enough and had borne himself bravely on many great occasions, but at that moment he seemed in some sense to have collapsed. No sense of his stature remained. His limbs were drawn closely together, his shoulders had acquired a new stoop, his head was thrust a little forward, as though he were forced against his will to return the earnest gaze of his visitor. The marquis was forty-six years old, and called himself a young man. He had health enough, and courage, and good looks, but at this moment all three seemed to have deserted him. The cords of life had suddenly slackened. He was face to face with horrible things, and the nerve which should have set him with feet firmly planted upon the ground to face the crisis was gone.

"It has been a long search," Drake said.

"Since it is at an end, then," the marquis answered, "what would you have of me? Up to a certain point," he added, in a low, uneasy tone, "I am in your hands. Do you see, I attempt no evasions. I say that I am in your hands. Go on."

Drake laughed a little bitterly. It was not a pleasant sound, that laugh. It seemed to come from somewhere at the back of his throat, and it left his features unmoved. "Milord has lost his courage," he muttered. "Why don't you have me thrown into the gutter?"

"Because," the marquis answered, "your snarl would reach me from there. Is the—I mean is she—are you alone?" he asked, with a sudden break in his voice.

Drake shook his head. "We are all here," he answered, "she and I and Chicot."

The marquis shivered a little. "Yes, I remember," he said, half to himself. "You, with your tattered brown overcoat, that cursed animal, and the girl. You have been looking for me, I suppose?"

"Over half the world," Drake answered. "Up and down the streets and along the byways of more cities than I should care to count. We have watched the boulevards, the restaurants, the clubs of Paris. We have watched the crowds go by in all the great thoroughfares where one might hope to find a man such as you. It is four years since we started on the search."

"And now?" the marquis asked.

"And now," Drake answered, "I have come to warn you. We shall be here in this city for months. Get you gone out of it. You will be wiser."

The marquis looked startled for a moment. Then he leaned forward, with the air of one who does not understand. Suddenly his expression gave way to one of positive terror. "You don't mean," he faltered, "that you have already, without coming to see me—"

"No," Drake interrupted. "We have done nothing. We have said nothing. It is for another reason that I would have you go."

The marquis was once more puzzled. "You tell me," he protested, "that for four years you have sought me, and yet, now that you have succeeded in your search, you tell me to go away. What do you mean?"

"It is not I who have sought you," Drake answered bitterly. "It is she. She builds dreams, she has many fancies. It is she who has driven us round the world, from place to place, in this wild quest. Understand me. It is I who have found you out. She has not. She does not know."

"But you will tell her!" the marquis exclaimed.

“I shall not,” Drake answered. “I tell you that all through these weary months, when her eyes have gone through the throngs, seeking, always seeking, mine have followed hers with a dread as great as her desire. For the first time in my life, to-day I am faithless to her. I come here alone. She does not know, and I would have you hurry away and hide yourself before chance brings you face to face with her.”

“I do not understand,” the marquis said weakly.

“Perhaps not,” Drake replied. “Yet it is simple enough. Look at me. See what I am—a miserable fragment of a man, a misshapen creature, the scoff of passers-by, an outcast. Yet such as I am, I am all that she has. It is I who stand by her, I on whom she relies from day to day for bread and shelter. If she finds you, there will be an end of this, there will be an end of me.”

The marquis drew a long breath. There were some signs of color in his cheeks. His tone had gained a little strength. He was no longer absolutely a stricken thing.

“You mean,” he said, “that she would have no more need of you?”

“I mean that,” Drake answered. “She would take your gold. I wouldn’t. She would be a great lady, while I pushed my barrel, ground out my tunes, and pocketed the pennies for which Chicot danced.”

Once more the marquis drew a long breath. This time he almost whistled. He remembered that he posed sometimes as a student of human character, that he was a member of the Ethnological Society, and sometimes attended its discussions. These were strange words to come from such a person. “Tell me,” he said, “why would you not take my gold? You have only to speak, you know that.”

Drake raised his eyes, and he looked the marquis straight in the face, until the eyes of the latter drooped and fell. “You know,” he answered.

The marquis laughed uneasily. He had looked away, but the fire of that intent gaze seemed still to be burning its way into his consciousness. “Well,” he said, “you are a strange mortal. You think, then, that if I leave London, say to-morrow, I shall not see her?”

“You will go?” Drake asked.

“I will go,” the marquis answered.

There was a moment’s silence. The marquis looked at his visitor, and saw upon his person the signs of suffering.

“Do you think,” he asked, “there is any real reason why you should not take a trifle of money from me—twenty or fifty pounds, at any rate? You need new clothes. I should imagine that you need many things.”

“I will take no money,” Drake answered. “Apart from the reason which you know of, she would discover it. She sees our takings. If I had money she would suspect. She might even guess the truth. And if she knew that,” he added in a lower tone, “she would never forgive me.”

The marquis looked at him curiously. “You are a strange person,” he said. “You prefer poverty, privations, and all the squalid discomforts of life, just for the sake of having that girl walk by your side?”

“I do,” Drake answered. “You look at me and you wonder, I suppose. You think that a creature such as I am has no right to the heart of a man. Perhaps you are right. I do not know that it matters.”

“Supposing,” the marquis said, “that your health broke down, and the girl was alone?”

Drake was unmoved. The shadow of a smile played about his lips. “I have had that fear,” he said, “and I have provided against it.”

“At the same time,” the marquis said, “I cannot see why you should not allow me, for the girl’s sake, to help you.”

“I tell you that I will not touch your money,” Ambrose answered. “We take pennies every day from all alike, from thieves and vagabonds, sinners of every class. But to us they are strangers, they are just the flotsam and jetsam of the world, paying their tribute as they pass by. You are different. We know who you are.”

The marquis rose to his feet with an uneasy little laugh. He thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his quilted smoking-jacket, and he stood upright on his hearth-rug, an attitude not by any means ungraceful. “You are the strangest person I ever met in my life,” he said to Drake. “Tell me, where were you born? Of what nation are you? Surely you speak English too well to be a foreigner. If such a thing were possible—”

The frown upon Drake’s face was like the frown of a man rebuking an impertinence. “My family history,” he said, “would scarcely interest you. Such as it is, it belongs to myself.”

The marquis turned toward the bell. “There is nothing more?” he asked.

“There is nothing more,” Drake answered, as he turned to leave the room.

Chapter V

It was mid-November, and the afternoons were short. Already the gas-lamps were lighted when Drake re-entered the lodging-house, and after a moment’s hesitation made his way into the little sitting-room at the rear. The girl was sitting there, with a pack of cards spread out on the table before her. She looked up as he entered, and the frown upon her dark sullen face grew deeper.

“Where have you been all day long, Ambrose?” she asked. “Why have you left me here alone?”

“It was wet,” he answered quickly, “too wet for you to go out. I sold matches this morning. Since then I have had the piano out, Chicot and I. We did not do so badly.”

She looked disdainfully at the handful of coppers which he laid upon the table. “Faugh!” she exclaimed. “It disgusts me, this cheap dirty money.”

“We live by it,” he answered grimly.

“It has stopped raining,” she said. “I shall go out now for a little time. I have on my thick boots.”

“As you will,” he answered, a little wearily. “The piano is still outside.”

“And Chicot?” she asked.

He brought into evidence the canvas bag hung over his shoulder. Chicot’s little black head peered out. The girl rose, and pinned on her hat before the cracked looking-glass. Not even the careless indifference of her movements, or her shabby clothes, could altogether conceal the elegant lines of her slim young figure.

They descended to the street together. Drake lifted the handles of the barrow a little wearily. For two hours he had been grinding out his wretched music, and he was weary.

"Which way?" he asked, turning eastward. "I think this will be better."

The girl shook her head. She pointed across the river, to where the lowering skies were already catching the reflections from the flaring signs and hotels ablaze with light.

"No," she said firmly. "It is there that we must go. It is there that we go all the time. You forget, Ambrose, that it is not for our miserable pennies that I walk these wretched streets. It is for the search, still for the search!"

He obeyed her, but with reluctance. "You forget last night," he said. "We may be seen. He may have informed the police."

She shook her head. "You did not hurt him," she said. "What can he do? He cannot make us speak. I cam be dumb, and so can you. Come."

They crossed the bridge. The girl walked apart and unseeing, her eyes fixed steadily upon the deepening glow in the skies. Drake groaned a little to himself as he pushed the barrow. He had eaten little, and his limbs were stiff with cold and wet. Now and then he looked wistfully toward the girl, but never once did she turn her head. At the corner of the Embankment she paused.

"Here first," she said.

Silently he arranged the seat, sat down, and struck the crazy notes of his little instrument. The girl folded her hands and sang. The monkey, with outstretched tray, collected the pennies. Then a policeman moved them on. It was always like that.

They passed along the Embankment. The girl walked close to the stone wall, looking down to the river. Drake, whose breath was coming in little gasps, pushed his barrow along close to the curbstone, to avoid the heavy mud. They passed the side streets which led up into the Strand, and turned into Northumberland Avenue. Once more they paused and repeated their little program. There were fewer people and fewer pennies this time. The evening was raw, and every one was hurrying. When the girl had finished singing there were very few for Chicot to visit with his little tray.

"Let us go back," Drake said. "It is a bad night. There are few people out of doors. We have enough for dinner. I did well with the matches this morning."

The girl shook her head. "No," she said. "I am going on, on that way." She pointed across Trafalgar Square, westward. "If you are tired, go back, you and Chicot."

She walked on, as though heedless whether they followed or not. Drake set his teeth, and commenced once more his weary pilgrimage. The wheels of his barrow were stiff, and the traffic around him grew thicker. Still, somehow or other, he managed to keep his eyes upon the girl ahead. Once or twice, when the crowd was thick, he grew anxious. "We shall lose her, Chicot," he muttered. "No, there she is! Courage, little one. We must push on."

A hansom cab missed him by barely a few inches. A motor-car, whizzing by, splashed him all over with mud. Still he kept her in sight along Pall Mall, up Regent Street, once more to the left, always westward. She paused for a few

moments to look into a shop. He caught up with her there and called to her weakly.

"Christine," he said.

She turned away, and approached the edge of the pavement.

"Christine," he gasped, "I am tired. The roads are heavy, and I have not eaten much to-day. Let us rest for a little time."

"Rest!" she answered bitterly, "there is no place here to rest."

He sat upon the handle of his barrow. "Let us go home," he said more slowly. "No one will stop to listen to us to-night. If we sing here the police will only move us on."

"Go home, if you like," she answered. "I am going farther. Somehow, I feel that here in London we are near the end of it."

"The end?" he gasped.

"The search," she answered. "You know what I mean. There is something which seems to draw me across that bridge up here. I tell you that it is not I who comes. It is something which tells me that here, not far away, I shall find him."

She paused. For the first time a shadow of something which might have been sympathy crossed her face. "As for you," she said, "you are not strong enough for this. You are tired. I can see that you are very tired. Listen. I will wait here and hold Chicot. You shall go over there and take something to drink, something hot."

He hesitated. Even then he would not have gone but for the feeling of faintness against which he had been struggling for the last half hour. "You will not move from here?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Then I think I will go," he said. "It is foolish, but there is a pain."

He plunged into the traffic and crossed the street to the bar opposite. They looked at him strangely as he drank his hot spirits and water. On a corner of the counter was a little basket of bread, left over from luncheon-time. He took a piece and ate it ravenously. He remembered suddenly that he had not eaten since that early breakfast. Then he turned once more into the street and crossed it. His heart gave a sudden jump. The piano was there. Chicot, indeed, had collected a small crowd, for he had escaped from his bag, and was sitting on the top saluting the passers-by with profuse wavings of his little hat. The piano was there, and Chicot, but the girl was gone!

* * * * *

Drake stood upon the curbstone, gazing wildly up and down the great thoroughfare. He peered into the shops, came back again, and walked backward and forward along the crowded sidewalk. Christine was not there, and his heart was filled with a sudden terrible apprehension. People stared at him, this queer little figure, with tragedy written large in his face, who wandered hither and thither, peering into their faces, looking everywhere, looking for something which he could not find. At last he came back to the piano.

"We will wait, Chicot," he muttered. "We will wait here. She has gone away to buy something, perhaps. She will come back. We must wait here, Chicot, or she will lose us."

The rain commenced to fall, at first softly, then more steadily. Chicot crept into his bag. With trembling fingers Drake drew the waterproof covering over the little piano. Then he stood up beside it, facing the sidewalk, looking up and down, across the street, up and down again. Sometimes they moved him on. He went a few yards and returned.

"She will come back," he muttered to himself. "She must come back. We will wait, Chicot and I."

Chapter VI

Exactly how it happened, Christine herself could scarcely have told. She had been gazing without any special interest into a shop-window, awaiting Drake's return. Suddenly she was conscious of some one standing by her side, and a hand was laid upon her wrist. She looked around, startled. It was the man who had rushed the night before down from his rooms into the narrow passage, the man whom they had left lying upon the pavement with his face turned to the sky. She recognized him at once with a little gasp.

"This time, young lady," he said quietly, "I am not asking you any questions. I know quite well who you are, and I want to talk to you. Are you alone?"

"I will not talk to you," she answered, snatching her wrist away. "I do not know you. I am waiting for Ambrose. When he comes you will be sorry."

The young man laughed softly. It was not at all an unpleasant laugh, nor was he an unpleasant person to look upon.

"My dear young lady," he said, "why will you persist in looking upon me as an enemy? I assure you that I have no wish to be anything of the sort. It may be very much to your interest to talk to me for a few minutes. At any rate, I have found you, and I am not going to let you go."

Something in his face suddenly attracted her. She hesitated.

"Come," he said persuasively, "do not be foolish. Times are bad with you. Don't think me impertinent, but I can see that. It is not fit for you, this life."

"It is the life I choose," she answered, a note of fierceness in her tone.

"You have, perhaps, an object," he said quietly. "But never mind that now. You must come with me."

"Where to?" she asked.

"I am going to take you to a restaurant close by here," he said, "and I am going to give you some dinner. Afterward we will talk."

The idea appealed to her amazingly. A restaurant, good food, wine, flowers, and lights! She half closed her eyes. When she opened them again she was quite determined. "I will go with you," she said. "Let us hurry. We must be gone before Ambrose returns."

He needed no second bidding. In a moment they were across the street, and he piloted her through the throngs of people for a hundred yards or so. Then he stopped before a great restaurant. The commissionaire threw open the door with a bow.

“We will go in here,” Hannaway said, “into the grill room. It is too early to find many people there, but we can talk.”

She followed him into the room. He led the way, preceded by a bowing maître d’hôtel, to a corner table. She sank into a chair with a little sigh of relief. There was everything here that she had hoped for—clean linen, sparkling silver, flowers upon the table, a delicate sense of warmth, and from the larger restaurant, the faint sound of music. He took the carte and ordered the dinner. The waiter placed by his side a gold-foiled bottle and a pail of ice. Over their oysters he looked at her, smiling.

“Come,” he said, “this is better than hitting me on the head because I ventured to show myself to you once more.”

For the first time she smiled. The parting of her lips was transfiguring. One realized, almost breathlessly, that this girl with the tired eyes and sullen face was, if she chose to claim her heritage, beautiful.

“If Ambrose should find us,” she said, “I think that he would do more than strike you.”

“I will take my chances,” the young man answered easily. “I do not think that he will find us here, but even if he does he shall not take you away until I have said something to you which has been in my mind since—”

Her hand flashed out across the table. “Never mind when,” she said hurriedly. “You will say what you want to, I suppose, and I must listen. But remember that even here there are waiters, and people at the next table. There are some things it were better not to speak of.”

He remained silent for several moments. The girl sipped her wine and with her elbows on the table leaned her head on her hands and looked across at him thoughtfully. He was certainly good to look at, this young Englishman. It was a pity that he knew anything of those days that lay behind. It was a pity, she thought, that she had not met him now for the first time, that this ceaseless duel between them must intervene, must keep her always upon her guard.

Their table was admirably chosen for a *tête-à-tête*. There were few people in the room, and the little party at the nearest table were too thoroughly engrossed in themselves to be of any serious account. Gilbert Hannaway, who for some time had maintained a deliberate silence, turned in his chair and took careful stock of their surroundings.

“I think,” he said, “that we are not in very much danger from eavesdroppers here. Tell me this. Is this miserable existence of yours, this tramping after a piano, a necessity of your life? Or is it merely a cloak for something else?”

“It is a necessity,” she answered.

“You are really as poor as you seem?” he asked.

“Poorer,” she answered. “I have known what it is, within the last few weeks, to depend upon the pennies thrown to us in the streets for the food we ate.”

“I do not understand it,” the young man said. “There should be one man, at any rate, upon whom you have a sufficient claim.”

Her eyes suddenly glittered. She leaned far across the table. Her lips were parted. A flush of excitement was in her face. “There is,” she answered. “Do you know where I can find him?”

The young man toyed with his wine-glass. “Perhaps,” he said. “That depends.”

“Upon what?” she whispered, almost fiercely.

“Upon two things,” he answered. “The first is, I must know exactly what will be your attitude toward that person when you have found him.”

“The second?” she demanded.

“I think,” he said quietly, “that you know. For four years I have been looking for you. That is why, when I looked down from my rooms last night and saw you singing in the passage underneath, saw you and the hunchback and the monkey, that I rushed down like a madman, determined that this time, at any rate, you should not escape me.”

She drew away. “You were foolish,” she said. “You are foolish now.”

“I do not deny it,” he answered. “I have been a little foolish ever since I used to see you, almost daily, singing in the streets. You were never very gracious. Sometimes when you saw me there among your scanty audience you would even frown and look annoyed. You scarcely ever spoke a kind word to me, and yet, when you disappeared I commenced a search which has never ended until now.”

She looked at him a little curiously. Her face was no longer sullen, and with the passing of the frown from her dark, silky eyebrows her eyes seemed somehow to have increased in size. They watched him steadily, soft, brilliant, inquisitive, anything but tender. Her mouth was no longer hard. Her lips had parted in a faint mocking smile.

“And now that you have found me,” she asked, “what do you want?”

“To help you, if I can,” Hannaway said. “I believe,” he continued, “that this time, at any rate, you are really what you seem. I believe that your poverty is not a disguise. You really trudge these cruel streets for a hard living. You were not born for it. It is not right that you should live such a life.”

“You wish to help me?” she asked.

“I do,” he answered fervently.

“Then you can tell me,” she said, leaning a little forward, “something that will end my search—tell me the whereabouts of the man whom we seek.”

“I could,” he answered, “but I will be frank with you. I have no information to give away. I will sell it at a price.”

“Sell!” she repeated scornfully. “Look at me. My hat has been soaked through a dozen times, and it cost me five shillings. My clothes were bought ready-made. My boots—well, the soles are thick, but they are what your country girls wear who walk to market. Look at me. I have no gloves. All my jewelry, the little I ever had, is in the pawnbrokers’ shops of Paris, Milan, Rome, and those other places. What have I to offer you for your information?”

“You can repay me,” he answered, “in the like coin. You are in search of—”

Again her hand flashed across the table. She seemed about to close his lips. She hung on his wrist, and her terrified eyes flashed into his.

“Be quiet! Oh, be quiet!” she said. “You must not mention him. It is not to be thought of.”

He smiled. “This is England,” he said.

“But it is London,” she interrupted, almost fiercely. “London is not England. London is as bad as any place I know of. There are many who say too much here who never speak again.”

Hannaway drained his glass. “My dear young lady,” he said, “caution, up to a certain point, I approve of most thoroughly. But now listen to me, and understand this. I will give you, at this moment, the name and address of the man whom you seek if you will tell me who it was you helped to escape, you and the dwarf and the little black monkey, when you—”

“Stop!” she cried, with pallid lips. “You must not!”

He shook his head. “We are safer here than in the streets,” he said. “You know when I mean. I saw you going down the hill; I saw you pass into the Rue Pigalle. I saw that strange little hunchback running, pushing the little piano before him, and I saw a man walking by his side. You were there, too. I saw you all turn into the Boulevard. I saw your shadows. I even heard the sound of those creaking wheels. You turned the corner, and you vanished. The earth might have swallowed you up. No one knew of you. Every corner of Paris was searched in vain. What became of you? No, I will not ask you that! I promised to ask one question, and one question only. Who was it that you helped to escape that night?”

The girl’s face seemed suddenly changed. She was paler. Her features had lost all their sullen impassivity. She was like a person looking out upon dreaded things. She crumbled up her bread with trembling fingers. The hand which raised her wine-glass to her lips shook. Waiters were at their table, but she made no attempt at lighter conversation. She sat still, looking around the room, looking everywhere but into the fixed, steadfast face of the man who sat opposite to her. Presently they were alone again.

She leaned a little over the table. “There was no one there,” she said. “We were alone. We hurried away because we were afraid. It was a passer-by that you saw.”

He smiled. “It is not true,” he answered. “There are some things about which it is not worth while to lie, and this is one of them. Will you tell me who it was? I am not a policeman or a detective. No harm will come to anybody through me.”

“Not if a knife were at my throat!” she answered, with sudden passion. “Why should I? What are you to me? I owe you what? A dinner, perhaps. Bah! You asked me here, not because I was hungry, not because you really wanted to see me again, but just to gratify your curiosity. You say that you have searched for me for four years. You want me to believe that you have thought of me, that it was for my sake. You looked everywhere for a singing girl and a hunchback and a monkey! Bah! I do not believe you. I am not even sure that you are not a policeman.”

“That is not kind of you,” he answered quietly. “It may seem strange to you, perhaps, that I should be so curious. Since you misunderstand me, I will ask you that question no more. Only, unless you will tell me exactly what you want of this person of whom you are in search—”

“I am in search of no one,” she interrupted, with a little nervous gesture. “It is a mistake. We are here because there is money in London, always money. And one must live. We have been in so many other places, and every one has told us that it is here that one finds that people give the easiest.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and filled her glass. “You will not trust me,” he said. “Very well, I will not spoil your dinner any more. I will ask no more questions. Presently we shall part. Only, before you go, there is one privilege at least which you must allow me.”

“I will not take your money,” she said hastily. “I will not take anything at all from you.”

“Then you are a very foolish person,” he answered. “I do not know much about you, but I do know that it is a shameful thing that you should be singing in the streets day after day, with only that poor little hunchback for a companion. I do not ask for any return from you of any sort. I simply ask to be allowed to help you for the sake of a sentiment.”

“It is finished,” she said coldly. “I can starve very well, but I would not take money from you.”

He sighed. “You are worse than foolish,” he declared. “You take pennies from the passers-by in the street, and yet you refuse the help of one who is anxious only to be your friend.”

“We take the pennies of people whom we do not know,” she answered coldly. “We sing and play to them, or we would ask for nothing. The greatest artist who sings in opera does that. For you it is different. We live our own lives. After all, we ourselves are the best judges of what seems right to us.”

Hannaway shrugged his shoulders. It was only too obvious that the girl was in earnest. “It must be as you will,” he said quietly. “The chicken at last! You take salad, of course? For the rest of the evening we speak of cookery, or shall it be the weather?”

She looked at him not unkindly. “You may talk of what you like,” she answered, “except—”

He smiled as he filled her glass. “That,” he answered, “is finished.”

Chapter VII

Mr. Gilbert Hannaway was on the point of cutting in for a rubber of bridge at his favorite club when a paragraph in the evening paper through which he had been glancing attracted his attention. He read it through carefully.

We regret to state that, owing to sudden indisposition, the Marquis of Ellingham has been ordered by his medical adviser to proceed at once to the south of France. The announcement will be received with very great regret throughout all classes of the community, especially as just at the present time his lordship’s work in the cabinet is of great importance. We understand that his duties will be temporarily filled by the Right Honorable Meredith Jones.

Hannaway excused himself from the projected game. He remained a few minutes longer, chatting to his acquaintances, and then left the club. In less than a quarter of an hour a hansom deposited him at the door of Number 11 Cavendish Square.

The butler was at first obdurate. His lordship would see no one. He was leaving for abroad early in the morning, and his instructions were absolute. Hannaway, however, was possessed of an impressive manner, and he succeeded so far as to be shown into a small room to await the coming of the marquis’s secretary. The

latter, who was in a very bad temper, however, was not in the least inclined to afford opportunities for any more strangers to interview his master.

"I do not know you, Mr. Hannaway," he said, "and my chief has been ordered to take absolute and complete rest. He cannot give personal attention to any matter of business, and social calls just now are out of the question. I am sorry, therefore, that I cannot help you."

"You can help me so far as this," Hannaway answered, "and incidentally you can also help the marquis, of whose indisposition I was very sorry to hear. Tell him that the person who telephoned him last night from the Altona Hotel is anxious to have a few minutes' conversation with him."

The secretary's manner changed. With obvious reluctance, he turned to leave the room. "I will give him your message," he said curtly. "You may wait here."

* * * * *

The marquis had dined tête-à-tête with his wife. She was a very beautiful woman, and very much in demand in the social world, of which she was one of the principal adornments. To-night, however, she had canceled all her engagements. In face of the statement which was appearing in all the evening papers her presence at any social function was scarcely to be expected. Apart from this, she had an immense curiosity as to the cause of her husband's sudden departure from England. They had finished dinner, and were taking their coffee in the smaller library, where the marquis was accustomed to receive private visitors. The marchioness, who had had a fatiguing afternoon, was curled up on the sofa, watching her husband through half-closed eyes.

"You certainly, my dear Francis," she remarked, "do look a little pale and drawn. At the same time, I should scarcely have thought that there was anything in your health which made this sudden departure necessary."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Margaret," he said, "appearances are sometimes deceptive. I have been feeling absolutely run down for some time. To tell you the truth, I am in a very delicate position politically just now. I am absolutely opposed to our chief on several important matters. I have no following, and I am not disposed to give in altogether."

"So it is a political trouble, is it?" she asked.

"I do not wish you to understand that," he answered, taking a cigarette from a cedar-wood box upon the table, and carefully lighting it. "At the same time, if matters in the cabinet were different I might perhaps have made a more energetic struggle against my indisposition. Frankly, I think that I shall do myself no harm whatever if I am away during the next few months. It will obviate my acquiescence in a certain policy which I feel sure, sooner or later, will turn out to be disastrous."

The marchioness was distinctly interested. "Yet," she said, "you leave the conduct of affairs in the hands of a man whose policy is, I believe, very different from yours. Isn't Meredith Jones one of those who go through life shivering through fear of the Germans?"

"Meredith Jones, at any rate," he answered, "represents the popular feeling in the cabinet. I am almost alone in my views, except, as you perhaps know, for some very powerful influence outside the cabinet. Single-handed, I could do nothing. If I remained, I should have to carry out another man's views. No! I am well content to

be away for a short time. Apart from which," he added, with a little sigh, "I am really feeling shockingly seedy."

"You won't expect me out until after Christmas, I suppose?" she asked.

"Certainly not," he answered. "You can come just when it is convenient. In fact, although I have wired to have the villa got ready, I shall probably wander about for some time and try to find a quiet spot along the Italian Riviera. I shall have plenty to occupy my thoughts. There are some papers I have been wanting to write for the reviews."

The marchioness looked for a moment or two thoughtfully into the fire. She was not in the least satisfied with her husband's explanation.

"My dear Francis," she said presently, "but for the fact that I interviewed Sir Frederick myself, and know that he dare not tell me a downright lie, I should come to the conclusion that you are keeping something back from me with regard to your health. Frankly, I do not believe this explanation of yours. You are not at all the sort of man to run away from trouble."

The marquis stood still for several moments. His thin, drawn face was in a sense expressionless, yet his wife was perfectly well aware that there was some change there. Something had happened which reminded her of a terrible week of restlessness soon after their marriage.

"There is some trouble," he said, "from which flight alone is possible."

The marchioness raised herself a little on the sofa. "I do not like to hear you say that, Francis," she, remarked. "I hope that you have not been foolish enough to allow yourself to be frightened by any of these bands of blackmailers. They tell me that half the public men in London, at some time or another, have to face trouble of this sort."

"Blackmailers!" he repeated softly. "No, it is not exactly that."

"There is something?" she persisted.

"There is something," he admitted, unconsciously lowering his voice. "There is something, I must admit that."

"Why not tell me about it?" she asked. "I think that on the whole you and I have been much more than fairly good husband and wife to each other. I do not wish to say anything which might sound bourgeois, but if there is any real trouble or danger to be faced I do not need to hear the other side. I believe in you, and I would help you if it were possible."

The marquis threw away his cigarette. He stooped down and raised his wife's fingers to his lips. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he stooped lower still and kissed her lips.

"Dear Margaret," he said, "I thank you very much. If it were possible for me to give it to any one in the world, you should have my whole confidence. Unfortunately, it is not possible. If you were my guardian angel, the materialized conscience of my life, I should still be dumb."

"There were times," she remarked thoughtfully, "when you were a young man, before there was any thought of your coming into the title, when you were unheard of. There were years of your life during which you seem to have had no friends, when no one seemed to know anything about you, where you were, or what you were doing. You came back when your cousin died, a stranger to nearly everybody. I have been curious sometimes, Francis, about those years."

His lips parted slowly into a smile which seemed to make a stranger of him to the woman who was watching his face. Certainly it was some other man who, with fixed eyes, looked back into the shadows of another's past.

"You must remember," he said, "that in those days I was nobody. I was a well-born, penniless young man, with no career, practically no expectations. I was treated very badly by people from whom I had some right to expect countenance. I was a little wild, perhaps, but I was no worse than dozens of others. I mention this because I want you to understand that in those days I felt no shadow of obligation toward either my country or my family. That is all I can tell you, Margaret."

Then the marchioness made what was for her a most astounding suggestion, a suggestion which even a few days afterward she reflected upon with amazement. "I wonder," she said, "whether you would care for me to go with you abroad? I could manage it, of course. The servants could follow us in a few days with the luggage."

He looked at her. He was astonished, and showed it.

"My dear Margaret," he said, "it is most unnecessary. For what you have said I am very grateful, but it is better for me to go alone just now. Now who the mischief can that be?"

There was a low tapping at the door. His secretary entered, with a brief apology.

"I am most sorry, sir," he said, "to interrupt you. There is a man here of whom I cannot get rid. His name is Gilbert Hannaway."

The marquis shook his head. "I never heard of him," he said. "Are you sure that he is not from a newspaper?"

"I am quite sure," the secretary answered. "He is very urgent in his desire to see you, and he will give me no further explanation of his coming than this. He says that he is the man who rang you up last night from the Altona Hotel."

The marquis set down his empty coffee-cup. It was impossible for either of the other two persons in the room to avoid noticing that his hand was trembling. Again there was something in his eyes which, to those two who knew him so well, seemed to suggest another man living in another world.

"I will see this gentleman," the marquis said. "You may show him in here," he added, with a little glance toward his wife.

She rose at once and shook out her gown. "I will go to my room," she said, "and read for a little time. Perhaps if you are not detained too long you will come in and see me."

The secretary held open the door with a low bow. Her husband, as she passed, once more raised her fingers to his lips.

"My dear," he said, "I shall certainly come."

Chapter VIII

The marquis glanced from the card which he held toward the man whom his secretary had just ushered in.

"This is Mr. Hannaway, sir," the latter remarked.

The marquis inclined his head very slightly. “I do not understand the purpose of your visit, sir,” he said, “and I am exceedingly occupied just now. If you will kindly explain in a few words what I can do for you, I shall be glad.”

Gilbert Hannaway bowed, and glanced toward the secretary.

“Do you wish me to stay, sir?” the latter asked.

The marquis hesitated for a moment. Then he shook his head. “No,” he said. “You had better type those letters I gave you before dinner. Bring them to me in a few minutes, and I will sign them.”

The secretary bowed and withdrew, closing the door carefully behind him. The marquis, who was still regarding his visitor with a slight frown, motioned him to take a seat.

“Sit down, if you will, sir,” he said. “I can spare you only a very few minutes. First of all, let me ask you what is the meaning of that extraordinary message which I understand came from you last night?”

Hannaway accepted a chair, and laid his hat and stick upon the table. He drew up one knee and clasped his hands around it. “A hunchback, a singing girl, and a monkey!” he murmured. “You see, I had been searching for them, and they appeared unexpectedly. It occurred to me that you, too, might be interested to know that they were in London.”

“But why?” the marquis asked. “What has such a company as this to do with me?”

Hannaway was silent for a moment. “Your lordship,” he said, “are we to talk as men who feel for the point of the other’s rapier in the dark? Or are we to lay our cards upon the table? We may, perhaps, each be able to help the other.”

The marquis glanced toward the door. “Mr. Hannaway,” he said, “you comport yourself like a sane man, but I frankly admit that your words seem to me to qualify you for a lunatic asylum. Frankly, I have no idea what you mean.”

Hannaway nodded thoughtfully. “Ah!” he said, “you prefer that way. Well, it is your choice of weapons, for it is I who have sounded the tocsin. I understand that your lordship is leaving England to-morrow.”

“If I am,” the marquis answered, “I do not conceive it to be any concern of yours.”

“One cannot tell,” Hannaway answered. “Sometimes the little webs of fate which connect our lives are almost invisible. There may be something which brings us into closer touch than you are willing to admit. Five years ago, for instance, my lord, things were different with both of us.”

The marquis looked at his visitor long and steadily. “Listen,” he said. “Five years ago I was a penniless man. I was leading an adventurous life, and I was to be found in strange places. It is possible that I may have seen you in some of them. It is possible that I have met you under circumstances which seem to you scarcely in keeping with my present position. What of it? What concern is it of yours? Are you here to ask for blackmail?”

“You do me an injustice,” Hannaway answered, without any sign of anger. “I, too, only five years ago, was a wanderer, something of an adventurer, perhaps. It was about that time that I began to find life more than ordinarily interesting. I was in Paris five years ago.”

The marquis bowed.

“It is possible,” he said indifferently, “that I may even have had the pleasure of seeing you there. If so, I do not remember it. You must permit me to remind you, Mr. Hannaway, that you have not as yet given me any excuse, call it reason if you will; for your visit.”

“There was a girl,” Hannaway murmured, “a singing girl, a hunchback, and a monkey. To-night I had dinner with the singing girl. We talked of many things.”

The marquis did not at once reply. He turned his back a little upon his visitor, and moved toward a chair. “You have read in the papers, perhaps,” he-said, a little hoarsely, “that I am ill. I am not fit to be about. You say that you dined with a singing girl, and you tell me that as though it were likely to interest me. What do you mean?”

“Your lordship,” Hannaway said, “I dined with the girl whose life is a search. You know whom she seeks. You know why she seeks him. You know more than I do of these matters, but I know enough to make me sure that you are leaving England to-morrow to avoid an unpleasant encounter.”

“Mr. Hannaway—” the marquis began.

“We are alone,” Hannaway said. “There is no need to waste our words. There is a man in France sighing out his life behind the walls of a prison. This girl seeks, perhaps, for some one to take his place.”

“Really,” the marquis declared, “you are becoming quite interesting.”

“I am thankful for so much of your lordship’s consideration,” Hannaway answered.

“She is looking, do I understand, for a substitute?” the marquis asked.

“She is looking for a criminal,” Hannaway answered. “She is looking for the man who should be in the place of a certain Vicomte de Neuilly.”

“You have come here to tell me these things, Mr. Hannaway,” the marquis said. “Why?”

“Because,” Hannaway answered, “I expect for my information a *quid pro quo*.”

“Naturally,” the marquis answered. “In the shape of a check, may I ask?”

“I am no blackmailer,” Hannaway said sternly, “but I was in the house at the corner of the Place Noire on the night when twenty gendarmes were foiled by one man. I set myself to find out who that man was. I have even visited the prison. I know that the man who lies there is not the man they think.”

“Indeed?” the marquis answered.

“The police themselves know it,” Hannaway continued, “but they are vain, and they will not admit that they failed to secure the man with whose name all France was ringing during those few months. Only a few people know that the man who lies in the jail at Enselle is not the terrible Jean. I am one of the few who know how he made his escape that night. I was lying with a bullet in my thigh, or I should have followed even then. Some of you others must have known. Tell me who that man was, Lord Ellingham. Tell me where I can lay my hands upon him. You owe me that much for the warning I have given you to-night.”

The marquis had settled down in his easy chair. He lighted a cigarette, and looked across at his companion with a curious smile. “My dear Mr. Hannaway,” he said, “I am delighted that I decided to see you. No one has amused me so much for a very long time. Pray go on. Tell me more about this Jean the Terrible, I think you

called him. Who was he, and why was he terrible? And above all, why do you come to me for information about him?"

"Because you knew him," Hannaway answered. "Because you were one of that band of ruffians. There, you see, I am not over-jealous of my secret. I have no grudge against you. I understand that things have changed with you, so that you would prefer to look upon the past as though it had not been. But my silence is worth something. The man may be dead, or he may be alive. Anyhow, his whereabouts interest me. Tell me, even, what his haunts were, what he was like to look at, anything that can help me in my search."

The marquis shook his head.

"Mr. Hannaway," he said, "you have amused me exceedingly, and I am very much obliged for your call, and also for the warning concerning the young lady and the dwarf and the monkey. I fancy that you have been taking an overdose of Heine. Let me recommend you to go back to that young lady, and get rid of your illusions. She will probably be able to help you to do so."

Hannaway nodded, as he stretched out his hand reluctantly for his hat and stick. "Ah, well," he said, "I am not disappointed. The old fear still remains, I suppose. The old bonds are still tightly drawn. There are ways, though, without your lordship's help."

The marquis touched the bell. "I have enjoyed your call immensely, Mr. Hannaway," he said. "Pray come again some day, when I have returned from abroad."

"I shall certainly do myself the honor," Hannaway answered, as he followed the footman out of the room.

Chapter IX

The girl paused at the threshold of the sitting-room, and opening the door softly, looked in. Drake was lying huddled up on the sofa, his face buried in his arms. Chicot sat a few feet away, regarding him dolefully. At the sound of her coming, both turned toward the door. Drake sprang to his feet. A little cry broke from his lips.

"Christine!" he exclaimed. "You are back again! What has happened? Why did you leave me?"

She looked at him for a moment steadily. Certainly he was a strange-looking figure. His hair was tangled and disarranged. There were patches of red upon his face. His clothes were splashed with mud. She held out her hands with a little gesture, almost of aversion. Then she slowly began to remove the pins from her hat.

"Ambrose," she said, "you have been drinking."

"God knows I needed to drink!" he cried. "I was away three, perhaps five, minutes. When I came back you were gone. I waited, we waited, Chicot and I. When they made us move on, we came back again. We walked on the pavement, we stood in the street, the hours went, and you did not come. Yes, it is true,

Christine. Then I drank. What was I to do? I could not eat, and I was faint, faint with fear. But you have come back," he added, with a little break in his voice.

"Of course I have come back," she interposed wearily. "What was there else to do?"

"You want something to eat!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Not a thing," she answered. "I have had dinner at a restaurant. I have dined, actually dined, Ambrose. Think of it! I have seen clean linen, flowers, and silver. I have eaten warm, well-cooked food. I have even tasted champagne."

The joy died out of his face. Once more he was haggard. "With whom?" he demanded. "With whom have you been?"

"With no one of my own choice," she answered. "I met him face to face, and you were not there. I was obliged to listen to him. It was the Englishman. You remember? The one from whom we escaped only last night."

"I know," the dwarf said. "Hannaway, his name was. God knows where he came from! He is well again, then. He was not badly hurt."

"No," she answered, "he is quite recovered."

"You went to dinner with him?" he exclaimed, his voice trembling. "Why did you do that? Where did you go? Why did you not keep him talking until I came?"

"It was no use," she answered. "We could not have escaped from him. It was best to let him talk."

"You told him anything?" Drake asked.

"Nothing!" she answered.

"How much does he know?"

She shook her head thoughtfully. "He is one of those silent persons," she said, "who say little, who ask questions, and whose face never changes. How much he knows I could not tell."

"Did he come home with you?" Drake demanded. "Does he know where we live?"

"He knows nothing," she answered.

"Tell me," Drake asked, "what if we fail also in London?"

"We cannot fail," she answered. "We must find him. He is here somewhere. I know it. We are in the same city. In time we must come face to face. Then he shall know what it is to hear words of truth. He shall hear what a woman, even though she be only a girl, thinks of a traitor."

"It is a great city, this," he said thoughtfully. "We may search day by day, month by month, even year by year, and the one person for whom we look may escape us."

"We must take our chance," the girl answered doggedly. "He must be found. In time we shall find him. I am sure of it."

"And meantime we starve," Drake muttered, "you and Chicot and I. The pennies come hardly all the time, and the piano is wearing badly. The man told me to-day that I should have to pay for two fresh notes. It is the damp and the rain that do it. What a country it is, Christine!"

She saw the gleam in his eyes, and she answered him almost roughly. "Oh, I know!" she said. "You are longing for the sunshine, for the smell of flowers, the warm south winds. Don't you think that I, too, miss them? It is a hideous country, this, but we have not ourselves to think of. Remember the man whose life is worse even than ours, who waits, who has nothing else to do but wait and hope."

"It shall be as you say," Drake answered. "We will stay, if you will have it so."

"Stay we must," the girl answered passionately. "It is not of my choice, it is not a matter of will. We are here. We must remain here."

There was a tap at the door. The child who carried up Christine's breakfast entered. She held in her hand a twisted scrap of paper.

"A gent left this 'ere for you," she explained.

Christine unfolded the note with curious fingers. "For me?" she repeated. "A gentleman left it for me?"

Drake came softly nearer, with darkening face. The child, who saw prospects of trouble, lingered. Christine read the few lines, scrawled across a half-sheet of paper, and her eyes flashed.

"Look, Ambrose!" she cried. "See! It is a message from the skies, this. Read!"

"I cannot read," he muttered. "My eyes are dim." She read it to him:

Be at Victoria Station when the eleven o'clock train leaves for the Continent to-morrow. Watch the passengers.

There was no signature, nothing on the paper by which they could tell from whom it had come. Christine's eyes were on fire with excitement.

"To-morrow!" she cried. "The eleven o'clock train at Victoria!"

"Who sent you that note?" Drake demanded.

She laughed. Her fingers went to her lips, and she threw an imaginary kiss. "I cannot tell," she answered, "but this is for him, and more, wherever he may be."

Chapter X

At seven o'clock in the morning there were few people stirring in the miserable lodging-house where the hunchback and the girl had their quarters. From his secret hiding-place Drake came stealing with soft footsteps into their little sitting-room. He struck a match and lighted the stove, slipped out through the front door, and at a neighboring shop bought rolls and butter and fresh milk. These he put carefully on one side. For himself he produced from the cupboard two small pieces of stale bread, some rancid butter, and a coffee-pot, and prepared some unnameable compound. Then he arranged the girl's breakfast upon the tray, set the kettle once more upon the stove, and commenced his meal.

Up and down the little room he walked, listening intently for any sound in the sleeping house. His face was drawn and tense with emotion. Sometimes as he walked he cracked the joints of his long fingers. Sometimes he paused to wipe the damp fear from his forehead. Would she come? Was he going to lose her? Would she oversleep, perhaps, or change her mind? In his heart he knew that none of these things was probable. He knew that the great sickening fear which had taken possession of him would soon be realized. How he cursed the anonymous sender of those few lines! She would go, he was sure of it. Soon he would hear her footsteps upon the stairs, and see her hurry into the room, with this new

animation in her face which had never left her since she had received the letter. She would wish him good-by carelessly as usual, and she would go out of the door never to return. He was sure of it, sure of it, he told himself, with a little sob of agony. What was there to keep her in this bondage of misery when once the way of escape was made manifest?

Eight o'clock struck, and then half-past. Nine, and there was no sound of her coming. A faint impossible hope commenced to quicken his pulses. Sometimes she slept late. If she should do so to-day, if she should fail to reach the station in time, the man might go. There would be nothing left for her but to stay with him. She would hate him more than ever for not having called her. What did it matter? There was little he had from her save ungracious words. She would be with him still. She would walk by his side. She would accept day by day his constant service. He prayed that she might be late. In vain! Nine o'clock had scarcely struck before he heard her step upon the stairs. He raised his hands high above his head in a little gesture of despair. Then, with a queer little sob, which somehow or other he contrived to suppress, he took the coffee-pot in his hand and poured in the hot water.

"Your breakfast is ready, Christine," he said. "I thought that you would take it downstairs this morning."

Christine nodded carelessly. In that first furtive glance he had noticed, with sinking heart, that she was wearing her best hat, and that her clothes, shabby though they were, had been carefully brushed. She carried gloves, too, and a little piece of lace was at her throat. There could no longer be any doubt about it. She was going to the station. She was going to obey the summons sent her from this unknown source. She sat down at the table, and drank her coffee slowly. She was a little pale. There were dark rims under her eyes, which spoke of a sleepless night.

"You are not coming with me, then?" she asked abruptly.

"No," he answered.

"I shall come back," she said, "anyhow. I shall come back for a little time, whatever happens."

He turned away that she might not see his face. "I wonder," he said thoughtfully.

In his heart he did not wonder at all. He felt that the end had come. It was there like a dead weight over his heart. After she had finished her coffee she began to draw on her gloves.

"They tell me," she said, "that it takes an hour to walk to Victoria from here. I think I will start."

"There is a railway that goes underground," he said. "I have seven pence here."

He held out the coins, and laid them with shaking fingers upon the table. She took them up, and put them into her pocket.

"I will take the money," she said, "in case it comes on to rain. If not, I would rather walk."

She rose to her feet, and then, with a sudden impulse, she turned round toward him. Her eyes, for a moment, lost their far-away look. The lines of her face seemed to soften.

“Good-by, Ambrose,” she said. “Won’t you wish me fortune? Remember, it is for your sake as well as mine.”

He threw himself suddenly on his knees before her. His long fingers caught at her skirts. His eyes were full of passionate tears. “Don’t go,” he cried. “There is danger, and I am afraid. I am afraid that you will not come back. I can earn more money. I will get up earlier. I will go out in the evenings, Chicot and I. There are many who do well on the streets when people are going and coming from the theaters. You shall have more clothes, I swear that you shall. Don’t go away, Christine. I am afraid.”

She looked at him with the tolerant amazement of one who sees an unexpected passion seize hold of a child. “My dear Ambrose,” she said, drawing her skirts away from his clinging fingers, “don’t be absurd. Sit up, and remember that you are a man. Remember that this is what we came here for, what we have been looking for ever since we started the quest. A few shillings a day more—what do you think that could mean to me? I am tired of this wretched poverty. I want another life from beginning to end. If I do not find it soon I think that I shall go mad.”

Already he was conscious of the futility of his effort. He dragged himself to his feet. He was feeling very weak and very old. “Another life,” he muttered. “Yes, I understand!”

She threw him a farewell nod. “You have been very kind, Ambrose,” she said. “Do not be afraid that I shall forget it.”

She left the room, and from the window he watched her cross the road and set her face westward. He recognized a new blitheness in her step, a new grace in the way she held her skirts and carried her head. The hope which had been almost crushed in her was alive once more. The signs of it were all there, a torment to him. He turned back into the room as she disappeared, finding it strangely empty. She was gone, and in his very misery he was hopeless. Something vital had been torn from his life. He sat on the edge of the sofa, and Chicot leaped onto his shoulder.

* * * * *

At twenty minutes to eleven there was all the pleasant bustle on the platform at Victoria which precedes the departure of the Continental train. Piles of registered luggage were being checked and looked over by their owners. The people who had arrived early were walking up and down the platform, saying good-by to their friends. Busy inspectors were scrutinizing the labels to find the engaged carriages. The boy who sold seats in the French train was doing a thriving business. Gilbert Hannaway was sauntering by the book-stall, turning over magazines, and glancing frequently toward the main entrance, where Christine was standing, pale and expectant.

A few minutes before the hour, Lord Ellingham, leaning a little upon the arm of his secretary, and preceded by a tall footman, came through onto the platform. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but walked straight through the press of people to take his place in the train. Hannaway, whose emotions were not easily aroused, felt himself suddenly thrilled as he watched the girl. He saw a new thing in her face. He saw an expression which never before had he seen in the eyes of

any living person. She had staggered a little back, and was leaning slightly against the wall. Her hands were stretched out, as though to hide from her the sight of some terrible thing. Her lips were a little parted. Her eyes had grown larger, distended, terrified. As though against her will, they followed the movements of the man who passed so close to her. They followed him across the platform, followed him, the central figure of an obsequious-looking group, to the reserved carriage awaiting him. Her hands clutched at the air. She seemed almost as though she would fall.

Hannaway crossed the platform to her. “Have you nothing to say to him?” he asked, pointing to the carriage, the door of which was now closed.

The girl looked at him with unseeing eyes. She started to cross the platform, and at that moment Lord Ellingham came to the window to give some parting instructions to the footman. His eyes met the girl’s, and for the second time Gilbert Hannaway was thrilled. He saw the man at the carriage window break off in the middle of a sentence, saw him clutch the sides of the door for support, saw in his face something of that same look which had shone a moment before in the eyes of the girl who was now going toward him.

Hannaway stood rooted to the spot. It was one of the great tragedies of life being played before his eyes, between these two, the man and the girl, both torn by some strange, incomprehensible emotion.

Illustration:
„Have you nothing to say to him?“ he asked,
pointing to the carriage.

The whistle of the train blew. Lord Ellingham threw open the door of his carriage.

“Let her in,” he said hoarsely, to the inspector.

The people who stood around looked from the girl to him in amazement. Penton, his secretary, was too amazed to say a word. The footman could not think of one to utter. Only the inspector, with his mind upon his duties, was able to make any remark at all.

“The young lady won’t be going on, sir?” he asked. “We are off now. There’s no time—”

Lord Ellingham stretched out his hands and drew her into the carriage. The train was already moving. There was no opportunity for any other protest. Those who were left upon the platform, and had witnessed the little scene, gazed after the train in amazement. Only Gilbert Hannaway understood, and he very dimly, something of the meaning of what had happened.

Chapter XI

Three nights later Gilbert Hannaway sat at dinner in one of the most famous restaurants of Paris. His companion—he had many friends on that side of the channel—touched him on the arm.

"My dear Gilbert," she said, "you asked me to point out to you what I should recognize as the real Parisian type, the absolutely smart woman. Look! I show her to you. There! The girl in the black dress, and the hat with white feathers. Believe me, that is the last thing which Paris can show you. Her shoes, her jewels, her furs, the cut of that long jacket, the little dog with the gold collar she has under her arm,—they are all of the moment, the latest thing. There is your type for you."

Gilbert Hannaway was used to surprises, but this one left him staring, open-eyed and for a moment speechless, at the girl and her escort, who, preceded by a couple of maîtres d'hôtel, and leaving in their wake a little train of attendants,—a page boy, a cloak-room attendant, and the hurrying manager of the restaurant himself—were passing toward a table in the middle of the room which had evidently been reserved for them. Marvelous transformation though it was, Hannaway had not a second's doubt as to the personality of the woman his companion had pointed out. It was the girl whom, three days before, he had seen drawn into the train at Victoria—shabby, bewildered, dressed in the same clothes in which she had tramped the streets, singing to the miserable music thumped out by the hunchback. Hannaway drew a little breath. He looked across the restaurant, but he saw a dark alley leading from the Strand, saw the raindrops glittering about the dingy gas-lamps and falling softly upon the soaked pavement. He saw the little group gathered around the piano, with its cracked notes and wheezy chords. He saw the figure of the hunchback bent over his task, the girl, with white, still face, singing as though in sullen defiance of the emptiness around her. He saw the monkey sitting on the barrow, with something of the hopelessness of the other two reflected in his own changeless face. Even the sound of the girl's voice seemed to reach him as he sat there. Then it all faded away. He heard her laugh as she turned softly to her companion. Already it seemed to him that the beauty which had lain dormant beneath her white, strained features was subtly reasserting itself. Hannaway called for the bill.

"Let us go," he said to his companion. "We have only five minutes to get to the Capucines."

Christine toyed with her caviar, and tested the temperature of the champagne with the air of one to whom these things were part of the routine of life. She nodded her approval to the anxious waiter and turned to her companion.

"There are no English people here," she said. "You need not look so worried."

The marquis shrugged his shoulders. "One cannot tell," he answered. "The English are everywhere. There was a young man who has just left. I could not see his face, but his figure was English. I think it is imprudent, this dining in public, for many reasons."

Christine laughed softly. Her voice seemed to have lost its ill-natured ring. "If you had dined," she said, "as I have dined for the last few years, I think that you would not mind a little risk."

"Incidentally," he remarked politely, "the risk is mine, not yours."

"We share it," she answered carelessly. "Come, let us not spoil our dinner by imagining things."

Her companion had not the air of a man to whom the enjoyment of anything was possible just at that moment. He was looking paler and thinner even than when he had left England. There were deep lines about his mouth. His eyes seemed set farther back. He had the uneasy, self-conscious look of the man who is wondering whether he is observed.

Illustration:
„Look at the big man opposite, with the little girl in red.
How he stares!“

“One should cultivate the art of forgetfulness,” she remarked. “What delicious truffles!”

“For you,” he muttered, “it is easy enough. You are young, and you come from hard times. For me it is different. I think that after to-night I shall hire a chaperon for you, and send you out alone.”

“As you will,” she answered carelessly, “although,” she added, smiling at him, “I prefer the present conditions. Look at the big man opposite, with the little girl in red. How he stares! I think the little girl will soon call him to account. She is pouting already.”

The marquis put his hand to his forehead, and found it damp. He pushed his plate away untasted. “I will not do this again,” he declared. “I will not show myself at these places with you, or even alone. Look at the man again, Christine. Does he remind you of no one?”

She shook her head. “He reminds me more than anything,” she said, smiling, “of a hippopotamus.”

“I seem to see him,” the marquis muttered, “with a beard, and in different clothes.”

Christine laid her hand upon his arm. “You are nervous to-night,” she said. “Drink some wine. It will give you courage. Of course, if you are going to feel like this all the time, we must give up the restaurants. It is very foolish of you, though. There is so little to be feared.”

“I have been afraid all my life,” he said softly, “of the hundredth chance. It sent me down from college once, gave me my first kick along the road to failure. Then it swung round, killed my relatives like flies, and made me the head of the family. You say that we are safe. We may be, but the hundredth chance bothers me.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “You seek misery openhanded,” she remarked.

He raised his glass to his lips, and set it down empty. “You are right,” he said. “I will be more reasonable. At the same time, I shall leave Paris to-morrow. I loathe the place. It reminds me of everything that I have struggled to forget. You are your own mistress. You shall do as you choose. Remember that every newspaper in England has announced my departure for Bordighera. I was to have stayed here for the night only. To-morrow I shall leave.”

“And I?” the girl asked.

“You can do as you choose,” he answered. “I cannot take you with me, of course. You know that. You can engage an apartment here, or you can go back to London.”

Christine was plainly dissatisfied. She met once more the stare of the bulbous-faced man opposite, and routed him completely. Then she proceeded with her dinner for a few minutes in silence.

"I think," she said at last, "that I should like to go with you."

Lord Ellingham shook his head irritably. "That is precisely what you cannot do," he answered. "I am going to a very small place, where every one is known, and his comings and goings are commented upon in the papers. I could not take you, of course. You must know that. And my appearance with you in public, except on one or two very rare occasions, would be impossible."

"Am I so very *outrée?*" she asked, with upraised eyebrows.

"You are nothing of the sort, and you know it very well," he answered. "At the same time, young ladies of your age and attractions do not travel about the country alone, and when they do, they would be impossible companions for a middle-aged and respectable politician such as myself."

"You will have to get me a chaperon," she declared.

"In England," he answered, "that would be possible. Here in Paris one cannot be hired at a moment's notice. You are in too much of a hurry, my dear Christine. Live somewhere quietly for a few months. After all that you have been through, I should think that that alone would be change enough."

She turned and looked at him for a moment thoughtfully. "Have you never considered," she asked, "that I might perhaps be lonely?"

He reflected upon the matter for a moment, as though it were some altogether new idea which had been presented to him. "I have never looked upon you," he said frankly, "as being like other girls. I have no doubt, when one comes to think of it, that you must have found your recent companionship a little trying."

She shuddered. "Don't!" she begged.

"Still," he added, "I cannot perform miracles. There are some ways in which you must work out your own salvation. That will come in time. Confound that fellow opposite! He never takes his eyes off us. See, he's writing a note now. *maître d'hôtel!*"

The man, who was passing, stopped with a low bow. The marquis indicated the table opposite with a slight movement of his head.

"That man," he said, "has annoyed us ever since we came in. He does nothing but stare at madame and myself. Who is he? Do you know his name?"

The man shook his head. He was distressed that milord should have been annoyed. The man opposite, he was unknown. He had been seen but once or twice before in the restaurant. He was probably some *bourgeois* person, unused to the presence of people of breeding. "Would milord care to change his table?"

The marquis shook his head. "It is not worth while," he said. "We have nearly finished dinner. At the same time, I must confess that I am a little curious concerning that person. You do not know his name?"

"Unfortunately no, milord," the man answered.

The marquis meditatively laid a hundred-franc note upon the table before him. He lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "He has sent for the *chasseur*," he said. "He is handing him a note. If you will let me know, before I leave the restaurant, to whom that note was addressed, this will be yours."

The maître d'hôtel departed with an understanding bow. Christine glanced at her companion with a smile, half amused, half scornful. "Even the shadows terrify you," she said.

The marquis dropped his eye-glass. Once more he had repelled, with glacial contempt, the scrutiny of his neighbor. "I am not so sure," he said, "whether it is a shadow. I seem to remember that man's face with a brown beard, but it was thinner."

Christine laughed softly. "If this is to be our last evening," she said, laying her hand for a moment upon his, "you must not be so foolish. See, they are going now. They will not annoy you any longer."

The man rose. He was a great, coarse-looking creature, with heavy-lidded eyes, and close-cut hair—a Frenchman, but of a larger and grosser type than is commonly met with. By his side his companion seemed almost like a doll. She, too, glanced often and enviously at Christine, as she buttoned up her jacket and turned to leave the restaurant.

They passed through the swing door, and disappeared into the street, and a moment or two later the maître d'hôtel came hurrying up the room. He laid a small folded piece of paper before the marquis.

"The name and address milord desired," he said, with a bow.

The marquis pushed the note across the table, and waited till he had disappeared. Then he softly unfolded it, and spreading it out on the table before him, adjusted his eye-glass, and leaned down. Christine felt the sudden start, which seemed to shake every nerve in his body. She felt the hand on which hers was resting turn cold. When she looked into his face she was alarmed.

"Be careful!" she said. "They are looking at you from the door."

The marquis recovered himself, poured out a glass of wine, and drank it off. "Come," he said, rising a little unsteadily to his feet, "we must go."

"Let me see the name," she whispered.

His fingers released the crumpled piece of paper. It stared up at her, scrawled in thick black-lead characters—

MONSIEUR PIERRE,
7 Place Noir,
Montmartre.

Chapter XII

Gilbert Hannaway smiled to himself as he leaned over the rail of the steamer, and watched the great French light go flashing across the dark, foam-flecked water. He thought of the time he had seen Christine singing in the rainy street for pennies. He turned his head a little to look at her now, stretched upon a deck-chair, covered with expensive furs, a jewel-case on her knees, a little Pomeranian under her arm, her maid busy a few feet away in the little private cabin from which she had just issued. Then his face darkened. After all, she had become

more unapproachable. He felt that as she was at present it would need all his courage to venture even to address her.

However, his opportunity came before they were halfway across. His chair was next to hers, and while she apparently dozed, her jewel-case slipped from her knees and fell onto the deck. She opened her eyes, to see him restoring it to its place.

"Allow me," he said. "It is not injured in the least. It fell upon the rug."

She looked at him steadfastly. There was not an atom of fear in her face. Her eyes met his frankly. She knew that she was recognized, and she accepted the inevitable.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said coolly. "Marie!"

Her maid came out from the cabin. Christine handed her the jewel-case.

"Take care of this," she said. "I find it in my way here."

Then she closed her eyes again, as though to sleep, and it seemed to Hannaway that his opportunity had gone by. As a matter of fact, she was only thinking. In a moment or two she opened them again. Glancing toward her furtively, he found that she was watching him.

"It was you," she asked calmly, "in Henry's restaurant' last night?"

"I was there," he answered.

She nodded. "I saw only your back," she remarked, "but I thought it was you. I trust," she added, with a faint smile, and ignoring altogether their more recent meeting, "that you have recovered from your little accident the other night?"

He smiled. "I have recovered," he answered, "but I hope that you do not always travel with such energetic protectors."

She smiled again. "You need have no fear," she said. "I am alone, except for my maid, whom I engaged only this morning, and who certainly does not seem strong enough to hurt a person like you. Now Ambrose," she continued, "is small, but he is very strong and very fierce."

"Is one permitted to hope," he asked, "that an acquaintance with Ambrose is not a necessity to those who wish to become—" He hesitated. Her eyes were fixed steadily upon his. He felt that his speech might savor almost of impertinence. And yet, under the circumstances, there was surely no necessity for him to consider trifles. "To become your friend?" he finished boldly.

She was silent for a moment. "Ambrose," she said, "belongs to a part of my life which I imagine is over, for the present at any rate. You have perhaps surmised that."

He bowed. "I am glad to hear it," he answered. "I am afraid that my sudden appearance the other night," he went on, "terrified you a little. I was associated, perhaps, with the times which you preferred to forget, but I should like to assure you," he added, leaning toward her, "that my coming was not only the result of my interest in those times, but it was also because I was anxious to see you again."

She turned her head and looked at him steadily. An electric light burned near them, and his face was clearly visible. It was an honest enough face, fair, with straight features and gray eyes. Hannaway was seldom called handsome, but always nice looking. Women, as a rule, trusted him, and women are generally right.

“I think that I like to hear you say that,” she said quietly. “I wish,” she added, “that you could forget altogether those other times. Remember that you were not concerned in them. What you know you learned by accident. They have nothing to do with you. Can’t you forget that you know anything of them? I wish that you could.”

“I think I might,” he answered, a little doubtfully.

“You are not sure?” she continued. “Why should you be? You remember our dinner together a few nights ago?”

He nodded. “Yes, I remember it,” he answered. “I fear that I did not entertain you with such success as your host last night.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “It is a different thing,” she said. “When you gave me that dinner I was starving. Those days are over. You asked me many questions. You spoke only of the past, and you spoke as one anxious to discover things that it were better for you to know nothing of. When I think of you as that person, I am afraid. I do not wish to know you or to speak to you.”

He was thoughtful for a moment. He looked across the sea to where the great light flashed and disappeared, flashed and disappeared. It was odd that the lingering impression which for years he had carried about with him of this girl,—a child when he had first seen her, a woman now,—should have been such a lasting thing, should be so easily stirred into vivid recollection by this brief contact with her.

“If I forget,” he said slowly, “that chance ever brought me near a little group of people about whose doings there were certainly mysterious things—if I forget this—”

Her hand flashed across the arm of his chair. “Forget it,” she whispered, “and remember that you have found again the little girl to whom you were once rather kind.”

He held the hand for a moment, and smiled into her face. “Very well,” he said. “For the present, let it be so. If I relapse again into the curious person, I will give you warning.”

“You shall not relapse,” she said, smiling at him. “I shall not let you go. I have been lonely for so long, and I think that I have fewer friends even to-day than I had in the days when you first knew me.”

“To-night, then,” he said, “you have added to their number by one.”

It was rather like a dream to him afterward, to find himself established as her escort, walking by her side from the steamer, seeing her small luggage through the customs, bringing her coffee to the carriage, which a carefully bestowed tip had secured for the three of them. Her maid, who spoke not a word of English, was useless, and evidently viewed Hannaway’s coming as heaven-sent. She sat with closed eyes in a corner after the train had started, and Hannaway and Christine talked together in English.

“You must wonder many things about me,” she said softly. “We begin, of course, on the night when you heard me sing in that little alley. Our memories go no farther back.”

“Mine,” he assured her, “is already a blank.”

“I was not playing any part then,” she went on. “I can assure you that I was singing for my living, and grateful for the pennies that Chicot picked up. You must have seen how hungry I was when you took me to the restaurant.”

“Things,” he remarked, “are changed now.”

“They are changed,” she answered. “I was in search of some one all the time. It was for that we were in England, Ambrose and Chicot and I. I had almost given up hope when I found—not the person I expected to find,” she continued, in a rather lower tone, “but some one else. It came to the same thing. It was some one from whom I had a right to demand a release from my hateful life.”

“You mean the Marquis of Ellingham, of course,” Hannaway said softly.

She nodded. “Yes,” she answered. “You saw me with him last night.”

“I will tell you something else,” he continued. “I saw you at Victoria. I saw you recognize him. I saw you drawn into the carriage and spirited away.”

She looked at him with parted lips, a little pale at the recollection of that wonderful moment. “You were there?” she whispered. “To me it was a great shock. I saw him come, and all the platform seemed spinning round. My heart almost stopped beating. I saw no one but him. You do not understand that it was wonderful.”

“No, I do not understand altogether,” he said. “Never mind, I ask no questions. It is he, of course, who has altered things for you.”

“It is he,” she answered. “I have an income. I have a letter to his solicitors. They are to find me a house. I am going to have the things I have longed for all the time I have tramped those muddy streets in torn clothes and thick, patched boots.”

“It is a great change,” he murmured.

“It is a great change,” she assented. “There is only one thing which I fear. I shall have no friends. I am afraid of being lonely.”

He nodded. He felt that silence was best. He could ask no questions concerning Lord Ellingham which might not offend her.

“I am sorry to hear that,” he said. “Life without friends is very much like a dinner without salt. But it will not be for long,” he added, looking at her.

“I am not sure,” she answered.

“You are sure of one, at any rate,” he declared.

She looked at him steadily. There were many things in her face which he could not understand. There was a sort of fear, and there was a sort of wistfulness. There was also an almost passionate intensity. What was it she was begging him, he wondered. What was it she feared from his friendship, or hoped for?

“I hope that you mean it,” she said. “Oh, I do hope that you mean it I Only I have known so few men, and they have not been the sort that make good friends.”

“At any rate,” he said quietly, “when friendship becomes impossible I will tell you so.”

She seemed puzzled. She even repeated his words to herself. Then a possible meaning of them seemed to occur to her. She looked away with a little uneasy gesture, slightly, charmingly confused. Was she really still so much of a child, he wondered, or was she a supreme actress?

“We will not think of any evil days,” she said. “Remember that to be my friend will be no sinecure. There will be so many things that I shall want to know, so much advice, so much help, that I shall need.”

“I am an idle man,” he answered. “I shall be always at your service.”

“Then begin, please,” she said, looking out of the window to where the great semicircle of lights showed that they were approaching London, “begin, please, by telling me a hotel to which I can go with Marie here—something very good, but very quiet, where people will not look at me because I am alone.”

He wrote the name and address and gave it to her. “You had better mention my sister’s name, Lady Hartington,” he said. “She always stays there. You see I have written her name upon this little slip of paper.”

The train glided up to the platform. She seemed unaccountably nervous.

“You will not leave me,” she begged, “until our baggage has passed through the customs? I am not used to traveling alone. I think that I am a little nervous.”

“I had no idea of leaving you,” he assured her. “We will put your small things in a cab, and then go back to find your trunks. It will be a matter of only a few minutes.”

Her eyes swept the platform immediately they descended. She walked close to Hannaway’s side as they moved about. When at last they drove off she waved her hand out of the window of the cab, and smiled at him delightfully.

“Au revoir!” she murmured. “To-morrow, remember.”

Hannaway followed her a few minutes later,-in a hansom, on his way to his rooms. The people in the streets seemed all unreal. Never a romantic person, he was suddenly conscious of a vein of something which assuredly had little to do with the practical side of life.

“It is that cursed Heine,” he muttered to himself. “But she is wonderful!”

Chapter XIII

They were sitting side by side in a hansom, Gilbert Hannaway and Christine, making their way with some difficulty along one of the crowded side streets close to Piccadilly. They had lunched together, and she was dropping him at his club, on the way to her dressmaker’s. Suddenly he felt her fingers grasp his arm. She shrank back into the farther corner of the cab.

“Sit as you are,” she said quickly. “Don’t look. It is Ambrose. He must not see me.”

Despite her entreaty, his eyes wandered up the narrow turning, guided thereto by the jingle of the cracked piano. It was indeed Ambrose who sat there playing, Chicot with him, but no one else. There were no listeners, nor was there sign of any. Ambrose played with bent head, looking neither to the left nor to the right. Chicot looked everywhere, waving his little hat in his hand, but there was no one to whom to offer it.

“Did he see us, do you think?” she gasped, when the cab was safely by.

“I should imagine not,” he answered. “He seemed to be looking down at his instrument all the time.”

She drew a little breath of relief. His face, however, remained grave.

“Your late partner,” he remarked, “seems to have fallen upon evil times. He looks half starved.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “He earns enough for himself,” she answered. “He eats nothing. He only smokes.”

“I suppose,” he said, after a moment’s hesitation, “it doesn’t occur to you to send him money? He was your partner once, wasn’t he?”

“If he knew where it was from,” she answered carelessly, “he would not take it. He can look after himself quite well.”

Hannaway was suddenly serious. It was not the first time that he had noticed in her this marvelous selfishness, which seemed to take no account whatever of the feelings or sufferings of others.

“He looks older,” he remarked. “I suspect he misses you.”

“Yes,” she answered. “He would miss me very much, I am sure of that.”

“Have you written him at all,” Hannaway asked, “since you disappeared?”

She shook her head. “What would be the use? It would only unsettle him. He would not approve of what I have done, and whatever he said would make no difference. Tell me, do you think he saw me?”

Hannaway shook his head. “No,” he answered. “I was watching him all the time. He did not even look up. I don’t think you need be afraid.”

She was unconscious of the slight note of sarcasm which quivered underneath his words. She was apparently too much wrapped up in her own thoughts and fears. The cab pulled up suddenly at the door of his club.

“Don’t go in,” she said pleadingly. “Drive home with me. I will give you some tea presently. I don’t want to go to my dressmaker. I am tired of clothes.”

He shook his head, treating her words lightly. “What a heresy!” he declared. “I am sorry, but, although you may not believe it, I really have some business to attend to this afternoon. You are dining with me to-morrow evening, you know.”

She hesitated. “I am not sure that I can,” she said slowly.

He looked at her quickly. It was the first time she had hesitated to accept an invitation from him.

“To-morrow night,” she said, “I believe that I am engaged.”

He waited for a moment, believing rightly that she would tell him more.

“I think that I am dining with Lord Ellingham,” she said. “He comes home to-night from abroad.”

Hannaway lifted his hat gravely. “I had forgotten,” he said. “Good-by! I shall see you again soon, of course. Where shall I tell the cabman?”

“Sixteen Hanover Street,” she answered, without looking at him.

Hannaway watched the cab drive off, but he did not at once enter his club. Instead, he turned slowly round, and went back along the way by which they had driven. Soon he came to the corner where Ambrose had been playing. He was still there, still alone. He had closed the piano, as though in the act of moving off. Hannaway slowly approached him.

“You see,” he remarked, “my skull was too thick to crack.”

Ambrose looked at him quickly. His face darkened, his eyes narrowed with anger. “I am sorry,” he answered. “I wish that you had never moved again from the place where you fell.”

Hannaway laughed softly. “What have I done?” he asked.

Ambrose's fingers suddenly caught the arm of his coat. "It was you," he said, "who sent her that note. Tell me the truth. It was you who sent her to Victoria Station that morning?"

"What of it?" Hannaway answered. "You must remember that I am not altogether a stranger. It was not difficult for me to guess whom you were seeking, when I saw you in London. How could I tell that I was not doing you both a good turn?"

"If my curses can repay you for it," Ambrose said, "you have them, never fear, morning and night."

"She went, then?" Hannaway asked.

"She went," Ambrose answered, "and I have not seen her since. Tell me," he begged suddenly, with another change of voice. "Perhaps you have seen her. Perhaps you know where she is. Tell me," he persisted. "Do you know?"

"If I did," Hannaway answered, "why should I tell you? What do you want with her?"

"What do I want with her?" the dwarf repeated, looking away. "My God! What do I want with her? Yes, I suppose that is how it must seem to you. I want to see her. If she is happy, I want to see that she is happy. If she is well cared for, I want to see her well cared for."

"What you really want, I suppose," Hannaway remarked, a little brutally, "is to share in her good fortune, if she has found it."

If a look could have killed him, Hannaway would have been struck dead on the spot. The eyes which shone beneath those bushy eyebrows were red with fire. Ambrose took up the handles of his barrow, and turned away without a word. Hannaway felt not altogether satisfied with himself.

"Listen," he said. "I didn't mean to say anything offensive. It certainly was a wretched life for her, tramping the streets with you. You can't be sorry if she has found something better."

"Has she found anything better?" Ambrose demanded. "Tell me. Tell me where she is. If I believed you knew," he muttered, "I would drag the words out of your throat."

Hannaway shook his head. "If she had wished you to know," he said, "she could have found you out, I suppose?"

Ambrose shook his head sadly. "She was always," he said, "a little thoughtless about others. She was only young, and she was not used to such hardships as we had to face. And yet I did my best for her. She never really knew what it was to be hungry. I managed that somehow. I did my best. She had the little things she liked, whenever I could get them for her. Chicot and I starved often, but we were strong, we could bear it."

"Tell me," Hannaway asked, "how do things go with you now?"

"Worse," Ambrose answered slowly. "People would not want to hear even a Liszt try to drag melodies from a thing like this," touching the instrument contemptuously. "They hurry on. It is only because of Chicot that they sometimes throw us a penny. And Chicot," he added, passing his arm a little anxiously around the animal's neck, "has not been very well lately. It is the climate. It is cold and damp for him here."

“Why not go back where you came from?” Hannaway asked. “Listen! I will pay your fare back as far as the south of France, if you like.”

Ambrose turned his head slowly. He looked into Hannaway’s face. “Has she sent you?” he asked. “Does she know that we are still here? Is she in London?”

“She did not send me,” Hannaway answered. “I make you the offer because I have money, and because both you and Chicot look out of place here. Take it if you will. You are welcome.”

Ambrose shook his head. “I dare say,” he said, “that you mean to be kind, but we cannot leave London. Somehow, I believe that she is here. Some day she will send for us, or try to find us. She will remember that she has been a little unkind. If we were not here she would be disappointed.”

Hannaway was silent for a moment. He understood what it was that had brought him back. He understood the pathos which lay underneath the poor, miserable existence of this half-starved creature. When he spoke again, his tone was different.

“Tell me where I can find you,” he said. “Perhaps I may come across her. If so, I could let you know.”

“Not unless she wishes it,” Ambrose answered.

“Remember that. We will not go near her unless she wishes it.”

“I will remember,” Hannaway answered.

“We are in the same rooms as when she went away,” Ambrose continued. “I did not like to leave, for fear that she might come back there. Number 17 Pickett Street, over Waterloo Bridge.”

Hannaway nodded. “I shall remember,” he said. “You will at least let me give Chicot something for his supper?”

He dropped a sovereign in the hat which Chicot, seeing the hand traveling toward his pocket, promptly handed to him. Ambrose said nothing. He was busy fastening the straps of his barrow upon his shoulders. As Hannaway turned the corner of the street, he saw the weary little procession start on its way along the gutter.

Chapter XIV

The right Honorable the Marquis of Ellingham returned to England, as the daily papers were all happy to state, immensely improved in health. His nerves were certainly in a sounder condition, for they stood the test of various little shocks on his homeward journey without once failing him.

The first occasion was at the hotel in Paris, where he and the marchioness, who had come out to join him, and their somewhat numerous suite spent the night. They had dined at the embassy the previous evening, and tonight had themselves entertained a brilliant little party at the Hotel Ritz. Lord Ellingham had just said farewell to the last of his guests, and was standing on the pavement outside the hotel, looking across the Place Vendome. Suddenly he felt a touch upon his arm. A large man, with a red face and thick neck, and wearing a fur-lined overcoat, was

standing by his side. Again Lord Ellingham permitted his fancy to invest that smooth-shaven face with a long brown beard.

"May I be permitted a few minutes' conversation with you, Lord Ellingham?" the man said, in a low tone.

The marquis looked at him blandly, holding his cigarette in his hand. "I do not understand," he answered. "I do not speak French," he added, lying promptly and without hesitation.

The man was puzzled. He continued, speaking rapidly, and still in a half whisper. "We are not mistaken," he said. "I myself saw you at Henry's some months ago. Since then we have made sure. It is not wise to avoid us. Let me assure you, my Lord Ellingham, that it would be very unwise indeed."

The marquis, with a turn of his head, summoned the burly commissionnaire, who had been watching the little scene suspiciously. "I think," he said, "that you had better send this person away. I do not understand what he wants, but I fancy that he is rather a bad lot."

Lord Ellingham turned away and strolled inside the hotel. The man would have followed him, but the commissionnaire's hand lay heavily upon his shoulder. There was a brief explanation between the two, during which the commissionnaire said several things which were very much to the point. Then the man walked away.

"My dear," the marquis remarked to his wife, as he bade her good night, a few minutes later, "if it would not interfere with your plans very much, I should like to leave for England to-morrow. I have had very pressing despatches."

The marchioness made a little wry face, for, of course, she loved Paris. Incidentally, however, she was also quite attached to her husband.

"If you could make it the four o'clock train," she suggested.

"The four o'clock train it shall be," he answered, raising her hand to his lips.

They reached the Gare du Nord the next day with very little time to spare. One of the secretaries from the embassy, who was Lord Ellingham's nephew, came to see them off. Several of the officials from the railway, too, were on the platform, so that the marquis, as he passed up to his place, was the center of a little group. His friend of the fur-lined overcoat, attended by a smaller man who had a dark, wizened face, was walking up and down the platform. The two turned and followed the little procession. Obviously they were doing their best to attract the attention of the marquis. He surveyed them, through his eye-glass, with bland unconsciousness, however, and, bidding farewell to his friends some few minutes before the train was due to leave, took his place in the reserved compartment, with his back to the window, talking earnestly to his nephew, who had accompanied him. The two men stood a few feet away upon the platform. Once Lord Ellingham heard a soft tapping on the window-pane, but he did not turn his head. He only glanced out of the window as the train was finally leaving the platform. The tall man was still standing there, with his hands thrust deep into his overcoat pockets. His companion had disappeared.

It was a fine crossing, and Lord Ellingham walked alone upon the upper deck. About halfway across, he recognized the smaller of the two men who had been at the station. The latter, choosing his opportunity, accosted him.

"Lord Ellingham, I believe," he said in English.

The marquis looked down upon him a little impatiently. “What do you want?” he asked curtly.

“I want a few words with your lordship concerning one Philip Champion,” the little man said. “Your lordship may perhaps remember the name.”

Lord Ellingham shook his head and passed on. “I never heard it in my life,” he said. “You will excuse me.”

“It will be better for you to talk to me,” the little man began. “Evasions will not answer for very long.”

The marquis threw away the match with which he had just lit a cigarette. He stared hard at the person who had accosted him. “I am afraid,” he said, “that you cannot be well. I simply do not know what you are talking about, and I do not choose to converse with strangers.”

He walked away, and descended the steps to the lower deck, where he joined his wife in her private cabin. His nerves were certainly very much better! He sat and chatted with her until they reached the harbor, and himself escorted her to the reserved carriage which was attached to the train. At Charing Cross, the brougham was waiting almost opposite the spot where the carriage stopped. From the window, as they drove out, Lord Ellingham caught a glimpse of the little man hurrying along the platform. He leaned back in the carriage and smiled. The marchioness suppressed a yawn.

“You are in great spirits, Francis,” she said.

He smiled. “I am feeling better,” he said. “A little more fight in me.”

“The change has certainly done wonders for you,” she remarked. “You look quite fresh. I feel a perfect rag myself. It was such a hateful journey.”

The marquis smiled. “It is a dull journey,” he admitted. “Suffers, as a rule, from lack of incident, doesn’t it? Well, we are back again, and London looks about the same.”

“You are glad to be back, of course,” she remarked. “It is always a little interesting,” he answered, “to take up the threads.”

The marquis sat up late that night, going through letters with his secretary. When they had nearly reached the end Penton produced three envelopes from his coat pocket.

“Your lordship,” he remarked, “was particular to give me instructions to open everything, even letters that were marked strictly private. There are three communications with which I have been unable to do anything, and which I imagine must have been sent to your lordship in error.”

He spread them out upon the table. There were three sheets of foreign notepaper, addressed to the Marquis of Ellingham in typewritten characters. Their contents were the same. There was a single sentence, which occupied only a small space in the middle of the sheet of paper—

Philip Champion is requested to communicate with his friends.

The marquis read the sentence over slowly, and knitted his brows a little, as one confronted with a problem. His nerves were certainly stronger, for neither did he change color nor did the fingers which held the thin sheets of foreign notepaper tremble.

“What the devil is this, Penton?” he asked.

"I have no idea, sir," the young man answered. "There are the letters, just as they arrived, addressed to you and marked private. And look here."

He turned to the reading-table and picked up the *Daily Mail* and the *St. James' Gazette*. He pointed to the agony column of each. The same announcement appeared—

Philip Champion is requested to communicate with his friends.

"Is it an advertisement, do you suppose?" the marquis asked.

"If so," the secretary answered, "the explanation would have to come separately, for there is none yet that I can see."

"No new patent food or medicine?" the marquis suggested.

The secretary shook his head. "I have never heard the name of Philip Champion before," he answered, "nor have I seen it connected with any commodity of that sort."

The marquis replaced the letters in the envelopes. "Keep them," he said carelessly. "Some explanation may come to us later on. We have done enough for tonight, I think, Penton. You may go."

The young man took his leave. The marquis sat alone in his easy chair, watching the dying fire. He could hear the steady footsteps of the policeman pacing the stone flags outside. The roar of the city had died away. It was the one hour of quietness which comes, even to London, before the dawn. He looked into the fire, and thought steadily of what might lie before him. He wasted no time in regrets. He had done once and forever with all nervous fears. He had made up his mind as to his course. It was to be war to the end, war to the hilt of the knife. If he went down, he would go down fighting. He had a great name, the honor of a great family to guard. Something of the spirit of his fighting forefathers stirred in his blood, as he sat there through the silent hours and planned the days to come.

Chapter XV

Christine was in one of her worst tempers. Gilbert Hannaway had not been near her since they had parted the afternoon before, and Lord Ellingham was already nearly half an hour late. She sat in her easy chair, her opera-cloak about her shoulders, her gloves ready buttoned, and the minutes seemed to pass like hours. At last she heard the elevator stop, and the ring of her front door-bell. A moment later the parlormaid admitted Lord Ellingham.

"A gentleman to see you, madam," she announced. Christine rose to her feet. The marquis came in with a little gesture of apology.

"I am so sorry," he said, "but you must have a little consideration for an unfortunate servant of his country who has had too long a holiday. I simply could not get away."

She nodded. "Why did you not give your name to the servant?" she asked.

He took her hands, raised one of them for a moment to his lips, and then turned away with a little laugh. “My dear child,” he said, “you will find that this city is like a great nursery, where people can whisper one to the other all the time. To the world, you are Miss Christine de Lanson, and I am the Marquis of Ellingham. The particular reasons which brought me to dine *tête-à-tête* with you would not be a profitable subject for conjecture.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Why should I care?” she said, a little hardly. “I have no friends. There is no one whose opinion is anything to me.”

“That we may some day be able to remedy,” the marquis said. “In the meantime, where are we to dine?”

“Wherever you like to take me,” she answered.

Lord Ellingham hesitated. “You have a restaurant attached to the apartments, have you not?” he asked.

She nodded. “I have dined there,” she said, “for the last two months, a great many times too often. You will have to take me somewhere else to-night.”

He looked grave for a moment, but he made no objections. Her maid came in to adjust her cloak, and they went down in the elevator together.

“If you do not mind,” Lord Ellingham said, “I shall take you to one of the smaller restaurants. Until we have decided what is really best to be done with you it is not wise that we should be seen together too much.’

“Anywhere you please,” she answered.

He looked at her curiously as they glided along the streets in his electric brougham. It was not until they were seated at dinner, however, that he spoke to her seriously.

“Well,” he said, “you have some of the things, at any rate, which you craved. You have a home, you have carte blanche at your dressmaker’s, you have jewelry, a carriage, a motor-brougham. These, I believe, were the things on which you laid most stress. I see that you are no longer thin, that there is nothing now to conceal the fact that you are a remarkably handsome young woman. Tell me, how does it feel? Are you satisfied?”

“No,” she answered.

He nodded. “This,” he remarked, “is interesting. I think that if I had not turned to politics I should have tried to write a novel. There is much in the study of human beings which interests me. You have all that you asked for, and you have them in sharp contrast with the life which you were living when I found you.”

“Excuse me,” she interrupted. “When *I* found *you*.”

“I am corrected,” he admitted, “but the facts remain the same. But tell me what there is still lacking.”

“I am lonely,” she answered. “I want friends. Nobody knows who I am. Nobody cares. My servants do their duty; I am their mistress, nothing else. They serve me at the shops; I am a customer, nothing else. The beggars to whom I throw money thank me; I am a source of income, nothing else.”

“You want friends,” he repeated thoughtfully.

“I do,” she answered. “I have one,” she went on. “I dare say that you would call him a dangerous one. Do you remember an Englishman—”

“Gilbert Hannaway?” he interrupted quickly.

She nodded. “Our meeting,” she remarked, “was scarcely encouraging. Months ago, before I had found you, he saw us and spoke to us in a little court off the Strand, where I had been singing. I did not want to have anything to do with him. You can guess why. And Ambrose, when he persisted in following us, struck him. We left him lying in the court, and escaped. Afterward I met him in the street. We talked together. I came to the conclusion that he knew less than I had feared. He was on the boat when I crossed from Paris. Since then he has been to see me often.”

“He came to see me once,” the marquis said thoughtfully. “I suspected him then. I had an idea that he was one of those busybodies who go about the world imagining themselves heaven-sent solvers of mysteries. I thought that he had learned a little, and was trying to discover everything.”

“I don’t think so,” she answered. “He never talks about the past to me.”

“Then it is possible that you may find him a useful friend,” the marquis said, “for I want to warn you that they are thick upon the trail, upon my trail, at any rate. They came to me in Paris, they tried to speak to me upon the steamer, they have written me private letters, they have advertised in the papers. You can see it in the agony column of the Mail any day—‘Philip Champion is requested to communicate with his friends.”

“And what,” she asked, “is Philip Champion going to do?”

“Philip Champion is dead,” the marquis answered. “The Marquis of Ellingham knows nothing of him. I am not the nervous creature I was a few months ago. If these men press me hard I am going to fight. But I wanted to warn you. If they have not found you out already, it can only be a question of hours. You will have to choose with whom you take sides, and choose quickly. If you side with me, you will have dangers to confront, as I shall. If you side with them, I imagine that it will shorten the struggle.”

She counted rapidly upon her fingers. “There are only three left,” she said, “three only to be feared, and the worst of these is Anatoile Devache.”

“He is in London, I believe,” the marquis said.

She looked at him with a sudden horror in her face. “And yet you go about and you do not seem afraid!” she said.

“I am not afraid,” he answered. “Look at my hand,” he continued, raising his glass to his lips. “It does not shake. I go about my daily life without a thought of fear. I tell myself always that Philip Champion is dead. He died in prison, I believe; but as for that, it does not matter. He is dead, and the Marquis of Ellingham has nothing whatever to do with any one of his friends.”

“Don’t you think it would be better,” she asked, “to make terms?”

“No!” he replied. “Think of the men! What would satisfy them? What would they ask for a life? I am not a rich man. My estates are already mortgaged to raise large sums of money. I should practically embarrass them for generations. Even then I should not win my way free. I will not do it. If I am found some night with a dagger in my heart, at least I shall die saying that I am not Philip Champion, that I never knew him.”

She shivered. “These are terrible enemies to have,” she whispered.

He nodded. “That is why,” he said, “I would not have you declare yourself upon my side. You, at any rate, had better temporize with them. Let them make what use of you they can.”

“It is Anatoile that I fear,” she muttered. “I wish you had not told me that he is in England.”

Their relative positions had become reversed. In Paris he had been nervous and afraid, while she had been bold. Now he was calm and collected, and she was afraid.

“Nothing will happen to you,” he said reassuringly. “Only you must be prepared. It will certainly not be long before they find you out.”

She looked around a little nervously, and he smiled.

“One can understand,” he said, “meeting Anatoile in the strangest corners of the world, but I can assure you that, many-sided though he is, he would never dare to penetrate into this little restaurant. He is somewhere down in Soho at the present moment, I expect, dining and trying to satisfy that tremendous thirst. Come, we have finished with that subject. The thing which is upon my mind is exactly what further I can do for you.”

A rare moment of tenderness came over Christine. Her fingers stole under the table and pressed his. She looked at him with softened expression.

“You have courage,” she said. “It doesn’t matter about me just now. I suppose I shall get on somehow. You do not mind my knowing Mr. Hannaway?”

“Not in the least,” the marquis answered. “Only I think that I must write Philipson’s about providing a chaperon for you. I must either do that or you must make up your mind to live always as a Bohemian.”

“I hate restraint,” she answered, “but I should love to have some friends. Life is so cold, and one becomes so selfish when one is altogether alone. Sometimes I am afraid. If it were not for the novelty of being rich I should be miserable.”

They left the restaurant a few minutes later.

“I must take you straight home,” Lord Ellingham said, as he handed her into the brougham. “I have two receptions to attend to-night. Perhaps you will give me some tea to-morrow afternoon, and we will talk seriously.”

“I should like to,” she answered.

He left her at the door of the house where she lived. She ascended in the elevator, and let herself in with the latch-key. The room was in darkness, and from the moment she entered she had a curious feeling that something had happened. She sprang to the lights, and turned them on with trembling fingers. Then she opened her lips to cry out, but she was suddenly dumb, dumb with horror. She staggered back against the wall, and felt with her fingers for the electric bell. When at last she found it, and heard its shrill summons go echoing outside, she was able to close her eyes.

Illustration:
She advanced with slow, hesitating footsteps
toward the spot where the man was lying.

Chapter XVI

It was only for a moment that Christine lost control of herself. Her persistent ringing of the bell brought into the room her parlormaid, followed by another domestic. Amidst a chorus of exclamations, she rapidly became the coolest of the trio.

"One of you ring for the elevator man," she directed. "We must have a man here of some sort. You, Alice, ring up the exchange. Ask to be put on to the police station. Tell them to send some one round here at once."

The girl shivered and burst into hysterical sobs. "I can't, I can't!" she shrieked, and ran out of the room.

Christine went to the telephone herself: "I must have an inspector here at once," she said, as soon as she was connected. "I have just returned home and found a man here in my rooms. I think he is dead. Number 42 Victoria Flats. Please send some one quickly. There are no men here, and we are frightened."

Then, for the first time, she advanced with slow, hesitating footsteps toward the spot where the man was lying. There were signs of a struggle in the room. A vase which had stood upon a small table was smashed into a thousand pieces. The table itself lay on its side. Books were strewn everywhere, a chair was overturned, the hearth-rug was doubled up. She looked for a moment at the object that lay half hidden by the round table—a strong man, with big eyes and thick neck. She recognized him at once. She had seen him in the restaurant in Paris. Dimly she remembered him even before that. He lay there now, a ghastly object, with all the high color gone from his cheeks, his eyes closed, the knife with which he had been stabbed still in his Side. She turned away, feeling a little sick, and clutched at the elevator man, who had just hurried in.

"Don't go away," she begged. "Wait till the inspector comes. We are all terrified. Something has happened in my rooms while I have been out."

The man was staring at the prostrate form. "My God!" he exclaimed. "He's stabbed! I brought him up not an hour ago."

"Was he alone?" she asked.

The man nodded. "He was alone when I brought him," he answered. "He was alone when he rang your bell. I'll answer for that."

"How long have you been on duty?" a quiet voice asked from behind.

They turned round. The police inspector had arrived. "Keep back, all of you," he said. "Nothing in the room must be disturbed. Who knows anything of this?"

There was little enough to be told. The man had arrived about nine o'clock, had rung the bell and asked for Miss de Lanson. The parlormaid had answered the bell, and had explained that Miss de Lanson was out. She had recovered now from her hysterics sufficiently to explain that the man seemed to have come from a journey, and spoke very civilly, but begged for permission to wait until Miss de Lanson returned. With some misgivings, she had allowed him to sit down in the dining-room, while she returned to the kitchen. She heard no struggle, no sound of any sort. The bell did not ring again, nor did she admit any one. She heard the

elevator ascend with her mistress, heard her mistress open the door, heard the shriek and the clanging of the electric bell.

The police inspector asked few questions, but he remained in the room a long time, taking notes. The doctor, whom he had summoned immediately on his arrival, made but the briefest of examinations. The man had been dead, he declared, at least an hour, stabbed right through the heart by some one who knew the exact spot to drive a knife home.

Christine left them there. The inspector had decided to stay all night. She went to her room and sat down. It was Anatoile, one of the three she had feared, in her room, and dead! After all she had been told, it was not surprising that he should have been there, but who had killed him? How had he met with his death? She felt herself trembling all over. The shock of the thing seemed to grow more intense. She glanced at the clock. It was not yet midnight. She looked through the telephone book hastily and rang up Gilbert Hannaway's club. Yes, he was there. The man went away to find him. There were a few minutes of suspense. Then she heard a familiar voice, and her heart gave a sudden beat of relief.

"Is that you?" she asked.

"It is Gilbert Hannaway," he answered. "Who are you?"

"I am Christine de Lanson," she answered. "Something terrible has happened here. I want you, if you will, to come to me. Do come, please."

"I shall be around in five minutes," was the quiet answer.

She laid down the receiver with a little breath of relief. It was something, this, to know that some one was coming on whom she could rely, some one, too, who knew a little of the truth. She went out into the passage, walking up and down waiting for him. As soon as she heard the elevator stop, she threw open the front door. It was obvious that he had already heard the news, for he came in pale and with a scared look in his face. She took him into the little drawing-room.

"It is Anatoile," she said. "Listen. To-night I went out to dinner with Lord Ellingham. There was no one here when we left. They say he arrived about nine. I returned at five minutes past ten. I let myself in as usual, walked into the dining-room, turned on the lights, and there he was, lying in the room, stabbed to the heart. The doctor said he had been dead more than an hour. There had been a struggle, too, for the furniture was all overturned."

"Who else had called to see you?" Hannaway asked softly.

"The elevator man declares no one," she answered. "My servants say they admitted no one."

"Lord Ellingham—" he began.

"Lord Ellingham dined with me. He left me below. He did not come up," she said quickly. "Listen. I want you to go to him. I want you to tell him what has happened. Ask his advice. Come back and see me. Am I to say that I dined with him to-night when they ask me where I was? How much am I to tell them? Go and see him, please, and bring me back word."

Hannaway took up his hat. "I will go at once," he said. "Why not come with me? You are scarcely fit to be left here alone."

She shook her head. "I am not a child," she said. "I am a little shaken, that is all. Go to Lord Ellingham's and come back here. I shall be up."

She went back to her room. Soon her maid, who had recovered a little from her terror, came in to undress her.

"I am not going to bed yet, Marie," she said. "I have sent to ask for some one to advise me. How can one sleep knowing that there is a dead man a few yards away?"

Marie held out her hands. It was terrible that such things should happen in England. For her part, she wished that she had never come to so barbarous a country. And monsieur the inspector he was sitting there all night with the corpse! They had had a glimpse of him just now. He was on the floor on his hands and knees making notes.

Christine let her talk. All the time, one thought was working in her brain. Who could have killed him? Who in the world could have intervened at such a moment? What would they think, the others? What would they believe? It had taken place in her rooms—would they visit it upon her?

Again there was the rattle of the elevator gates. It was Hannaway returning. She went out to him. They sat together in the little drawing-room. The fire had gone out, and she was shivering with cold and fear.

"I have seen Lord Ellingham," he announced. "He is terribly shocked, and most anxious on your account. He begs you to send for Mr. Lawson early in the morning, but thinks there is no need for you to mention with whom you dined, as your evidence in the case, so far as regards the murder itself, cannot be important. He will come to sec you himself the first thing in the morning."

She drew a little breath. Somehow or other she seemed relieved at his message.

"Is there anything more I can do?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Not now," she said. "There is nothing to sit up for. I shall go to bed."

He was amazed at her sudden coolness. "You are not frightened?" he asked.

"Why should I be?" she answered. "The man was a stranger to me. He came, I suppose, as a thief. For the rest, I cannot form even the slightest idea as to what happened to him in my room."

She looked him in the eyes, and he nodded slowly. "That is true," he said. "I will come to you to-morrow morning if I may."

He took her hand and held it for a moment.

"I wonder," she said, "if this had not happened, if I had not sent for you, whether you meant to stay away?"

"I meant to," he answered. "Whether I should have succeeded or not I cannot say."

Chapter XVII

The Marquis of Ellingham sat in the almost deserted smoking- room of his club, reclining in a reflective attitude in one of the most comfortable easy chairs. The evening paper, which he had been studying, had just fallen from his knee. His

eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. He seemed to be lost in thought. A man came in and looked around, a man to whom Ellingham nodded at once with some interest.

"How are you, Sir James?" he said.

The great lawyer returned his friend's greeting, and drew an easy chair up to his side. "I am tired," he admitted. "I have been down to the adjourned inquest on this extraordinary murder case. You read about it, I suppose?"

"I have just glanced it through," Lord Ellingham admitted. "So far as I can see, the police seem to have come to an *impasse*."

"Absolutely," the lawyer answered. "They returned the only verdict they could have returned—wilful murder by some person or persons unknown. A very extraordinary case," he continued, pressing the tips of his fingers together. "Here is a perfectly respectable young lady, vouched for by solicitors of the highest standing, occupying an apartment in a very reputable neighborhood. She dines out, and in her absence the servants admit a visitor whom they have never seen before. The mistress returns at ten o'clock. Within five seconds of her turning up the lights in the room her shrieks are heard. The servants rush in, her visitor is discovered there dead, and according to the evidence he must have been dead for at least an hour. The man came alone, the servants admitted no one else to the house, the elevator man brought no one else up. Yet he was killed in that room an hour before the return of its mistress. Find me a puzzle more complete than that, if you can."

"I cannot," the marquis admitted. "It is incomprehensible."

"The police," the lawyer continued, "seem to have been afforded every opportunity. The young lady herself behaved with the utmost discretion. To add to the mystery, she appears to have known nothing of the man, nor was there anything in his pockets which afforded the slightest clue to his identity. He was probably a thief, but even that does not give us a clue. Will you take a drink with me, Lord Effingham?"

"With pleasure," the marquis answered. "I was about to order one for myself."

The servant brought them whiskey and sodas. The lawyer tossed his off. Lord Ellingham held his glass for a moment before him.

"I am going to drink a little toast to myself," he said, smiling. "I am going to drink to an unknown friend."

He raised the glass to his lips with a smile, and drank its contents. The lawyer rose and bade him good night.

"So you don't think," Lord Ellingham asked, "that the police have any idea at all how to go on with this affair?"

"Not the slightest," Sir James answered. "You can take it from me that they haven't a shadow of a clue."

Lord Ellingham left the club a few minutes later. He walked up St. James's Street with his coat open, enjoying the fresh night breeze. As he passed the corner of Park Place a sound a little way along the opening arrested his attention. He stopped for a moment, and then walked slowly toward it. A man, a little huddled-up creature, was thumping weary music from the worn keys of a little piano. Lord Ellingham came to a pause before the instrument and looked down. He was right; it was Ambrose who sat there playing. The tune came to a sudden end. Ambrose

looked up at him from underneath his closely drawn eyebrows. “Well,” he asked sharply, “what do you want?”

Lord Ellingham smiled good-humoredly. “You are not over-polite, my friend,” he said, “to a possible patron. Supposing I say that I stayed to listen to your music?”

“Then you would lie,” the dwarf answered, “and you know it. There is no music to be heard here. Again I ask you, what do you want?”

“Only the pleasure of a moment’s conversation with you,” Lord Ellingham answered.

“Go on, then,” Ambrose said. “I cannot escape. You know that. Say what you want to. At least I am not bound to answer.”

“I have known people in your position,” the marquis said tolerantly, “who were more disposed to make themselves agreeable. However, we will let that go. You have lost your companion?”

“I have lost her,” Ambrose snarled, “thanks to you.”

“Come,” Lord Ellingham said, “you should remember that she is better off in every way where she is. I can assure you that I did not seek her out. She came to me, and after she had found me it was impossible for her to go on living this hand-to-mouth existence. You took good care of her, I believe. If you, too, wish to accept my help, you can have it.”

Ambrose closed the lid of his piano with a little bang. “Is that what you stopped to say?” he asked.

“Something like it,” Lord Ellingham admitted. “You have not given me much opportunity to choose my words.”

“Then you can be off,” the dwarf declared, his voice hoarse with either anger or excitement. “I want no help from you. I want no help from any one.”

“But consider,” Lord Ellingham continued. “You are, I believe, honestly attached to the young woman who for some time shared your fate. In altered circumstances you might still see something of her, might still be useful to her perhaps.”

Ambrose laughed harshly. “Yes,” he said, “I might be useful to her! Perhaps even now I may be that. You think it is a long way from the gutter to the palace, yet I think sometimes that we who crawl about the face of the earth see and hear things. We can be useful sometimes. You yourself, my Lord Ellingham, may need help at any moment. You fancy you are safe, because of your name and your wealth. One cannot tell. There are strange things that happen sometimes. And listen, milord. There are some strange people in London, even now.”

“You seem,” Lord Ellingham remarked, “to pick up a good deal of information in your comings and goings.”

“Why not?” the dwarf answered. “Why not?” He grasped the handles of his barrow. Chicot sprang up and held out his hat.

“Give him a shilling,” Ambrose said surlily. “We have had a bad day, and I would not have him go hungry because I do not care for your alms. Now go your way, and let me go mine. We do no good talking together. I am not on your side.”

Lord Ellingham threw a sovereign into the monkey’s hat and turned away with a little laugh. “You are hard on me,” he said. “I only meant to do you a service if I could. If you change your mind you know where to find me.”

He strolled back into St. James’s Street, and went on his way homeward. He let himself in with a latch-key, and went into his study. There were several private

letters upon the table, through which he glanced hastily. The last one was addressed to him in a typewritten envelope. He tore it open with a premonition as to what he would find. It contained a single sheet of paper upon which were typed these words:

> Philip Champion, if you mean war we too can strike. If you mean peace you had better accept this last summons. Be seated at the third table on the right-hand side from the entrance, in the Café Kulm, at four o'clock to-morrow, Friday afternoon. If you are not there, there will be one in England very soon whom you will not care to see.

Lord Ellingham thrust the letter into his coat pocket and took up the evening paper. Again in the agony column he read with a smile an even more pressing edition of a recent advertisement—Philip Champion is urgently desired to communicate with his friends.

Chapter XVIII

Christine and Hannaway were walking together in Kensington Gardens. It was early in March and the air was soft with spring sunshine. There were flaring beds of yellow crocuses and wonderful borders of hyacinths, faintly sweet. The chestnut-trees were in bud; here and there a flaky blossom was creeping out from its waxy covering. The sky was blue and the sun was soft. Christine had on a new and wonderfully becoming hat, which her companion had noticed and admired. And yet there was a cloud.

"Shall we sit down?" he asked gloomily.

"Just as you like," she answered, with suspicious sweetness.

They chose a seat from which they could look out over a lake, and sat there in silence for several moments, watching the swans and listening to the birds twittering over their heads. Then Christine looked down at the tips of her patent-leather shoes and frowned.

"I do not find you amusing this morning, my friend," she remarked.

"I am sorry," he answered stiffly. "I might add that I have also found you disappointing."

She looked around, as though to make sure that they were alone. Then she turned toward him. "You and I," she said, "should not behave like children. We are both of us too old. I, at any rate, have seen and suffered too much. You ask me some things which it is not possible for me to tell you."

"I maintain," he said slowly, "that our friendship has reached a stage when confidences should not be impossible."

She kicked a pebble away impatiently. "You talk to me," she said, "as though I were one of those light-hearted puppets of girls whom you meet every day and every hour upon the streets, in the park, on horseback here, and at the theater. They would give you their confidence without a doubt. Think what it would come

to—a few flirtations, a few childish escapades, a stolen kiss, perhaps, at the most. You know very well that it is not like that with me."

He too turned his head and looked around. "I know," he answered softly. "There are things in your early life, of course, which even now it were better to speak of seldom, if at all. You see, I am not prejudiced. I know that there is danger, even now, in treating lightly that little corner of the underground world where I first met you. But there are some things which I feel that I must ask you."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," she answered. "I am afraid you would be disappointed. There is so little that I can tell."

"I will not ask you much," he answered. "I do feel, though, that since we are friends—I think," he added, looking thoughtfully into her partly averted face, "that we may call ourselves friends—you might surely tell me this. What is the connection between the man whom they caught that night—and who is now in prison I suppose—Lord Ellingham, and yourself?"

She shook her head. "I cannot tell you," she answered.

He looked moodily away from her. "No doubt," he said, "your claim upon Lord Ellingham is a good one, but you must remember that I see you beholden to him for everything. Your jewels and your dresses, your house and your carriage, all come to you from him. What right has he to give you these things?"

"I cannot tell you," she answered.

He turned toward her. His hand rested for a moment upon hers. ristine," he said, "supposing that there were a man in my place who was fond of you? Supposing he knew only what I know?"

"Well?" she asked, returning his gaze.

"Don't you realize," he asked, "that he would want to know a little more?"

"I cannot tell," she answered. "Men are so strange. I know little of them. I imagine that any one who cared for me would trust me."

"He might do that, Christine," he continued, "and yet there would come a time when he would have to know these things."

"The man who cared for me," she said, "would have to wait until that time came. If he felt that he could not, it would be better for him to go and seek some one out of the every-day world of every-day people."

There was a somewhat prolonged silence. Hannaway's face was clouded. After all, he was a fool, he told himself. The girl was too clever. She would tell him nothing.

"I am answered," he said slowly. "There is one thing more."

She sighed. "You are not at all entertaining this morning," she said.

"I cannot help it," he answered. "There are some things which we must speak of. Look at me, Christine."

She turned her head as though surprised, either at his request or at his use of her Christian name. Her delicately marked eyebrows were slightly raised. She drew a little away from him.

"I want to ask you," he said, "I must ask you, whether in your heart you have any secret thought, any shadow of an idea, as to who it was who entered your rooms that night and killed Anatoile Devache?"

She sat still looking at him, rigid alike in features and posture; but the color had left her cheeks, and a startled anger smouldered in her eyes.

“You think, you believe,” she said, in a moment or two, “that I had something to do with that?”

“Not for one moment!” he exclaimed hastily. “Do not misunderstand me. Only, that man died by the hand of some one who knew his mission. You must have thought of it. You know more than I know about the coming of this man. It is only reasonable to suppose that you may have some idea as to who it was that killed him.”

She rose to her feet. He would have detained her, but she brushed him to one side.

“I do not wish to talk to you any longer,” she said, a little sadly. “I thought you were my friend. I believe now that you are just making use of me to try to find out things. They thought that night, you remember, that you were a detective, and the thought nearly cost you your life. Perhaps they were right. I cannot tell. Only, I know that I am tired of your questions, always questions. I am going away. I do not wish to see you again.”

He caught at her wrist. “Christine,” he said, “don’t you understand? If I seem inquisitive or curious, it is only because everything about you interests me. Christine, it is because—”

She had sprang away from him with the swift grace of some beautiful young animal. With dismay he watched her flying along the path. Pursuit would only have been ridiculous. He stood looking after her until she was out of sight. Not once did she turn round. He saw her call a hansom and drive off. Then he turned and crossed the park by another route, toward his rooms.

It was ten o’clock that night when Ambrose crawled homeward across the bridge and down the narrow street. Pennies had come but seldom. There were few who cared to hear the wheezy tunes of his wretched instrument. His feet and back ached. He was faint and nauseated with hunger. He wheeled his little barrow into the entry and came slowly along toward the door of his abode. A figure loomed up from the shadows and accosted him. He started back, and his hand darted like lightning to the inner pocket of his coat.

* * * * *

“Who are you?” he asked harshly. “What do you want?”

“Not another crack on the head, my friend,” Gilbert Hannaway said grimly. “I want to talk with you.”

Ambrose peered into his face. “It’s you, is it?” he exclaimed. “You want to talk with me, eh? Well, I have nothing to say. I am dumb.”

“You will change your mind presently,” Hannaway said. “The only question is whether you will come with me to the public house over there or whether I shall go with you to your rooms.”

Ambrose eyed the lights of the public house, and a sudden sick longing assailed him. There were enough pennies only for Chicot’s supper and his own. There was nothing left for drink, and there were long hours before he could turn into his miserable bed. Hannaway saw his hesitation and led the way across the street.

“Come,” he said, “that is sensible.”

Ambrose made no answer until they had reached the door of the public house. A pleasant sense of warmth swept out to them through the swing-doors. His eyes glittered.

"I would drink with you to-night," he muttered, "even though you were Jean the Terrible."

Chapter XIX

"What will you take to drink?" Hannaway asked, turning to his companion.

"I will have brandy," was the prompt reply—"brandy and hot water. I want bread, too, or a sandwich. Anything to eat. There is a seat there in a warm corner. If you want me to talk, I must sit down."

He led the way down the room to a corner where a small table stood in front of a leather couch. As he walked the mud and damp oozed from his broken boots. Hannaway was aware of a slit in his coat, buttoned high up to his throat to conceal the absence of a collar. In the darkness outside he had been a dejected-looking object enough. Here, in the brilliant light, he seemed little more than a bundle of rags. He sank down upon the couch, and drawing Chicot carefully from under his coat, made him comfortable in the far corner.

"In a moment thou shalt eat, my Chicot," he said. "They are bringing food for you and drink for your master. What, are you tired?"

Chicot seemed, indeed, a little weary. Nevertheless, when a great dish of sandwiches was brought, he sat up and ate with avidity. Ambrose seized one and tore it to pieces with the air of a wild animal. Somehow or other, of the two the monkey seemed to have the more restraint.

"I eat fast," Ambrose declared suddenly, turning to his companion, "because I am on fire to drink. Until I have eaten I cannot drink. It is not that I am afraid of being drunk, but I have not the strength. To-night I shall drink and drink and drink. I shall talk to you, and I shall tell you many things. You will go away and think, 'He is a little mad, that miserable dwarf!' It is true; he is a little mad."

Hannaway looked at his companion, and the more he studied his face the greater grew his curiosity. For he knew that underneath were different things. This strange being was not all that he pretended to be.

"It is harder work without the girl," he said. "You must have found it more difficult to make a living since you lost her."

Ambrose drank, drank steadily, half a tumblerful of brandy and water. "Yes," he said. "We have lost the girl. We have lost Christine, Chicot there and I. Some meddling jackanapes sent her a message, and she went. She is a rich lady now. She is safe from the rain and the cold, safe from the hunger that bites. It is better."

"Yes, it is better," Hannaway echoed. "After all, she was not meant for hardships. What a man can stand is sometimes death to a woman."

"Death!" Ambrose echoed. "Yes, it is that. To-night I shall be drunk. I can feel it in my veins. It is like hot sweet music. Some more brandy!"

“You shall have all the brandy you can drink,” Hannaway answered; “but listen. Remember who I am. I do not want to steal upon you and worm secrets away when you have not the strength to guard them. I am Gilbert Hannaway, you know. I was in Paris in May, four years ago.”

“In Paris, four years ago,” Ambrose muttered.

“More than that,” Hannaway continued. “I was in the Place Noire. I was in the fight. I lay on the pavement with a bullet in my leg when you passed down the hill wheeling the piano, with Christine and a stranger by your side. It was the night the terrible Jean was taken, the night that only one man escaped.”

“Ah!” Ambrose muttered. “You were there I Were you a spy?”

“No,” Hannaway answered. “But I will be frank with you. I want to know the truth about all that happened there that night. I want to know what share in those things you and Christine had. I want to know the name of the man who escaped, and I want to hear something about the man who lies in prison.”

“About Jean the Terrible?” Ambrose muttered. “Ah!” A waiter brought their drinks from the counter. Ambrose emptied his tumbler almost at a draft.

“A larger glass,” he demanded. “Don’t be afraid; I can stand it. Since she left I can stand anything. It drowns the thought a little, and it loosens the tongue. If you would have me talk you must see that I drink.”

“You understand,” Hannaway said, “I am here to ask you questions—to pump you, if you like. Drink, if you will, but remember that.”

Ambrose leaned his head, with its mat of ragged hair, back against the cushion at the top of the couch. He laughed softly, laughed till every bone in his body seemed to shake. The corners of his mouth quivered. He showed his yellow teeth. His eyes were still dry and bright.

“Oh, I shall talk!” he said. “I shall answer your questions. Yesterday or the day before, or perhaps tomorrow, I would sooner have struck you than drank with you. To-night I am in the mood. I tell you that it is in my blood. But answer me one question first.”

“Go ahead,” Hannaway said.

“What are you? Detective? Philanthropist? Or are you simply a passer-by—one who loves to gaze into the strange corners of the world?”

“Call me a passer-by,” Hannaway answered. “I am certainly not a detective, nor can I claim to be a philanthropist. But I love to discover the meanings of things which puzzle me. This morning I talked with Christine, but she would tell me nothing.”

Again Ambrose leaned back in his seat and laughed. His long chin protruded. He closed his eyes. His clenched fingers were entwined. “She would tell you nothing,” he muttered. “No, I know that she would tell you nothing!”

“I come, then, to you,” Hannaway said, “and if you fail me I shall go to Lord Ellingham.”

Slowly the dwarf opened his eyes. “You will go to Lord Ellingham?” he repeated.

“I will,” Hannaway answered. “He was there that night, you know. He, too, was one of the Black Foxes.”

“A passer-by!” Ambrose muttered to himself, as he held up his freshly filled tumbler to the light. “I drink to them all. I drink to the passers-by, to those who stop and bend over and are curious, to those who walk on, to those who walk on

and come back! The girl, man?" he asked suddenly. "What is she to you? Christine! Christine!" he repeated, his voice suddenly soft.

"She is nothing to me," Hannaway answered sadly. "This morning I spoke to her carefully of the past. She sent me away."

"The past!" Ambrose muttered. "Ah, I could tell you stories of that! I could tell you of the days when I played the organ in the little church, the church set among the meadows, meadows yellow with buttercups and deep marigolds. There was the river, too—broad and slow, clear as wine. She sat on the bank, and the music came through the open doors, and presently she would leave off picking the buttercups, she would look no longer into the river bed. She would come stealing up the avenue of poplar trees, up onto the stone flags, into the cool church, up between the old oak pews, to where I sat and played for her. I was not like this. She was not afraid to touch me then. I have felt her arms around my neck, I have felt her cheek close to mine, while the music grew and grew, a great thing, a live thing."

Hannaway was silent. Something strange seemed to have come over his companion. He talked like a man who has lost all count of place or time. Yet when he paused he drank, and when he had emptied his tumbler he held it out toward the busy waiter.

"You don't believe me!" he cried, almost fiercely. "You don't believe, perhaps, that I was not always like this. Go to Annonay, then. Ask them there. Ask them of Ambrose Drake of Annonay. Ask them to tell you of the day—Bah! These things are not for you. I forgot. You are paying for the brandy. It is of Christine and the Black Foxes that I must talk. The man is a long time fetching the brandy. If I may not drink I will say no more."

"He is coming," Hannaway answered.

"He is here," Ambrose declared, drawing his glass toward him with a little gulp of content. "When I drink I remember. No," he added, leaning back once more and half closing his eyes, "it is not memory; it is sight. The things of which I speak I see. I see Christine a child. She walked with me then hand in hand through the fields. I was only the son of the village schoolmaster, but they trusted me. Sometimes they would have me up at the house to play for them. I see Christine sitting in the open window. I can smell the lemon trees, the scent of the flowering shrubs, the scent of the drooping roses, great wax candles upon the piano, great wax candles in the bare room. Poor as rats, all of them, but proud. The seigneur died. Christine and her mother went to Paris. I remember that day. I worked in the fields. I saw the carriage go by, and I fell upon my face. I can smell the brown earth, freshly turned by the plow. I was there praying, poor fool! Give me some cigarettes. Give me something to smoke or I will not go on."

Hannaway took out his gold case and emptied its contents upon the table. Ambrose took a cigarette and lit it, puffing out the blue smoke without sign of pleasure or appreciation. Hannaway watched the long fingers curiously. They were well shaped. They had the appearance of having once been well cared for. On the little finger was still the mark where a ring had been.

"To Paris," Ambrose continued, still talking as though to himself, "to Paris, of course, and after them I. It was there that I starved. Oh, the long days and the

nights when I craved for food! I was young then. I had not learned that brandy is better, much better."

He banged his empty tumbler upon the table. The waiter came and looked at him curiously. His hand was perfectly steady. His eyes, for he had suddenly opened them, were bright and clear.

"Some brandy, fellow!" he ordered. "Serve me at once. My friend here is impatient."

"In a moment, sir," the waiter declared, hurrying away.

"You 're sure that you 're not drinking too much?" Hannaway asked bluntly.

"When I drink, I drink," Ambrose muttered fiercely. "When I have finished, I have finished. Look at my hand. It is as steady as yours. Does my voice falter? No! I will tell you where the brandy goes. It goes to the brain. I see again. I feel again. I remember. I live, if it be only among the shadows. Too much, indeed! But you do not understand. Ah!"

He held out his hand. His tumbler was back again, well filled. He half emptied it before he set it down.

"So I searched for them through the streets of Paris," he went on, "from one quarter to another. Paris was wild in those days. I saw a man killed one night. He was an Italian, and I carried him, dying, to his lodging-house. He gave me Chicot; Chicot, my friend."

He stroked the monkey thoughtfully with one hand. Chicot, who had eaten many sandwiches, opened one eye and went to sleep again.

"By night and by day I searched," Drake went on. "When I found them it was too late. Trouble had come. Trouble was with them all the time. Madame was dead, and Christine dwelt in the gray house in the Place Noire, where all the time men whom Paris called the Black Foxes were creeping in and out."

"What was she doing there?" Hannaway asked breathlessly.

"Trouble, aye, more than trouble!" Ambrose continued. "We plunged deep there. It came at last, the crash. You were there that night. Twenty gendarmes it took to storm that house. I remember you lay in the gutter when I ran past you with my piano. They let me go. They thought I was a frightened passer-by."

"Who was the man in workman's clothes who escaped with you?" Hannaway asked.

The barman crossed the room toward them. "Time, gentlemen, please," he cried.

A policeman put his head in at the door. "All out, if you please," he ordered.

Ambrose slid from the shiny seat onto the floor. He took Chicot under his arm and caught up his hat. "It is over," he cried. "I can see no more. I can remember no more. We go to sleep, Chicot and I. Good night!"

Hannaway would have pressed out by his side, but he thrust him away.

"It is finished," he declared emphatically. "When I cease to drink my brain is cloudy. I can remember nothing."

He shot out through the door and vanished round the corner. Hannaway drew a long breath and buttoned up his coat. He looked behind at the public house, now almost empty, and he looked down the dark street where Ambrose had vanished. He seemed suddenly to have passed into a different atmosphere. He realized now, for the first time, how absorbed he had been in those quickly spoken, tense sentences. Slowly and reluctantly he turned away and crossed the bridge.

Chapter XX

Two men, ill dressed, unshaven, obviously foreigners, sat at a small table in the Café Kulm. The place was not a hundred yards from Leicester Square, but to all effects, and certainly to all appearances, it was very much on the other side of the channel. The atmosphere was dense with the fumes of tobacco and the odor of many dinners. The mirrors which once decorated the walls were cracked and greasy. The cloths which covered half of the tables at the restaurant end of the room were remarkable neither for their cleanliness nor for their quality. Near the door the tables were marble topped, beringed with the stains of coffee and strange drinks. One heard scarcely a word of English. The two men, who were drinking absinthe together, were talking French.

It was a quiet time of the day, and, save for one other visitor, the few tables consecrated to the guest who came only to drink were unoccupied. The other visitor was Ambrose Drake. He sat with, a glass of brandy before him, his arms folded, his head bent forward. Chicot was asleep in his pocket. Outside, the piano had found temporary shelter in a covered entry. The rain came down in a gentle but sullen downpour. He had not a stitch of dry clothing upon him. No wonder that he seemed drowsy, that the fumes of the brandy which he was drinking had mounted to his brain.

One of the two men pointed to him. They talked together in French, quickly, and with many gestures.

“The creature there,” he said, “he reminds one, eh, of the hunchback who stole off with the girl that night, and—and some one else.”

The other man glanced across at Ambrose and shook his head. “Miracles do not happen, my friend,” he said. “Besides, the little creature there is smaller and older. See, he has drunk too much. He sleeps.”

The man who had spoken first, Marcel they called him, looked uneasily around. “When one is as I am,” he said hoarsely, “one fears the very shadows. One sees spies everywhere. Listen, Pierre. You saw the Figaro this morning?”

Pierre, gray-headed, obese, with the puckered face and sallow complexion of a dram-drinker, nodded his head. “Yes,” he said. “The man is dead. You struck home, Marcel.”

Marcel wiped his forehead with his hand. His hair was shaven close to his head. He was tall and of tremendous physique, but he was also by far the more forbidding looking of the two. His face had the look of a hunted wild animal. His eyes were furtive and uneasy. He was never altogether at rest.

“What could I do?” he muttered. “Think you, my friend. For five years I had suffered and starved. No absinthe, no brandy, coffee fit for the pigs, tobacco—a whiff now and then, no more. I, my friend, who loved always the best, who loved the red wine, who smoked night and day! And before me were another ten years. Do you wonder that I struck?”

Pierre curled his mustache upward, showing a wide, cruel mouth. His eyes were close together, his cheekbones high. He was not pleasant to look at.

"You were right, Marcel," he muttered. "A man like you must live. Now that you are here you will be safe. Here we have more hiding-places than in Paris itself."

"Aye, safe!" Marcel muttered. "They will not find me here, I am sure of that. But there is the money. One must live! We must all live. I dined ill last night. Unless one has fortune I shall not dine at all to-night. Pierre, a blow must be struck."

Pierre held out the palms of his hands. "Anatoile," he said, "came to strike that blow. He is dead, and the hand that struck him might have come from the clouds. Is it a wonder that one fears?"

Marcel clenched both his hands. He leaned over the little round table, and his face was like the face of a devil, "Nevertheless," he declared, "something must be done, and that quickly. All our money has gone. He has not obeyed this, our last summons. Who was he, I ask? A stranger, a newcomer, to make fools of us all, of us, my friend, who had risked our lives, and more than our lives, to get together that money! Was there ever such treachery? The disguise was there for me. The hunchback and the girl were waiting that my escape might be the easier. The money that meant fortune to all of us was there, too."

"He shall share it," Pierre muttered. "He must be made to share it."

Marcel struck the table with his hand. "Which of us," he muttered, "shall go and tell him so?"

Ambrose rose suddenly from his seat. He dragged the chair along with him and placed it by Marcel's side. "I," he answered, striking the table in front of him.

A bomb thrown in their midst would have astonished them less. They shrank back, looking at him with terror-stricken faces. Pierre's hand went to his waistband, Marcel's to his hip pocket. It was plain what manner of man these were; they carried knives!

"You need not be alarmed," Ambrose said coolly. "You did not recognize me at first, but I knew you both from the moment you entered. Don't you remember the cripple and his piano and the monkey? Here am I, and here," he added, patting his pocket, "is Chicot. We have sworn the oath. Have no fear."

Their courage came back. They even grasped him by the hand. Ambrose called a waiter.

"I have a few shillings," he said. "We will drink." They gave their orders. Ambrose leaned over the table and patted Marcel on the back.

"You did well, my friend," he said, "to escape. It was bravely done. You stabbed him in the back, eh, that warder, and ran? But it was a feat! It was worthy of the Black Fox!"

Marcel looked uneasily around. "We do not speak of it," he said. "One never knows who may listen. Tell us now of yourself. Tell us what has become of you since that night."

The face of the dwarf was set and grim. His underlip protruded. His eyes rolled as he spoke. "Of myself!" he muttered. "There is not much to tell. We fled that night, the girl and I, and the man—whom all the time we thought was you, Vicomte," he added, under his breath. "On the Boulevard we separated. The man who was with us, he took the piano. The girl went to some lodgings in a quiet part. I went to St. Denis and stayed there for two days. When I came back to Paris the

piano was left where he had promised. I found Christine, but the man who had shared our flight was gone. Afterward we seemed likely to starve. We went in search of him. From town to town we went, from country to country. Here in London we found him."

"You found him?" they both muttered in unison. "What then?"

"He took the girl away," Ambrose muttered. "He took her away from me. Chicot and I have been alone for months."

They looked at him wonderingly. His clothes were in an evil state, his beard untrimmed. He was unwashed, unkempt.

"You are poor, you? You have no money?" Marcel demanded.

Ambrose laughed harshly. "Look at me!" he exclaimed. "You ask a question like that! Bah!"

For the moment they forgot his presence. They exchanged swift glances, swift, comprehending glances.

"He has given you no money, friend?" Pierre asked softly.

"The coin which we have just spent was his," Ambrose answered. "It is all that I have ever had from him, and he took Christine from me."

Marcel wet his dry lips with his tongue. "Look here, friend," he said, "with you it is different, of course, but you know who I am. You know how I have suffered, and for what."

Ambrose nodded. "I know," he said.

"Think you," Marcel continued, "that I have done it for nothing? Five years of the life that slaves lead! Five years of the life which he might have led if he had not stolen my disguise and escaped in my place! He is rich, you say?"

"Aye!" Ambrose answered. "He has money to throw away with both hands, gold to scatter in the streets if he wills, gold to load his wife with jewels, to buy horses and carriages and automobiles. He lives in a palace, an army of servants wait upon him. It is a contrast, eh, Marcel? A contrast, is it not?"

"He shall pay for it," Marcel muttered.

"Why not go to him?" Ambrose asked. "Why not beard him there and say: 'I am Marcel, and I come to you from a French prison. You are—"'

They stopped him.

"Mention no names," Marcel said uneasily. "This is the region of spies. One must not be overheard. I will not go to him. He is too clever. He might even give me up to the police. We shall accept your offer, my friend. It is you who shall go. He will not suspect that you come from us."

"Listen," Pierre said. "We have summoned him here and he did not come. We have summoned him in many different ways. The result has been always the same—silence. He makes no move. If he feels fear he shows no sign of it."

"What shall I say to him?" Ambrose asked.

Marcel threw out his hands. They were white and shapely. Marcel, indeed, in other days, had been an aristocrat.

"We must have money," he said, "money! Who is he to live in the great places, while I have toiled among the felons? We must have money, or he shall be sent to take my place there."

"How much?" Ambrose asked.

“A great deal,” Marcel declared. “We shall not be content with a trifle, Pierre here and myself. We have had enough of suffering. We want to spend, spend, spend. We must have money, and more money, and more money, but there must be a beginning. I have not a louis. There is not a louis between us. I need clothes and linen. I am weak from prison. I need food and wine. Mon, Dieu! To feel myself once more a gentleman! Then we will talk, he and I. We will talk, indeed.”

Ambrose nodded. “Very well,” he said, “I will go to him. He shall find the money. Why not? Christine has horses and carriages, fine clothes and servants.”

“From him?” Pierre asked.

“From him,” Ambrose answered.

Pierre and Marcel looked at each other uneasily. The same thought was in their minds.

“But Anatoile?” Pierre whispered.

Ambrose smiled. “There are mysteries,” he said, “even on this side of the channel, In Paris one heard of such things, and one nodded one’s head; one understood. Here, too, strange things may happen.”

“Listen,” Pierre whispered, leaning across the table. “Anatoile was our comrade. He was our messenger. How came he to his death?”

Ambrose shook his head. “One cannot tell,” he said. “The hand that struck him might have come from the clouds.”

The two men again looked at each other uneasily. The face of Marcel was gray with fear.

“We will not talk of Anatoile,” he declared. “My nerves are not what they were.”

“As you will,” Ambrose answered. “To-morrow I will go to see the person we have spoken of. At five o’clock I come here.”

He slouched out. The rain was over. He set Chicot on the top of the little piano and started on his weary trudge.

Chapter XXI

Christine and Lord Ellingham were lunching together at a fashionable West End restaurant. The marquis bowed to some acquaintances a little coldly, and turned back to Christine.

“My dear child,” he said, “do not think that I too have not some anxieties on your account. I admit that the situation is very difficult. Certain things I am able to give you. Certain other things I cannot give you. I only wish that it were possible.”

Christine looked across the table at him with weary, questioning eyes. She was as perfectly dressed as any woman in the room. Excellent taste, a first-class milliner, and the natural advantages of her slim, sinuous figure combined to invest her with a style which made her, in all that select gathering, perhaps, the most notable figure. She altogether lacked, however, any expression of contentment with herself or her surroundings. Her eyes were tired, her lips a little tremulous. She had found the material things for which she craved, and she was

finding, also, that they left her only a looker-on at the life which she longed to enter. At that moment she was particularly depressed. Gilbert Hannaway had entered the room a few minutes before, and after a glance at her companion had passed on with a stiff bow and a look in his face which she bitterly resented.

"I can hire you a chaperon, of course," Lord Ellingham said. "I dare say my lawyers could find one who would be able to introduce you more or less into society. But you yourself know whether this would be wise. There are certain things which we cannot ignore. They lie too close behind us."

She toyed with her food and sipped her wine. "A few months ago," she said, "this would have seemed paradise to me, to be sitting here in the sort of clothes I wanted to wear, in the sort of place I wanted to be in. Life is very disappointing."

"We all find it so," he answered softly. "For ten years of my life I myself was penniless, almost an adventurer. All my good fortune came too late. I too have the shadows always around me. I sometimes rise in the morning afraid to look at my letters, afraid to step out into the streets. At night I am only thankful because another day has passed without disaster."

She looked at him curiously. It was not often that he spoke to her so intimately. "You are a brave man," she said. "No one would fancy that you were afraid."

He laughed quietly. "We know very little, after all,"

I' he said, "of the people who jostle through life by our sides. We see them with smiling faces, making a brave show to the world. We know little of their inner lives, of their secret troubles, of the shadows which sometimes make life seem little better than a nightmare. There are others besides myself who walk on the brink of a precipice."

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "whether he—you know who I mean—will dare to come to England."

"Honestly," the marquis answered, "I believe it is the one place where he would be surest of refuge. For one thing, he would want to find me out, and for another, it is said that there are districts back there in Soho where the foreign criminal is safer than anywhere else in Europe. Pierre is in London, I know. He summoned me to meet him at some little Café last night."

"You did not go?" she asked.

"I did not go," he answered. "If I once recognized the existence of any of these men it would be the beginning of the end. There would be not one of them to satisfy, but fifty. One can make terms with an individual, but scarcely with a whole community. And some day," he added, "there will be Marcel to deal with, Marcel fresh from prison, his blood boiling with anger, his fingers itching to be at my throat. If ever they do release him he will tell the whole truth, whatever happens to him. Ana-toile was dangerous. Marcel free will be worse. But," he added, in a lighter tone, "we have had enough of this serious talk. How does the new automobile go?"

"Beautifully," she answered, with a little sigh. "I have been out in it every day. If I were only not so lonely!"

"Why does that young man," Lord Ellingham asked, "look at you so strangely? His face somehow seems familiar to me."

Christine half turned in her seat. Then she looked down upon her plate. "You know him, I think," she said. "It is Mr. Gilbert Hannaway."

“Of course,” Lord Ellingham remarked. “I remember him quite well. He was in Paris, was he not, on the night of the great rout? He has been to see me since. He is a little interested, I think, in our affairs. That does not explain, however, why he should look at you as though you were providing him with some cause for personal offense.”

“I have seen him once or twice,” Christine said slowly. “He was inclined to be rather nice to me. Then he said some things which I could not tolerate.”

“You quarreled?”

She nodded. “I suppose so,” she answered. “He has not been to see me since. No one has been to see me for all these weeks—not since those awful reporters left off coming to ask me about Anatoile. Do you know,” she went on, leaning across the table, “I do not think that I can stand it any longer. Life seems to come so near, and yet to stay so far away. Some nights I feel like putting on my best clothes and going to the theatres or the music-halls, or even out into the streets, and saying to the people who look at me, ‘Come and talk to me if you will.’ I must talk to some one or I shall go mad. I see crowds of people every day, nice-looking people, who look as though they would like to talk to me. Some day I shall single one of them out and carry him off.”

Lord Ellingham looked grave.

“It is a dangerous way to make friends,” he said, “especially in London.”

“Or,” she went on, “I feel sometimes that I could throw off all my beautiful clothes, and rush out into the streets and search for Ambrose and Chicot. Many people spoke to us when we tramped the streets and sang for pennies, more people than speak to me now.”

They left the restaurant a few moments later. Lord Ellingham handed her into the smart little automobile which was waiting.

“You cannot come a little way with me?” she asked timidly.

“You may drop me at the Foreign Office, if you will,” he answered. “I have a busy afternoon. Besides, you must remember,” he added, taking his place by her side, “that it is not well for either you or me that we are seen too much together.”

The short drive passed almost in silence.

“When can you take me out again?” Christine asked, as they parted.

“Not for a week, at least,” he answered. “I will try to come round and see you, however, before then.”

Christine was whirled away homeward. At the corner of Piccadilly, however, there was a block. She sat looking idly about her, watching the string of carriages go by and looking into the faces of the streams of people. Suddenly she gave a little cry, almost of terror. A weird little form had sprung up through the open window of her automobile, and was sitting there waving his worn little hat with frantic demonstrations of pleasure. With a little gasp she recognized Chicot. She leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. Then she descended into the street. Chicot, still waving his hat, ran on before, to the great amusement of the passers-by. He led her straight to where Ambrose was thumping out his miserable music, a few yards beyond the corner of a quiet thoroughfare. He went on striking the keys of his instrument. He did not seem to recognize her. Suddenly she remembered that she had been brutally selfish.

“Ambrose!” she exclaimed. Chicot has just come to fetch me. I ought to have found you out before.”

Ambrose continued to play, as though he had not heard. She began to feel almost timid.

“Ambrose,” she said, coming quite close to the barrow, “do you not mean to speak to me?”

He ceased his playing then and raised his eyes to hers. Her heart smote her as she saw the change in him. He looked much older, and she knew very well that he had been drinking. The signs were there, and she recognized them.

“You should not talk to me in the streets,” he said in a dry, colorless tone. “People will make remarks.”

“Nonsense!” she answered. “You forget how short a time it is since I stood by your side and sang.”

“No, I do not forget,” he said, “but those times are past and gone. There is no need to remember them.”

“Ambrose,” she said, resting her delicately gloved hand upon the top of the piano, “I am very lonely.”

Something seemed to leap into his face, but it was so quickly suppressed that she could not tell for certain whether it had really been there or not.

“That,” he said, “will soon pass away. I think that you had better not be seen talking to me. Chicot and I will move on. We are very glad indeed,” he said softly, “to have seen you.”

“Ambrose,” she begged, “will you not come and see me? There are things I want to talk about. I shall be in all this evening. My address is 42 Victoria Flats, in the Buckingham Palace Road. Will you come, please, and bring Chicot?”

“To-night?” he asked slowly.

“To-night,” she repeated.

“Yes, we will come,” he promised, “if you really wish it, Chicot and I.”

“You will not forget?” she asked, as he picked up the handles of his barrow and prepared to move away.

“We shall not forget,” he answered gravely.

Chapter XXII

The marquis came home from the House early on the following afternoon, to find his study invaded by his wife, who was dictating notes to his secretary.

“How charming!” she exclaimed. “Do say that you can have tea with me. We will have it sent in here, and Mr. Penton shall go away and type the letters I have given him. We shall not be disturbed, for I have given orders that I am absolutely not at home this afternoon.”

“So far as I am concerned,” said the marquis, “I shall be delighted. I have an hour and a half to spare, and I really came home to rest.”

“Are you speaking to-night?” the marchioness asked. “I imagine so,” he answered. “We are being frightfully harried over this Algerian business.”

Penton hurried away with his note-book. The marchioness rang the bell and ordered tea.

"Francis," she said, "I hope you won't think me quite impossible if I ask you a somewhat bourgeois question."

"My dear," he answered, "ask me whatever you will."

"Who is the young lady with whom you have lunched and dined several times lately, and who has, I think, been seen in your automobile?"

The marquis did not reply for a moment. His wife drew up an easy chair to the fire, and seated herself in it.

"I hope you will not misunderstand the spirit in which I ask you this question," she said, smiling at him a little apologetically. "I am simply curious. If you were a different sort of man I should not dream, of course, of mentioning it."

The marquis waited while a footman who had entered the room arranged tea upon a little round table. As soon as the door was closed he turned to his wife.

"My dear Margaret," he said, "the young lady in question is connected with a part of my life which I am only anxious to forget myself, and which I sincerely wish that a good many other people would forget also. However, there she is, a person to be explained or not, according to the extent of your curiosity."

The marchioness shrugged her shoulders. "I never allow my curiosity," she said, "to go beyond bounds. At the same time, I should like to ask you this. The young person, you say, is connected with a part of your life which you would prefer to forget. Is she connected also with the anxieties which seem lately to have made a changed man of you?"

The marquis sipped his tea thoughtfully.

"I had hoped," he said, "that I was exercising a little more self-control."

"The change," she remarked, "may not have been obvious to every one. I, however, have noticed it. Your nervous breakdown, of which the papers made so much, was, I imagine, only a pretext for getting away from England. You show a very brave front to the world, but I am an observant woman."

The marquis nodded thoughtfully. "The young lady," he said, "is certainly connected with events in the past which are just now giving me a great deal of anxiety. I may add that when she appeared I was very much at a loss to know what to do with her. I very nearly came to you to beg for your patronage."

The marchioness sighed gently. "Anything that I could do—" she murmured.

"I am quite sure that you would not have failed me," he interrupted. "Unfortunately, however, any direct connection between that young person and my own household was not exactly desirable."

"I cannot be of any assistance to you, then?" she asked.

He came and sat on the arm of her chair and took her hand in his. "My dear Margaret," he said, "I fear that you cannot. To tell you the truth, I am very much on the brink of a volcano. It may blow up, and it may not. I have to take my chances."

"You would not care, I suppose," she suggested hesitatingly, "to tell me all about it?"

"My dear," he answered, "I could not."

The marchioness was thoughtful for a moment. "There was a man," she said, "murdered a few weeks ago in a young lady's apartment. I forget her name, or the

name of the man, but several of the penny society papers hinted that she was the friend of a nobleman preeminent in politics and society. No name was mentioned, of course, but it was quite clear that it was you who was meant. Was this the young lady in question?"

"It was," the marquis admitted.

"And the murder took place in her rooms?"

"It did," he admitted.

"Had that murder," she asked, "any connection with the events of which you have been telling, or rather which you will not tell me of?"

The marquis nodded. "Without a doubt," he answered. The marchioness was again thoughtful.

"Well," she said, "I do not suppose there is anything else I can say. If you had cared to give me your confidence—"

He laid his hand upon her shoulder gently, almost caressingly. "My dear," he said, "if I could give it to any one I would give it to you. As a matter of fact, I cannot. I am not the only one who has to walk through life with a black shadow at his heels. Some day I may crush it, or it may crush me. One cannot tell. Only, it is quite enough that it should wait upon my footsteps. I would not have you burdened for one minute by my anxieties."

"You are too kind," she murmured; "kinder and more considerate than I would have you be. If I thought that it would help you in the slightest I should insist upon your telling me everything."

He smiled. "You are very generous," he said. "We will let the subject drop for the present. Sometimes in my saner moments I fancy that I am mad to take so seriously anything which, after all, is more like opera bouffe than stern reality."

A servant interrupted them. There was a person below who desired to see his lordship. He had been there once before and had been admitted; a dwarf or cripple he seemed to be.

"You may show him up," the marquis directed. "I will see him in the next room."

The marchioness sighed. "Then our tjte-b-tjte is at an end," she murmured. She rose and shook out her skirts. "You had better see your little man in here," she said. "It will be more comfortable. And, Francis, I should like you to remember this," she added. "I have asked for your confidence, and if you should change your mind at any time I should be glad to have it."

He drew her to him and kissed her upon the lips. "Dear," he said, "some day it may be necessary that you should have it, but I hope that that day is not yet."

She swept out, leaving behind her a lace handkerchief, which he picked up from the floor and regarded curiously for several moments, and a breath of lingering perfume, something like the odor of dried rose-leaves mingled with lavender. The marquis sighed as he walked slowly back to the hearth-rug.

Ambrose was shown in a minute or two later. He followed sullenly an immaculate footman. His own attire was by no means orderly. His clothes were ill-brushed, his boots were unpolished. He was certainly not a prepossessing object.

"So you have found me out again," the marquis remarked, as the door closed behind the servant who had admitted him.

“I have found you out again,” Ambrose answered. “Don’t think, though, that I have come on my own account. I have come neither for help nor with threats. I am an envoy.”

The marquis glanced at him shrewdly. “Come,” he said, “this is a new departure. You are in touch, then, I presume, with some of our friends from the other side?”

“They are here in London,” Ambrose answered. “You have read nothing of interest in the papers the last few days, then?”

“Nothing,” the marquis answered.

“You did not read,” Ambrose continued, “of the man who killed a warder and escaped from the fortress prison of Enselle?”

“No,” the marquis answered. “I have not read it.”

“Marcel was his name,” Ambrose continued slowly. “Marcel was his right name, too, only in prison they found him another.”

The marquis stretched out his hand and felt for the mantelpiece. His eyes were half closed. His cheeks were ashen. “Do you mean,” he asked, “that he—that the vicomte has escaped?”

“I mean more,” the dwarf answered slowly. “He is in Landon. I come to you from him. He has sent me.”

The marquis was like a man who, after a long struggle, finds himself face to face at last with the end, the end which is death. There was resignation as well as despair in his face, as he turned away and stood with his head resting upon his hands, his elbows upon the mantelpiece.

“They are both here,” Ambrose said; “Pierre and Marcel. They bid me tell you that they have been trifled with long enough. They bid me say that if within a week you do not appoint a meeting-place the covenant of silence is at an end.”

The marquis was silent. He understood exactly what it was that they meant. For some time he did not stir. Then he turned around and faced his visitor. “What sort of a mood is our friend in?” he asked.

“A murderous one, if he has not his own way,” Ambrose answered grimly. “I think, milord, that you had better come.”

“So do I,” the marquis admitted. “Where is this place you spoke of?”

“In Charles Street, off Warder Street—the Café Kulm it is called.”

The marquis nodded. “I dare say I could find it,” he declared, “but I think, on the whole, it would be better if our friends came here. People have such a trick of recognizing one in the most out-of-the-way places.”

“It would be better, perhaps,” Ambrose admitted, “but Marcel has lost his nerve. He is terrified to move. I am not sure that he will come.”

“He is probably safer here than in Soho,” the marquis answered. “So far as I am concerned, at any rate, he has a safe conduct. Tell them to come at twelve o’clock tonight.”

Ambrose turned toward the door. “Very well,” he said, “I will deliver your message.”

With his hand upon the door-knob he hesitated and faced the marquis once more. “Listen,” he said. “If they speak to you of Christine it would be better not to let them know her whereabouts. They are like madmen, these two. They are not safe to trust.”

“I will remember,” the marquis answered, watching his companion with curious eyes. He was thinking of Anatoile!

Chapter XXIII

On his return from the House that night, the marquis let himself in with his latch-key, and went at once to the study. His secretary was there, engaged with a pile of letters.

“Routed the enemy, I hope, sir?” Penton remarked, rising.

“For the present,” Lord Effingham answered. “There is not much satisfaction, however, in holding office with a majority as slim as ours. I won’t keep you any longer, Penton. I have some queer sort of visitors coming in, people in whom I am somewhat interested, and I want to talk to them alone.”

The young man picked up his papers and prepared to leave. The marquis’s valet, who had heard his arrival, had come silently into the room and was relieving his master of coat and hat.

“Whiskey and brandy and soda on the sideboard,” the latter directed, “a box of cigars, and some of my own Russian cigarettes. Nothing more to-night, Perkins, except—wait a moment.”

The man came back and bowed inquiringly.

“There will be two men here to see me directly. They should arrive about twelve o’clock. They will probably look like burglars, or some sort of desperate characters. It doesn’t matter. I will see them at once. Show them in here.”

“Very good, your lordship,” the man answered.

The marquis found himself alone. The long hand of his clock pointed to five minutes of the hour. Curiously enough, although he fully realized the seriousness of the situation, he felt more cheerful than he had done for months. At last these nameless fears were to take to themselves definite shape. He would know exactly what was demanded of him. He would know exactly where he stood. If it were a question of money—he ran over in his head rapidly his sources of income. For his position, he had little enough to spare, and yet there were means of raising capital, if it must be raised. If it were money they wanted, and money only, he might, after all, fight his way through.

Twelve o’clock struck. He rose from his chair, and mixing himself some brandy and soda drank it off at a draught. It was rarely that he touched spirits, and he felt the effect at once. Whatever he might have been, he told himself, as he walked up and down the room, his hands behind him, his brows knit, his eyes flashing with resolute fire, he was now Marquis of Ellingham, a distinguished politician, the head of a great house, a man entitled to respect and consideration. He would not allow himself to be abjectly frightened because that terrible chapter of his past life was to be laid bare. He would hear what these men had to say. Afterward he would consider what was best to be done. He was strong enough to hold his own. He had influence, power, and the security of an established position. He had the choice of many weapons.

Illustration:
„Marquis of Ellingham!“ he cried. „Lord Ellingham, indeed!“

There was a knock at the door. The servant with some hesitation, notwithstanding his orders, ushered in the two expected guests.

“The gentlemen whom your lordship was expecting,” he announced.

Marcel and Pierre entered. They both wore long coats buttoned up to their throats. They both carried bowler hats in their hands. They were both gloveless. The door closed behind them. The receding footsteps of the servant were heard. Then Marcel, who had been breathing softly but thickly since his entrance, clenching his teeth, obviously at war with a storm of passions, broke loose.

“Marquis of Ellingham!” he cried. “Lord Ellingham, indeed I The mansion of my Lord Ellingham! The butler of my Lord Ellingham! Look at me!”

He threw open his coat. His blue serge suit was ragged and shiny, his linen frayed and soiled.

“Look at me!” he exclaimed. “Me! A vicomte of thirteen generations, an aristocrat, fresh from the convict prison. Do you know what I have been through? Champion, you, Ellingham, or whatever you call yourself?” he cried, pointing at the marquis with shaking finger. “Do you know what I have been through while you have been living here in luxury? I have scrubbed my cell, I have eaten bad food, I have herded with swine, I have drunk water, bad water. I have smoked a cigarette once a day or a week, perhaps, of tobacco which the warders refused. And I have done these things in your name. It is you who should have been there, you who should have come and somehow or other dragged me out. But you, no! You were a traitor. You left me to rot. But I am free! Perhaps it is my turn for a little time now.”

“Be calm, my dear Marcel,” his companion begged. “It is not the time to excite yourself. Those days are past. We come here to talk of the future.”

The marquis bowed and pointed to chairs. He pointed, also, to the sideboard. “I am sorry,” he said, “to find that you come here to-night in a spirit of recrimination. I will admit that on the occasion you have mentioned the luck went against you. Yet I do not see that I am greatly to be blamed.”

Marcel, who had been on his way to a chair, swayed upon his feet. His cheeks were livid. His eyes seemed almost as though they would start from his head—black eyes with red rims, ugly, uncompromising things.’

“Not greatly to be blamed?” he repeated. “Not greatly to be blamed, when you stole away and left the others to their fate? When you robbed me of my means of escape, robbed me—”

“One moment,” the marquis interrupted. “What is this you are charging me with? I robbed you of the means you provided for your own escape. Well, if you had meant to leave us in the lurch, I scarcely see how you can blame me for seizing my opportunity.”

“It is not only that,” Marcel cried. “It is this, this, this!” throwing out his arms in a comprehensive gesture. “Whose money has gone to the furnishing of this mansion? Whose money pays the servant who brought us in here, keeping us all the time at arm’s length as though we were vagrants and tramps? I, Vicomte de

Neuilly, great-grandson of a Duke of France. God in heaven! I ask whose money pays for the clothes upon your back? For the carriages and horses, the automobiles, the whole luxury of your life?"

The marquis was looking genuinely astonished. "Whose money is paying for these things?" he asked. "My own! Whose else?"

Marcel reached out his hand for the brandy. He drank nearly a tumblerful, neat, before he spoke again. Then he came up to within a yard of the marquis' chair, and stood there with outstretched hands. "I will not strike," he said. "I will not ask you why you mock me. I am here to tell you this. You are worse than a thief. You are a thief who steals from his own kind. You are a man who breaks his own laws. You are the lowest of the low. But unless you would have the whole world know tomorrow, or the next day, what we know, you will make instant restitution. You think that I shall fear to speak, you think that I am afraid to feel the handcuffs once more on my wrists, the irons on my ankles. I would rather feel them. I would rather go back to that prison and rot in my cell than leave you here in luxury, unpunished."

"Upon my word," the marquis said, "my dear Marcel, you are becoming incomprehensible. I tell you frankly that I cannot see that you have against me any very great grievance. I alone escaped, it is true, where you others suffered. I fought a little too vigorously in that first rush, but for what happened in the struggle you can scarcely hold me responsible. I should have sought you out afterward, have provided money for your defense, have come to lighten the rigors of your prison life, perhaps. Well, I didn't. There you have matter for complaint. But what more, what more have you to say against me?"

Marcel was almost hysterical. "What more?" he shrieked. "Why this! Not only did you keep away a from us, but you came over here and lived in luxury upon our money."

"Either you are mad," Lord Ellingham declared, "or I am. I have never seen a penny of your money. All that there was in the house in the Place Noire that night was seized by the gendarmes. I escaped with less than thirty louis in my pocket. I reached London absolutely penniless."

Marcel sank back into his chair. He tried to speak, but a sudden pallor crept over his face. The dissipations of the last few days, coming so soon after the privations of his prison life, had been too much for him. Pierre bent over and unfastened his collar. The marquis brought more brandy. Marcel slipped to the floor and lay there gasping like a dying man.

"Shall I telephone for a doctor?" Lord Ellingham asked.

Pierre shook his head. "No," he answered quickly. "He will revive. He was like this for a minute or two last night. It is nothing, an affair of the nerves. He has brooded upon this. Your answer excited him. See, he is coming to already."

Marcel moved his head. He sat up. He gripped Lord Ellingham's wrist. "Are you going to deny," he whispered hoarsely, "that you brought four million francs away with you that night?"

The marquis laughed indulgently. "My good fellow," he said, "I brought exactly what I have told you. I know no more about four million francs than you do."

Marcel staggered to his feet. His mouth and eyes were wide open. He leaned toward Lord Ellingham and caught him by the shoulders. “Say that again!” he hissed. “Say it again! Keep your face where it is. Say it to me now.”

“I repeat,” the marquis said quietly, “that I brought away from the house in the Place Noire less than thirty louis. Of the larger sums I never had any certain knowledge. I took it for granted that you and the others had them somewhere safely put away for the time when you would be able to seize them.”

Marcel staggered back. “God in heaven!” he exclaimed. “If this should be true! If it should be true!”

“Every word that I have, said to you,” the marquis said earnestly, “is absolutely and entirely true. You speak of four million francs. Where are they, then?”

“Where are they?” Marcel shrieked. “Why, they were within a few feet of you when you escaped. What has become of the three? You shall tell me,” he added, gripping the marquis’ elbow.

“What has become of whom?” the marquis asked, in amazement.

“Why, of that d—d trio,” Marcel cried, “the girl, the hunchback, and his piano?”

The marquis freed himself, and sat down in his chair. “A girl, a hunchback, and a piano,” he repeated quietly. “What of them?”

“You know very well,” Marcel answered quickly. “You escaped with them. You turned the corner of the Place Noire, pushing the barrow which supported that instrument, with the hunchback hopping along by your side, and the monkey sitting on his shoulder. Didn’t I see you where I lay struggling with that infernal Englishman? I saw you go, you and four million francs. Where are they? I tell you,” he continued, with a determined air, rising to his feet, “I will find them. I will find them if I go into every city of the world.”

The marquis was still bewildered. “The money—” he began.

“It was hidden in the false back of the piano,” Marcel hissed. “I arranged that when I made up my mind to escape with them in disguise. Either the dwarf or the girl has found it. I’ll follow them. I’ll follow them as long as there’s breath in my body.”

The marquis was silent. He was looking into the remnants of the fire. “Four million francs,” he muttered, “in a piano, with a girl and a hunchback and a monkey?”

Chapter XXIV

Ambrose reclined upon an easy chair, with Chicot, well fed and happy, upon his knee. Opposite to him sat Christine, watching the pair with an interest which she found it hard to account for, even to herself.

“You are happy, Christine?” Ambrose asked suddenly.

“Of course not,” she answered. “No one ever is, especially when they expect to be. A few months ago I plodded the streets with you, and my feet ached, and I was cold to the bone. I was sick to death of coarse clothes, sick to death of our struggling life. This is what I dreamed of then, dreamed of and prayed for—a

home, warm, luxurious, decent clothes, servants, plenty to eat and drink. And now I have them, Ambrose, as you see, and I find that it doesn't make much difference. Take a cigarette, Ambrose. You love good tobacco. These should please you."

Ambrose helped himself from a tin box at his side. "Perhaps," he said thoughtfully, "it is because you are not rich enough. Christine," he added, with a curious gleam in his eyes, "supposing you had money, a great deal of money?"

Christine sighed. "I am beginning to think," she said, a little doubtfully, "that there are other things."

"There is nothing," Ambrose said grimly, "which money will not buy, if only you have enough of it. When I say enough of it, I mean a great deal—millions, Christine, millions!"

"Will it buy me friends?" she asked, a little bitterly. "I have beautiful rooms here, plenty to eat and drink, the sort of clothes that I like, but I am very lonely, Ambrose. I am lonely half the time."

He looked at her steadfastly. There was an uneasy seriousness in his face. His eyes seemed almost dilated. "I think," he said, "that you have, after all, something of the spirit of the vagabond in your blood. Our life," he continued, speaking half to himself, "was not always so miserable as in London. Down in the south there was sunshine, sunshine always, dry roads, green fields, blue skies, the song of birds, and fruit, bread, and red wine at least, always for the asking. Christine, we were mad to come here."

"Mad!" she echoed. "Oh, I wonder!"

"Can you doubt it," he asked, almost fiercely. "It was an evil day that brought us across the channel, that set us tramping about the streets of London. We starved here on what would have kept us for a week in the simpler places."

"It was I who insisted on coming," she said thoughtfully. "I wonder if I am sorry?"

"If you are not," he answered, "God knows that you should be! There, from day to day, we were at least natural. We sang and we made music, we rejoiced with the harvesters, and bowed our heads before the simple coffin carried along the straight white road. We lived with the people there, Christine. Their joys were ours, and their sorrows. Here there is no one to care if we die to-morrow; no one, that is to say, who counts."

"You are right, Ambrose," she said. "Sometimes I am tired of my beautiful rooms, my dresses, and my carriage. Sometimes I would give them all for a day of the old sunshine."

Ambrose leaned a little forward in his chair. His long fingers were nervously interlaced. His voice shook. ristine," he said, "let us go back. I swear to you that there shall be no more suffering, that you shall have enough to buy pretty clothes, the best food and wine. You shall know no suffering; you shall sing only when you like. Only come. This life is not good for either of us, and it will be worse."

"How do you mean worse?" she asked.

"I mean," he answered, "that Marcel is here—Marcel and Pierre. They will track you down, Christine. They will find out where you are, and they will come and demand a share of all that you have. Christine, let us go away. Let us go further afield, say to Italy. We can be hidden there."

“Why hide?” she asked. “What is there to hide from?”

There was a moment’s silence. Ambrose looked into the fire. It seemed as though he were debating with himself whether he should speak of secret things.

“They are desperate men, these,” he said. “They will try, first of all, to get what they can from Lord Ellingham. I think that they will fail. Then they will come to you. Anatoile came.”

She shivered. Her face was suddenly pale. “Don’t mention that man’s name!” she exclaimed.

“I am sorry,” he answered humbly. “For the moment I forgot. Yet listen to me, Christine, if you will. I did not stop you when you vowed that the one object of your life was to find the man who had escaped by our side from the Place Noire that night. There was something righteous in your search. I figured to myself that you would find him, that you would say to him: ‘Back to Paris! Back to the aid of the man who, in addition to his own, is suffering for your crimes!’ I did not imagine that it was only for the love of gold that you were hunting him down. I fancied that in your heart there was some pity for the man who was sighing out his life behind the walls of a French prison.”

“Pity for him!” she interrupted scornfully. “But I forget. You do not understand. Listen! I did start out on my search with all the feelings in my heart of which you have spoken, but there came a time when I saw things differently.”

“The man was too clever for you,” Ambrose muttered.

“It was not that,” she answered, in a low tone, and without any sign of resentment. “It was not that, indeed, only I found that things were different from what I had imagined.”

“And now,” Ambrose murmured, “you take his money, you live in luxury on his bounty. It is not a good thing, Christine, for you are nothing to him, or he to you. It would be better to be free.”

She shook her head. “You do not understand,” she said.

He sat forward in his chair. The firelight played upon his long haggard face, his uneven features, his tangled hair. Yet the care he had taken with his person was not altogether wasted. His face, notwithstanding its strange setting, might have been, for those few moments, the face of a poet or a great enthusiast. His eyes were burning with the fires which were consuming him.

“Christine,” he said, “if it were possible for us to steal away, you and I, and the little one here,” he added, drawing his hand over Chicot’s head, “if it were possible, I say, to steal away, to find some corner where the sun shone and we were safe from pursuit, and for you to have all the money that you could spend, all the luxuries in which it were possible to indulge, would you come, Christine? Say to Greece,” he continued, as one who has received a happy inspiration. “You have often spoken of Greece. It is a beautiful country. You would like to go there?”

Christine looked at him, as though doubtful whether he were really in earnest. “Do you mean with the piano?” she asked. “Do you mean beg our way, as we did in the old days?”

He threw out his hands with a gesture of contempt. “No,” he answered. “I want you to imagine, just imagine that you were rich, that I could make you rich without the help of Lord Ellingham or Marcel, or any of their kin. Would you leave England then, steal away without a word to any one?”

“With you and Chicot?” she asked doubtfully.

“With Chicot and me,” he answered, with trembling lips. “Have we not cared for you always? Have you not been dearer to us than our lives? Have we ever failed you?”

She shook her head. “It is not that,” she said. “After all, why need we discuss this seriously? It is all imagination. You have not a fortune to give. Even if you had—”

“Well,” he interrupted breathlessly, “even if I had—”

She shook her head. “I think I have had enough,” she said, “of playing the vagrant. I think I have had enough of being outside everything there is in life worth having. Can’t you realize, Ambrose, that never since I left Annonay have I had one really happy day? There has been excitement, and tragedy, and pain, and suffering, flashes of joy, but long times of misery. Oh, I am tired of it! I want something that is nearer the heart of life itself. I want friends and a home. I want—”

He was suddenly pale. He struck the chair by his side with clenched fist. He leaned forward. He seemed almost like an accuser. “You want a husband!” he exclaimed.

She shrugged her shoulders. Her eyes met his without flinching. “What if I do?” she asked. “It is terrible, I suppose, to confess it, but is it so very unnatural? Women were made to have some one take care of them.”

“Haven’t you been taken care of all your life?” he asked fiercely. “Haven’t you been taken care of when there were dangers on every side, through hard times and difficult ones?”

“Oh, I know!” she exclaimed. “You have been very, very good, Ambrose. Don’t think that I could ever forget it. You have been the best of guardians. You have looked after me as no one else could have done.”

“God knows!” he muttered under his breath.

“But,” she continued, a little lamely, “it is not altogether the same thing.”

He rose to his feet. The hand which held Chicot was trembling. Chicot leaped up onto his shoulder, and pressed his hairy face against his master’s.

“I understand,” Ambrose said, a little hoarsely. “Forget what I have said. I have no fortune to give, no fortune!”

Chapter XXV

“Drink!” Ambrose muttered. “Hot, fiery, plenty of it! Waiter, more brandy. Bring the bottle.” The man hesitated. Ambrose laid a sovereign upon the table.

“Do you think that I cannot pay?” he asked. “Is that why you hesitate? Or do you think that I am drunk? Look at my hand. It is steady enough, isn’t it? Bring me the brandy at once.”

The man hurried away with a little shrug of the shoulders. If his queer customer chose to drink too much it was not his fault. He was at least able to speak clearly;

he had no signs of approaching drunkenness. Yet this was the fifth time he had been served with brandy the last twenty minutes.

"It is a mad dream," Ambrose muttered. "Four million francs is too small a sum. If the skies rained gold till one stood knee-deep in it, it were hard for such as I to wade through it to happiness. What shall we do, Chicot, now, eh? Shall we give it up? Shall we try the river, or shall we turn our backs upon this cursed country and let Christine go?"

Chicot yawned. Obviously the question did not interest him. He had dined well, much better than usual, and he would have preferred that his master had chosen to go straight home. Since it was not so, however, he was content to doze in the warmth of his master's pocket. The waiter brought the bottle of brandy, and Ambrose drank once more, not in sips, but in quick, hurried gulps. The waiters made remarks about him to one another as they passed to and fro. Ambrose had very much the appearance of a man who had just committed some dreadful deed which he was striving to forget. Marcel and Pierre found him sitting there when they arrived. They paused for a moment by the door to look at him.

"See," Pierre remarked, "he has money. He drinks brandy. One does not drink brandy for nothing here."

"Bah!" Marcel answered. "Does he not still push the piano? Who would lead such a dog's life if he possessed but a hundredth part of—"

Pierre laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder. "Hush!" he said. "One does not know in this sort of place who may listen. See, he is drinking, and he mutters to himself. I think that he is nearly drunk. See how he fills his glass. It is a fortunate moment, this. If there is truth to be wrung from him, now is the time."

They approached the table and greeted him noisily. Ambrose set down his glass, and looked at them for a moment as though they had been strangers. Then he struck the table before him with the palm of his hand.

"Marcell Pierre!" he cried. "Waiter, bring glasses. These are friends of mine. They will drink with me. How goes it, my brave Marcel? Still free, I see. Long may the fortune be with you!"

Marcel looked uneasily around. "Not so loud, fool!" he said. "At this place one never knows who listens. We are here to talk with you."

"And I," Ambrose declared, "I am here to listen. Speak on."

They leaned across the table.

"Listen," Marcel said. "Take your thoughts back to one night, never mind how long ago, when you hobbled and ran by the side of your piano, and the man who now calls himself Lord Ellingham, escaping in the clothes of a workman, pushed the piano and ran by your side. You three were there—the girl Christine, you, and Ellingham."

Ambrose nodded. "Aye, it is true!" he said. "We three! Very soon, though, we lost our companion. He crossed the city with us, and he flitted away. We saw no more of him till a few weeks ago."

"Another question," Marcel said, leaning across the table. "It is about the piano."

"The piano?" Ambrose repeated, staring at his questioner. "What of it

"You have it with you now, in London?"

“Of course,” Ambrose answered. “How else could one live? There is no bread lying in the streets here, no brandy to be given away. And brandy,” he muttered, “is a good thing, a very good thing.”

“It is the same instrument?” Marcel persisted. “You have not changed it?”

“Changed it? Why should I?” Ambrose answered. “It was made for me. The keys are worn, but the inside is good. It keeps in tune. Why should I change it?”

“Where is it now?” Marcel asked.

“In the entry near my lodgings, where I leave it every night,” Ambrose answered. “Why do you ask me these questions? What has my piano to do with you?”

“Not much,” Pierre answered carelessly. “And yet we were curious. You drink slowly, my friend, after all. Waiter, more cognac! All together now I To us who are left of the Black Foxes!”

Ambrose set down his glass. “I will not drink to that,” he said. “I will not drink to a gang of—”

Pierre dropped his glass purposely upon the floor. Marcel frowned angrily.

“Fool!” he exclaimed. “Keep your tongue still. We will drink no toast at all, then, only to ourselves.”

“As you will,” Ambrose muttered. “For myself, I never drink toasts. I drink and I drink and I drink, but toasts, bah! See here, my friends!” he exclaimed suddenly. “What about my piano? Why do you ask me questions about it?”

The two men exchanged swift glances. They filled Ambrose’s glass. They filled their own.

“For no special reason,” Marcel answered.

“For no special reason,” Ambrose echoed. “Good! Just now I said that I drank no toasts. I will drink one now to a night when the snowflakes fell soft on the ground, when the revolver bullets were whistling, when we ran down the silent street, we three and Chicot. It was a clever escape, that, and it was all through me. It was I who managed it—I, for the sake of Christine.”

“It was wonderful,” Marcel declared, “only it was the wrong man who escaped. It was I who should have been with you.”

Ambrose shook with laughter, a strange choking laugh, in which there was little enough of mirth. “He was too clever for you, too clever,” he gasped. “Somehow I think that he will always be too clever for you. What did he tell you to-day? What did he send you out for to seek? Why do you ask for my piano? Eh, Marcel? Eh, Pierre?”

He lurched a little sideways, and his eyes seemed closed. The two men exchanged quick glances.

“He knows,” Marcel whispered. “He knows. Fill his glass once more; then we will take him home.”

They filled his glass, and made a pretense at drinking themselves. Ambrose did not open his eyes. He seemed to sleep. The manager came up, summoned by an observant waiter.

“You must take your friend away, gentlemen,” he said. “We cannot have people falling asleep here. Take him away at once, please. It is nearly closing time, and the police might look in at any moment. It’s hard enough,” he added, with a little grumble, “to keep one’s license as it is.”

They jogged Ambrose's elbow, but he only fell over to the other side without opening his eyes. Then they helped him to rise. A waiter fetched his hat, and they left the place, supporting him one on either side. They moved a few yards down the street. Then Marcel called a four-wheel cab, and they hoisted him in.

"Where are your lodgings?" he asked.

Ambrose half opened his eyes. "Pickett Street, Waterloo Road," he answered, and then fell back among the cushions.

They gave the address to the driver. Marcel sat by his side. Pierre was opposite. The cab rumbled off.

Chapter XXVI

The two men who stood talking earnestly in a corner of the Duchess of Mechester's drawing-room excited comment both on account of the length of their conversation and from the mere fact that they were carrying on an animated discussion. And yet, although one was Baron de Mayo, French ambassador to London, and the other was the Marquis of Ellingham, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the interests of their respective countries never once engaged their attention. So far as the baron was concerned, their conversation was pure gossip, and that it had any further significance for his companion was a fact of which he was entirely ignorant.

"I had to-day," he remarked, after they had shaken hands and talked for a moment or two of nothing in particular, "a visit from the most extraordinary man in France."

The marquis was interested. "Pray continue," he begged. "All my life I have wondered who was really the most remarkable man in France, you or Monsieur Coquelin."

"Neither of us, I fear," the baron answered, with a smile.

"The man to whom I am alluding is Jacques Leblun, the detective."

"I have heard of him often," the marquis said quietly.

"He is over here," the baron continued, "in connection with an affair which at the time, I remember, interested me greatly. You, marquis, probably never read of it. It is difficult to keep in touch with the domestic affairs of other nations. This affair, though, was, in a sense, of world-wide interest, for the people concerned in it were of all nationalities. It was simply the breaking up of a band of thieves, the most dangerous, I think, in some respects, of any that ever flourished in Paris."

"You interest me greatly," the marquis murmured. "Pray continue."

"They began in a small way, I believe," the baron said. "A very well dressed and charming woman, accompanied by a man, also irreproachable—a man, indeed, of our ancient nobility—began to frequent the night cafés of Paris, the sort of places which flourish now in the Montmartre district. There they seemed to make acquaintances with people from all parts of the world, young people generally, who had money and little sense. They made acquaintances with Russians, with Englishmen, with Americans, and in time invited them to their house, an old-

fashioned but very fine place in the Place Noire. Gambling to an unlimited extent went on there, gambling which, without a doubt, was conducted upon principles favorable to the occupants of the house. Strange stories began to be whispered about concerning that house in the Place Noire. People entered it who were never seen to reappear. From it, too, as it eventually transpired, was conducted a system of robbery, magnificent in its conception and on the whole, I should imagine, immensely lucrative. The police were warned, and the whole locality was under constant surveillance. And yet, so clever were those people, it was many months before the police felt themselves justified in raiding the place. That night attack is well remembered in Pairs, even to-day. Two gendarmes were shot, but three of the ringleaders were arrested. A man named Marcel, who was supposed to be the ringleader and against whom many things were proved, was sentenced to imprisonment for life. Throughout his trial, however, he denied most emphatically that he was the actual leader of the Black Foxes, as they called themselves. He denied that it was he who shot one of the gendarmes through the heart, or that he was responsible for more than the conduct of the gaming part of the place. The police, however, were almost unanimous against him, and the story of some other leader was looked upon as a myth. Only this man Jacques Leblun was dissatisfied. There was a story about a man, an Englishman or an American, I think he was, who escaped in disguise as a workman pushing a piano through the streets. Such a person was certainly seen in the vicinity that night, but was allowed to pass, as there was nothing to excite suspicion. A dwarf, who was usually in charge of the piano, was there, and a girl who sang. They were known to the police, as all these semi-mendicants are. There was nothing against them, so they let them go through the cordon which had been drawn about the Place Noire. Curiously enough, however, neither the dwarf nor the singing girl was ever seen in Paris again."

"A most interesting story," the marquis declared. "You say that the man Marcel was convicted?"

"He was sentenced to penal servitude for life," the baron said. "That brings me to the present point of the story. A few weeks ago he escaped from the prison where he was confined It was not an easy task. No one but a person of great resource and cunning would have attempted it. But he is free, and he is thought to be in London. Jacques Leblun is here upon his heels, here not only to make his arrest, but because he himself believes in the existence of that other leader, and he thinks that by following Marcel he will discover the other person."

The marquis drew a little breath. "Your story," he said, "becomes still more interesting."

"I am glad that you find it so," the baron remarked politely. "To me the subject has always possessed a certain fascination. It has now reached an exceedingly interesting stage. Somewhere in London Marcel is hiding; also somewhere in London, if the theory of Monsieur Leblun is true, is the man who was his associate at the Place Noire, but who escaped capture. Leblun is here to watch. I must confess that I am exceedingly curious to discover what the result may be."

"It is a most interesting situation," the marquis said.

The baron, struck by some slight hesitation in his companion's tone, glanced into his face. "Ah!" he said. "I am afraid that I have bored you."

The marquis, who felt that he was ghastly pale, recovered himself with an effort. “These rooms,” he said, “are overheated. You know we English cannot live without fresh air. I think I shall make my adieu to the duchess. I am joining my wife at Esholt House.”

The marquis drove through the gaily lighted streets and squares, leaning back among the cushions of his motor. His arms were folded, his chin had sunk upon his chest. The color of his face was still ghastly. There were drops of perspiration upon his forehead. Was it to be in vain, then, this fight of his? Was he to lose it all—honor, name, and power—for the sake of those few wild months; because of a shot fired, as he had told himself a thousand times, in self-defense? Jacques Leblun I The name seemed to ring in his ears. He fancied him sitting apart somewhere in a little room of one of the great hotels, looking down into the city, watching the swarms of people, gifted with some strange power by which his searching gaze could penetrate walls and annihilate distance. Even in the security of his electric brougham he looked around wildly more than once. He seemed to feel the eyes of that silent Frenchman following him wherever he went. Marcel he had not greatly feared. He had felt himself strong enough to deal with such a man. Jacques Leblun was different. Jacques Leblun had had suspicions all the time. He only had believed Marcel when he swore that it was not his hand alone that had directed those amazing coups. What was to be done? What course was there open to him? Flight? It was the most dangerous of all. The days were past when flight from the hand of the law could be effective. The world was girded with steam and electricity. Its farthest corners were at the mercy of those who stayed at home and smiled. Death? Well, that was a last resource. He was still under fifty, and the joy of his new life and the honest love of his wife were still strong in his blood. Death might be a last resource, but it should be the very last. Not until the hand of fate was upon his shoulder and the world was growing dim would he stoop to that. To buy his freedom from Jacques Leblun he well knew to be impossible. The man was above such things. Money was nothing to him; fame was the very breath of his nostrils. ‘Mere was no move that he could make, nothing that he could do save keep a steadfast face to the world and leave the issue to fortune.

The brougham glided up to the curbstone, and stopped before the apartment hotel to which the marquis had directed his chauffeur. He descended, and crossing the pavement bade the commissionnaire good evening, rang for the elevator, and ascended to the seventh floor.

Chapter XXVII

Christine was sitting alone, curled up in her chair. She had spent a quiet evening at home and was now thinking about Ambrose and their recent interview. She heard the front door-bell ring, and rose doubtfully to her feet. Her maids had gone to bed. She could not imagine who it might be, come to visit her at such an hour. She stepped out into the hall, and then paused in sudden fear. Supposing it should be Marcel! She stood rooted to the spot. The whole horror of the coming of

that other man, and the thing which had happened to him, was suddenly brought vividly before her. Once more the bell rang, softly but insistently. She heard a sound in the servants' room, and it gave her courage. At any rate, she was not alone. A cry would summon both the girls. She opened the door and peered out.

"You!" she exclaimed.

The marquis nodded. She closed the door mechanically, and led the way into the sitting-room. Then she turned to look into his face once more. There were signs there of the agony through which he had been passing.

"What has happened?" she asked. "Why have you come here at this hour?"

"I came on the chance of finding you up, and alone," he answered. "To-night I have had a blow. I wanted to tell you about it, and ask whether you know who is in London."

"I know that Marcel is here," she answered, "Marcel and Pierre."

Lord Ellingham shook his head. "It is neither of them," he said. "One could deal with men like those, one in my position. It is somebody worse. It is Jacques Leblun who has followed them, who stands aloof somewhere, watching."

"Jacques Leblun?" she echoed. "Do you mean the French detective?"

Lord Ellingham nodded. "Yes," he answered. "He is the man who was present all through the trial of Marcel and the others, who was always silent, but always listening. He believed that Marcel told the truth when he swore that there was another man who was responsible with him for some of the things which happened at the Place Noire. He believed that it was not Marcel who shot that great bully of a gendarme."

"And he is here?" Christine asked; "in London?"

"He is here, watching," the marquis answered. "He is here because he believes that through Marcel he will find that other man."

Christine's face softened, her dark eyes became compassionate. She passed her arm through his, and led him to a chair. "It is terrible," she said, "but it is not so bad as it seems to you just now."

"Pierre and Marcel were in my house only yesterday," the marquis said. "Even the details of my escape are known to Leblun. I was told to-night by Mayo, the ambassador, of the man who, with the hunchback and the girl, passed out of the Place Noire that night, wheeling a piano."

She was silent for several minutes. "I wonder," she said softly, "how much you really had to do with that house of mysteries?"

The marquis groaned. "Not so much, after all," he answered. "You know very well that I was desperate that first night, when your mother and Marcel brought me there. I was ready to join in anything, but even then I would have nothing to do with the gaming."

"It was the attack upon the banks?" she asked softly.

The marquis nodded. "I was in that," he admitted. "It appealed to me. It was a desperate adventure, and it meant wealth for all of us if we succeeded."

"But it did succeed."

"It succeeded all right," he said, "but unfortunately the house was raided the next night, and I suppose the money was seized."

"You were not concerned," she asked, "in the Pierre Laplage matter?"

“Not I,” he answered. “I never stooped so low as that. I brought some English boys into the house one night, but I told them it was a gaming-place, and that I could not answer for the play. They ran their own risk.”

“If I could help you—” she murmured.

“You can tell me where I can find Ambrose,” the marquis said. “If he goes wheeling that infernal piano about London, Leblun will find him to a certainty.”

“Ambrose was here not long ago,” Christine said. “He was in a strange mood, too.”

“Has he ever accepted anything from you?” the marquis asked.

“Not a penny,” she answered. “He will not.”

The marquis’ thoughts went back to the day when Ambrose had come to see him and urged him to fly from the country. “It is conceivable,” he said, “that Ambrose might feel that he has a grudge against me for taking you away.”

She nodded. “He is a strange being,” she said. “I think he does feel like that.”

The marquis gave a little gesture of despair. “It is hopeless,” he said.

“It is nothing of the sort,” she answered. “I will send for Ambrose. I will see that he holds his peace.”

“It is useless trying to bribe him,” the marquis said. “Money seems to mean nothing to him.”

“He will do more for me than any one,” Christine said. “I promise you that he shall not betray you. I will see to that. As for those others, if they speak they must go back to prison. If they speak they lose forever the chance of making any money out of you. I do not think they are to be feared.”

“There is one more,” the marquis said, “an Englishman who was playing at the tables that night, himself, I believe, half a spy.”

“Gilbert Hannaway!” she exclaimed.

The marquis nodded. “There are too many who know or guess,” he said. “The odds are heavy against me.”

Christine was deep in thought. “I am afraid,” she said, “that, after all, I am your greatest enemy. Ambrose is wild with you because I have left him. Gilbert Hannaway and I have quarreled because I would not tell him why I was willing to accept so much from you. Never mind. Ambrose I am sure I can deal with, even now. Gilbert Hannaway I will try.”

The marquis glanced at the clock and rose. “I must go on,” he said, a little wearily. “I came to tell you these things, Christine, to put you on your guard. If Jacques Leblun should find you out—”

She laughed scornfully. “Look at me!” she exclaimed. “Am I likely to be recognized? Remember that in Paris I wore short skirts, and my hair was down my back.”

“You have changed,” the marquis said. “I suppose—”

He broke off suddenly in his sentence. The telephone bell of a small instrument placed upon the sideboard was ringing violently. They stared at each other. The marquis glanced at the clock.

“It is past eleven!” he exclaimed. “Who would ring you up at this hour?”

“Heaven knows!” she muttered. “I shall not answer.”

“You must,” he directed. “Go and see who it is.”

She took the receiver from the instrument with trembling fingers. There was another receiver upon the table. She passed it silently to the marquis, who held it to his ear.

"Who is it?" she asked, in a tremulous voice.

There was silence for a moment, except for a strange vibration of the wires. Then came a voice which at first she failed to recognize.

ristine!" it called. "Is it Christine who speaks?"

"It is I," she answered. "Who is it?"

Again the vibration, only this time its cause was obvious enough. It was a laugh, a strange, half-delirious laugh. The girl shivered.

"It is Ambrose," they heard at last. "I, Ambrose. Listen well, for I have something to tell you."

"I am listening," Christine faltered. "Go on."

"All the night," the voice continued, "I have been with two madmen—madmen, Christine. Oh, how I have laughed! I sat with them in a little café. They whispered together—they must make me drunk. So they tried. They bought brandy, and I drank. More brandy, and still I drank. Then they whispered together again. My eyes were closed. And what do you think? It was of my piano that they spoke, the little piano that we have wheeled together through the lanes and along the boulevards and across the streets of this cursed city. They thought—listen, Christine, for this is a joke—they thought there was something hidden in it."

Christine looked up, and her eyes met Lord Ellingham's. They were both as pale as death.

"He is mad," she whispered.

The marquis said nothing. Even his lips were pale. From the wire came the shrill denial.

"Oh, not mad, Christine, not mad! Only drunk—drunk and happy as a man can be. It is so droll. They found out where my piano was in the entry, you know, at Pickett Street. They took me by the arm, and they helped me out of the place, and my knees shook and my eyes were closed. But inside I laughed. They put me in a cab, and we drove on and on and on, all the way to Pickett Street. They helped me out of the cab. I stumbled across the pavement. 'Which way?' they asked, and shook me. I led them right. I led them to the entry. I showed them the catch of the gate. We entered, and there was the piano. Christine, it was droll! They tore the back off my poor little instrument. They lifted the first board, they struck matches and peered in, tore the strings in their eagerness and haste, and then they began to curse. I sat and looked at them, muddled, drunk, you understand, drunk as a man may be. They quarreled, those two, wild with disappointment. They quarreled at first silently, and then I saw the blood rising hot. They spoke so fast and so angrily that I heard only one half of what they said. They were very, very angry. Marcel took Pierre by the throat. I sat upon the ground and watched them. I was too drunk, you see, to move. Then, as I swayed, a knife fell from my pocket, the knife I always carry for fear—but never mind that."

"Stop!" Christine shrieked. "I am faint. Don't go on, Ambrose."

The marquis held her up. He did not speak, but there was something in his face which gave her strength.

"I am better," she murmured. "Finish, Ambrose. Finish quickly."

"The knife fell from my pocket. Marcel saw it, snatched it up. Pierre saw it, too, and he ran. Out of the entry they ran, and I suddenly was not so drunk. Up I rose and hobbled after them. I saw them go down Pickett Street, around the corner; I saw Marcel's hand lifted, I saw him strike, I saw the crowd gather. They picked Pierre up, and they chased Marcel. Listen, Christine. Pierre is dead. There is only Marcel left."

She began to moan. She lay a dead weight against the marquis' shoulder, but his hand still gripped his receiver. For a moment the voice said nothing. Then it continued:

"Marcel ran swiftly, and they say here that he has escaped. But Pierre is dead. Where he fell he died, and Marcel is hunted now for his life. Christine, these things are strange."

"But where are you?" she faltered. "Is there no one who can hear?"

"I am in the place I love," he answered. "I am in the great public house at the top of the bridge, where there are cushions and mirrors, where it is warm and the bottles of brandy on the shelves stand like regiments of soldiers. No, there is no one who can hear. I stand in a little compartment, and the door closes tight. No one can hear. I have paid my threepence to talk to you. I have told you these things, Christine, although I am drunk. It is wonderful, eh? Now I go back to my seat, to drink, to talk, and to drink. Good night."

They heard the click of the instrument as he hung the receiver in its place. They listened for a moment. There was no other sound. The marquis turned toward Christine. He himself was trembling in every limb. Word by word, as the story had come to him in those sharp, staccato sentences, he had felt his heart beat more wildly. The perspiration was standing all over his forehead. He was breathing like a hunted man. He saw the struggle in the entry, the knife slip from the pocket of the dwarf. He saw it snatched up, he saw the chase—Pierre bent double, running for his life; Marcel, degenerate, half madman, tearing after him. He seemed to see the blow struck, he saw the crowds of people in pursuit. Last of all, he saw Ambrose sitting in the cushioned seat he loved, the brandy before him, muttering, drinking. With an effort he realized where he was. The weight of the girl was heavy upon his arm. He looked into her face and saw that she had fainted.

Illustration:
The weight of the girl was heavy upon his arm.
She had fainted.

Chapter XXVIII

Gilbert Hannaway rose from his chair to greet an unexpected visitor. A few minutes before, lingering over his after-breakfast cigarette, he had found life dull enough. But the magic name on the piece of pasteboard which he still held in his hand had aroused in him something very much like excitement.

"Mr. Leblun," he said, holding out his hand, "I am very glad to know you, sir."

There was nothing impressive about the appearance of Jacques Leblun. He was short and slight, dark, clean-shaven, and with a somewhat worn face. His eyes were nearly always half closed, as though he were short-sighted. His hair was parted in the middle, and arranged with great exactness. He disposed of his hat and stick and accepted the armchair which his host had wheeled up to the fire.

"Your name," Hannaway remarked, "has been familiar to me for a good many years, ever since I spent some time in Paris, as a matter of fact."

Leblun nodded. He spoke English excellently, and with very little accent. "You are very kind, sir," he said. "You were in my country, I believe, four or five years ago."

"That is true," Hannaway admitted.

"You were present, I also believe," Leblun continued, "when a house in the Place Noire was raided by gendarmes, and several captures made. It was a gaming-house, and the home of certain men of a dangerous character."

Hannaway nodded. "I was there playing baccarat," he said. "The place interested me. I had been there several times before."

Leblun sighed gently. "Mr. Hannaway," he said, "I am getting an old man now. Such ambitions as I had are practically either laid aside or accomplished. I am, or rather I have been all my life, as I think you know, a detective. You, I believe, are one of those gentlemen who, without being connected with such matters professionally, still find a certain amount of interest—shall I say sport?—in following out to their termination such affairs as may chance to interest you. Have I expressed myself so that you understand me? I spoke English a great deal when I was younger, but lately I am a little out of practice."

"Your English is perfect, Mr. Leblun," Hannaway said, "and I understand exactly what you say. It is true that I have taken a certain amount of interest in some of the great crimes of the day. It is also true, if you care to know it, that my interest in that house in the Place Noire was largely because I was aware that the gaming-tables were being conducted in an illicit fashion, and I was almost certain that behind it all there was another and a more criminal reason for its existence."

Leblun sighed gently. "We should have met in those days," he remarked. "We might have been able to help each other. A raid, as you know, was made, and certain captures effected. Marcel, who posed as the ringleader, was arrested and convicted, not only for the various robberies which it was proved had emanated from that house, but for having shot dead a gendarme in trying to escape. Marcel—this may not be news to you—escaped from his prison three weeks ago."

"Escaped?" Hannaway murmured.

Leblun nodded. "To you, sir," he continued, "I do not mind confessing that we could, if we had chosen, have arrested him within a dozen hours of his escape. For reasons of my own I persuaded the chief of police to let him go for a time. It is always perfectly easy to lay our hands upon him, and in the interests of justice I was curious to see in what direction he would turn his footsteps."

"In the interests of justice?" Hannaway repeated. "You are going a little beyond me."

Leblun nodded.

"Permit me," he said, "to explain. Marcel, at the trial, as you may or may not remember, vigorously protested his innocence of having fired that fatal shot. He

also declared that there was another, an Englishman, behind him in the conception and execution of that remarkable series of thefts in which the gang that inhabited the house in the Place Noire was implicated. Marcel was not, I may add, believed, except by me. I have been convinced always that there escaped from the house that night, wheeling a piano, and having by his side a hunchback and a singing girl, the man whose brain was really responsible for the most daring and successful robbery that Paris has ever known. Therefore, when Marcel escaped, I said let him go. Let us follow him. He will lead us toward that person who, in all probability, made off with the large sums of money which we were unable to lay our hands on at the time of the raid. Marcel headed straight for London. He is in London now, in hiding, and in desperate fear for his life. Since his coming he has added to his crimes. Two days ago, in some drunken quarrel, he stabbed his companion, an associate, a man named Pierre Michel, and only escaped from the police through a miracle."

"You take my breath away!" Hannaway exclaimed. "I read in the papers of an affair—near Waterloo Bridge, I think it was—between two Frenchmen."

Leblun nodded. "Marcel," he said, "is lying, as he thinks, securely hidden, in reality watched by an army of spies. But he makes no move. He goes nowhere. He has sent one message, and only one. That was delivered to a hunchback somewhere down in Pickett Street, who goes around with a piano and a monkey. Without a doubt he is the same person who was with the man of whom Marcel is in search."

"The note was delivered?" Hannaway asked.

"It was delivered," Leblun answered. "Every movement of the hunchback will be watched, just the same as every movement of Marcel himself. It is clear that for some reason Marcel does not desire to communicate directly with his former coadjutor. He is going to do it through Drake. At least, that is what we surmise."

"Tell me," Hannaway asked, "since Marcel's arrival in this country has he made no calls whatever upon any one whom you could associate with the house in the Place Noire?"

"We fancy not," Leblun answered. "Perfect though I believe my spy system is, there was one night when it went wrong. Marcel and Pierre disappeared somewhere in the West End, and for several hours were not seen. They reappeared, however, at a small café in Soho, without money, but in a state of some excitement. I don't think it possible that they would discover the man whom they had lost, and come away without money."

"I have found all this exceedingly interesting," Hannaway admitted. "Now let me ask you a more personal question. Why have you come here to take me into your confidence?"

Leblun shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Hannaway," he said, "I am no longer a vain man. I am no longer anxious to obtain for myself all the glory of a subtle capture. I want to find this man of whom Marcel himself is in search, and I come to you for your help. In return you shall have whatever credit there may be in having tracked him down."

"You want to find," Hannaway said thoughtfully, "the man who escaped from the Place Noire that night in the garb of a workman."

“Exactly,” Leblun answered. “He is in London somewhere. That I know. He should have stood beside Marcel in the dock. He should now be serving his time in a French prison. In the interests of justice I should like to lay my hands upon him.”.

“Mr. Leblun,” Hannaway said, “I am flattered by your visit and the offer you have made me, but I cannot help you.”

The Frenchman leaned forward in his chair. Suddenly the man’s whole intelligence seemed to shine out of his face. His eyes were like gimlets. Hannaway felt that his very thoughts were being read.

“You know who this man is,” the detective said quickly. “Your manner tells me so. There is no doubt whatever about it. You desire to shield him, and therefore you will not help me. Why? Is he your friend? Or your friend’s friend? Why, I ask you?”

Hannaway was a little taken aback. He was not prepared with an immediate answer.

“Consider what you are doing,” Leblun said seriously. “Crime is crime, all the world over. It is no kindness to society to shield a man who has not paid his debt to the laws of his country. He may now be in a position to command your sympathy. He may be poor and unfortunate, perhaps, and you may say to yourself, ‘He has suffered enough.’ You may shrug your shoulders and say, ‘I will have mercy, I will keep silence.’ Or again, he may have become rich and powerful. He may have found a place in the great world. He may be married and have children, and you may say to yourself, ‘The man has reformed. Years have gone by. I will not bring the shadow of his past life to darken his present. The days of his sin have passed. I will let him alone.’ Which is it, Mr. Hannaway? Will you tell me that?”

“I will tell you nothing,” Hannaway answered.

Leblun sighed gently. “All!” he said. “Ours is a profession in which the sentimentalist is bound to come to grief. That is the worst of you amateurs. Up to a certain point you are excellent. Then you break down. Pardon me if I remind you that it is generally a woman who is responsible for these breakdowns. What, I wonder, has become of the girl who was with the dwarf and the workman, when he turned the corner of the Place Noire and vanished into space? Can you tell me that, Mr. Hannaway?”

“I can tell you nothing,” Hannaway answered.

“But you could,” Leblun interrupted quickly. “Oh, I am sure of that! You have too honest a face. One cannot look at you and make mistakes. So the girl is in it, too! I am afraid we have lost sight of her. Still, if you will not help me, I must work alone. It is not a difficult task, after all, you know. Sooner or later Marcel or Drake, or some messenger, must go stealing on his way toward this person, whoever he may be. Marcel cannot starve. He cannot live long without brandy and cigarettes. He has nothing, nothing at all. I have seen to that. We must wait.” He took up his hat and stick, and held out his hand to Hannaway. “Au revoir,” he said. “I am sorry that you decline my offer of comradeship.”

“It is not that exactly, Mr. Leblun,” Hannaway said. “I am flattered to have received a visit from you. But as you yourself said, I am only a dabbler in such affairs. I might follow them out if I were greatly interested, if I felt that it was in the

interest of human justice, not only legal justice, to do so. But frankly, I tell you that in this case my sympathies are against you."

"You do not deny, then," Leblun said quickly, "that you know the man?"

"I believe," Hannaway answered, "that I could find him. If my suspicions are just, although personally I have a grievance against him, I should say let him go."

Leblun smiled.

"Ah!" he said. "We others, you know, we know only one kind of justice, and that is the justice which brings to punishment, to legal punishment, I should say, the criminal. I know of no other sort. We may meet again, Mr. Hannaway."

He bowed himself out, leaving Hannaway a little dazed by the turn their conversation had taken, more than a little disturbed at its possible import. He went slowly into his dressing-room, changed his clothes, and descended into the street. Even then he seemed undecided as to his destination. He called a hansom, and directed the man to drive to Cavendish Square. He had gone scarcely a hundred yards, however, when he redirected him.

"Number 42 Victoria Flats," he said.

Chapter XXIX

The maid-servant who admitted Hannaway was a little uncertain whether her mistress would see him. There was a gentleman already in the drawing-room. But at that moment Christine's own maid, crossing the hall, welcomed Hannaway with a little smile. She was sure her mistress was always ready to receive Monsieur Hannaway!

She threw open the drawing-room door and announced him. Hannaway drew back, but he was too late. Christine's visitor had already recognized him. Christine herself seemed rather to welcome his coming. Monsieur Leblun laughed softly as he rose and bowed.

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Hannaway," he said, "you should have accepted my offer of an alliance. You see how easy it is for those with whom fortune sides. If there was one thing more than another that I would have given much to know," he added, "it was to whom your first visit would be paid after our little conversation a few minutes ago. Chance, you see, has told me. Chance has brought you here. If Mademoiselle de Lanson is half as glad to see you as I am your welcome is indeed a warm one."

Christine looked from one to the other in astonishment. She did not understand. "What does it mean?" she asked Hannaway. "And why do you come to me?" she added, drawing herself up. "You have been away so long that this is a pleasure which I scarcely expected."

Hannaway threw aside all personal scruples. "I came," he said simply, "because I could not stay away any longer. I do not quite understand what our friend Mr. Leblun means, but I can assure you that my visit here was planned long before his call upon me this morning."

Mr. Leblun smiled and glanced at the clock. “A man,” he said, “who at half-past ten presents himself at the house of a very charming young lady is not as a rule to be found at ten o’clock in slippers and dressing-gown, with a Bradshaw and Continental Guide on his knee and the frown of a pessimist on his forehead. I must confess, Mr. Hannaway, that I do not believe you were promising yourself so pleasant a morning.”

“I do not imagine,” Hannaway said, “that my movements one way or the other need concern you. This young lady and I are engaged to be married. I have a right, therefore, to come when I choose, and to ask you the meaning of your visit?”

Christine was dumb with amazement. Then a flood of color rushed to her cheeks. She looked toward Hannaway, and met his earnest gaze.

“As to the object of my visit,” Leblun said, “it is easily told. I came to ask Mademoiselle de Lanson with whom she and the hunchback Drake left the Place Noire, one night four years, seven months, and twelve days ago. Mademoiselle de Lanson has not yet told me,” he added, fixing his eyes upon her, “but I believe that she can.”

“Mademoiselle de Lanson, on the contrary,” Christine said, “can tell you nothing of the sort. There was a man, but I always understood that it was Marcel. He disappeared soon after we turned the corner of the square. I have not seen him since.”

Leblun smiled. “Mademoiselle,” he said, “the interests of justice are great, and sometimes they justify strange questions. You and your companion were penniless in those days, you were penniless when you tramped your way across France, you were penniless when you landed in London, you were penniless, almost starving, for weeks afterward. Let me ask you, where does the money come from for this?” He made a rapid movement with his hand around the room.

Christine drew herself up and pressed the bell by her side. “Monsieur Leblun,” she said, “you may be a wonderful detective, but it is not permitted of any one to address such questions to me. The money for my rooms, and for the wages of the servant whom I have summoned to show you out, is my own, and where it comes from is my business.”

The parlormaid was already at the door. Christine turned to her.

“You will show this gentleman out,” she said, pointing to Leblun.

Leblun took up his hat and stick. Not a muscle of his face betrayed in any way humiliation or disappointment. “Mademoiselle,” he said, “I am obliged to you for what you have told me and for what you have not told me. I rejoice to have found you in such pleasant circumstances, and in such good health; and I congratulate you both,” he added with an almost fatherly air, “upon an engagement which cannot, I am sure, end anyhow but happily. Good morning.”

He disappeared with a farewell bow. The door was closed behind him. They heard the servant show him out. They heard the rattle of the elevator as it descended. Then Christine sank into a chair. Hannaway was still standing.

“Christine,” he said, “for months I have suspected the truth. I mean that I have suspected the identity of the man who escaped with you that night. For some weeks I have known it for a certainty.”

She sat up and looked at him. “Well,” she said, “what concern is it of yours? What are you going to do about it? And how dared you come here and say such things to that man?”

“I said them,” Hannaway continued, “because I wished to have the right to order him from the room if it were necessary. I wish to heaven I could say them truthfully.”

She laughed, a little bitterly. “What, of me?” she exclaimed, “a singer in the streets, a—”

“A singer in the streets, if you will,” he interrupted. “That makes no difference. As a singer in the streets I would take you to my heart to-morrow, gladly and proudly. It is not that. It is when you become the pensioner of Lord Ellingham that I am forced to drop my arms. I once asked you for an explanation, but you would not give it. A word from me this morning and there would no longer have been a Lord Ellingham. I ask no reward for keeping your secret. All that I ask is that you tell me the truth.”

“I will tell you,” she answered. “You have done your service, and you shall be paid. But understand that I tell you not of my own free will, but because I may be said to owe it to you. Lord Ellingham is my stepfather.”

“Your stepfather?” Hannaway repeated slowly. “You mean that he was married—”

“He was married to my mother, Madame de Lanson of Annonay,” she repeated. “It was when we were all living with my uncle at the house in the Place Noire.”

“This is amazing,” Hannaway murmured. “Why, she died a month before the raid.”

“She died exactly five weeks after she was married,” Christine answered. “I think that he tried to be kind to me, but I was very angry, and it was then that I ran away and joined Ambrose.”

“So that is why you were up in the Place Noire that night?” Hannaway remarked. “You were there to help him to escape?”

The girl shook her head. “On the contrary,” she said, “I thought it was my uncle who was with us. He sent an urgent message for us to go up that night, and to take a suit of workman’s clothes. We went and left them exactly where he told us, and waited opposite the house, in one of those dark corners. When a man came out dressed in those things we did as he told us and hastened away. For years I thought it was Marcel who had escaped, and I was always angry because he had done nothing for us. He had my mother’s money and mine. After that night we hurried away into the country. I never looked at the papers. It was Ambrose who told me what had happened. And Ambrose lied. He told me that it was my stepfather who had been arrested and sent to prison as the head of the gang, and that my uncle was still free. So I went searching for him, determined that somehow or other I would make him restore the money which belonged to me, and which he had promised my mother that I should have. Then that morning at Victoria Station I saw the man whom I had believed was in a French prison.”

“Lord Ellingham!” Hannaway exclaimed. He moved suddenly forward. All the lines in his face seemed to yield. He held out his arms to her, but she drew away.

“No,” she said. “You have doubted me. I do not blame you, but I cannot forget it. Besides, this is no time for such things. I am afraid, afraid for him. Ambrose knows, and there is Marcel. One of the two will tell Leblun.”

“Christine,” Hannaway said earnestly, “I will do what I can to help. If I can save him I will, but you must forgive me.”

She hesitated for a moment. Her face had certainly grown softer. “But you cannot really care,” she said doubtfully. “I am only half educated. I have done strange things all my life. I am selfish, vain, thoughtless. You do not know what sort of a person I am. It is just a fancy of yours. You will outgrow it.”

He shook his head. “Fancy,” he repeated reflectively. “There is some fancy at the root of every passion. Christine, do you remember when I saw you first?”

She smiled. “It was in the Place Madeleine,” she said, “and you gave me ten francs, or rather you put it into Chicot’s hat.”

He nodded. “I saw you there, singing upon the curbstone,” he said, “with your hands behind you, and your head raised above all those people, looking up to the sky. I watched you longer than you ever knew. I watched you repulse those who tried to talk to you. I watched you listen to their stupid gallantries with stony face. I saw you give a franc to a beggar woman, and smile at her, and she gave you a bunch of her violets. I saw you go away, walking with your arm on Ambrose Drake’s shoulder, toward the Champs Elysées, looking neither to the right nor to the left, always up to the sky, as though the people who came and went, who listened to your singing and made banal speeches, had no existence whatever for you. I saw you again, in a crowd this time, on the boulevard. I passed you quickly in a motor-car with a friend. Again you were singing, and again your head was raised so that you saw nothing but the sky above the tall buildings. I saw you again pass along the streets, you and Drake, with the monkey sitting on the top of the piano—the strangest combination, I thought, that I had ever seen. Your face was so young, and yet you carried yourself as one who understood and despised.”

“And all the time,” she murmured, half to herself, “I did not know.”

“I saw you in the Place Noire one night,” he continued. “I saw how you treated that young cub of a French marquis who called you in. And I saw you on the night when the gendarmes came. I saw you go calmly down the hill, and I knew very well that you were helping some one to escape. I had been shot—by accident, I fancy—but I could have raised the alarm if I had chosen. I let you go. I don’t know why, but I let you go. Since then I have looked and watched for you and Ambrose. I never heard a street piano without turning my head to see. I never heard a girl singing but that I made sure that it was not you. Then, one night, I looked down from my window, and I saw what I had been looking for so long—a street-piano, a hunchback, and a singing girl; and I knew, although your hair was no longer down your back and your skirts were lengthened, that it was you. I rushed down, but I was afraid to speak. You had suffered, I could see that. You looked tired of life, as though its buffets had been too many for you. I wanted to speak to you, I wanted to know about that man whom you had helped to escape. Well, you remember what happened.”

She nodded. “I am sorry,” she said simply. “You can understand now that we did not wish to come across people who knew anything of those days.”

“I wanted you to know,” he said, “that this was not altogether a new thing with me. I wanted you to know that I have carried about with me for years now the thought of the little girl who sang in the Madeleine. If I was unreasonable and jealous it was because—”

She stopped him, but there was no anger in her gesture. “We will forget that,” she said. “Only, for the present, I must think, I can think of only one thing. Lord Ellingham has been kind to me. He was always kind to me. He must be saved somehow from Leblun.”

Hannaway held out his hand. “If I can help I will,” he said. “It is a dangerous combination. It is a dangerous trio—Marcel and Ambrose, who know, and Leblun who desires to know. But we will see. You think Ambrose is safe?”

“I am not sure,” she answered. “Sometimes I think so. Sometimes I remember that he was terribly jealous when I left him.”

“Leblun will find him out, for certain,” Hannaway remarked.

“Ambrose will tell nothing unless he chooses,” Christine answered. “He is as clever as Leblun himself. This afternoon or to-night I shall go and see him. If he will promise there will be only Marcel to fear. And Marcel is hiding, in fear of his life.”

“May I go with you?” Hannaway asked.

She shook her head. “Ambrose is strange,” she said. “To see you with me might make him jealous.”

There was a knock at the door. The parlormaid entered a little doubtfully. “There is a person to see you, madam.” she announced, “a person who was here a few nights ago.”

Christine turned to Hannaway. “It is Ambrose!” she exclaimed. “Please go! I would rather that he did not see you here. Alice will take you out to the other elevator.”

Chapter XXX

A little exclamation broke from Christine’s lips as Ambrose entered the room. It was Ambrose, indeed, but not the Ambrose she had known. He stood before her transformed. The shaggy mane of hair had been cropped by a fashionable barber. He wore dark but well-cut clothes, clean linen, a gray tie of fashionable pattern. He wore patent boots, he carried a stick and gloves. The hat in his hand was a black bowler, also new.

“Ambrose!” she exclaimed. “Why, I scarcely recognized you,” she added weakly.

Ambrose laughed, and his voice, at least, had not changed. “I suppose,” he said, “the wheel of fortune spins to every one some time. I have been left some money.”

“You have given up the piano and the streets?” she exclaimed.

“From necessity,” he answered grimly. “Those two maniacs smashed it to pieces the other night, searching for treasure.”

“What, in the piano?” she exclaimed.

He nodded. “They were mad,” he said shortly.

She motioned him to a seat. She herself was ill at ease. It seemed to her that even as he sat there she could hear the tremulous dramatic words come throbbing through the telephone, telling the story of that struggle in the dark entry, of the dropping of the knife, of the flight of the two men into the darkness. What a different person it was who sat there in black coat and well-creased trousers! Even his deformity was less apparent.

"Tell me," she said, "what you are going to do. Ambrose," she cried, with sudden fear, "you have not been taking money to betray—Tell me, Ambrose, quickly! Has this man Jacques Leblun found you out?"

"What, the French detective?" he asked calmly.

"Yes," she answered. "Have you seen him? Don't dare to tell me that you have taken money from him!"

Ambrose shook his head. "I have not seen him, or taken his money," he answered. "Is he over here? Ah, I can guess! He is over here after Marcel."

"Worse than that," she answered. "He is watching Marcel. He is watching to see to whom Marcel appeals. He has not forgotten the stranger who escaped from the Place Noire that awful night."

Ambrose nodded thoughtfully, and his eyes grew brighter. "So Leblun is still on the trail," he said softly. "It is very well. It fits in with what I was going to say to you."

"Go on," she said. "Tell me what it is."

Ambrose looked at her steadfastly for several moments. Christine was pale. There were dark rings under her eyes, and her mouth drooped wearily. As he looked, his own eyes grew soft.

"Christine," he said, "you have lost a good deal of your youth in this sad city. There were days, even after we had started on the search, when you were gay, when you danced for the love of it, when the laughter was in your eyes and the color in your cheeks. You are losing your youth, Christine, in this cursed city."

"It is not that," she answered. "I am afraid."

"What of?" he demanded.

"It is the shadow of those awful days," she answered, "which seems to rest upon us still. The coming of these men has stirred up all the old horror. You know what I fear, Ambrose. I am afraid of Leblun. I am afraid of Marcel. You know why."

"He is only your stepfather," Ambrose muttered.

"He has been good to me," she answered. "He too has repented of those days. He too sought to escape from the memory of them. And now they are tracking him down. They must not, Ambrose. Oh, I mean it! They must not!"

"You are afraid," he asked calmly, "lest you lose your newly found wealth, your beautiful clothes, your carriage? You are afraid lest you be driven out into the streets, to plod once more by the side of the piano, to sing while Chicot collects the pennies? Is that it?"

"No," she answered. "It is not only that. I am not so altogether selfish. It is for his sake, too."

"Listen," Ambrose said. "The days of the street-piano are over. It is smashed. Its notes are dumb. I shall never strike them again. I too have wealth. I can save even him."

"How?" she exclaimed.

“Never mind,” he answered. “Don’t ask me too many questions. You may learn things which you will be sorry to hear. There remain now only you, Marcel, and myself who could point to the Marquis of Ellingham and say to Jacques Leblun, ‘There is the man you seek!’ I say there remain only you, Marcel, and myself. I should have said there remains only myself, for I can keep Marcel silent.”

“You mean it?” she exclaimed breathlessly.

“I mean it,” he answered. “Now I will go a little farther still. I will tell you, Christine, that it rests with you alone.”

“With me?” she repeated.

“It is for you to save him, or to hand him over to Jacques Leblun,” Ambrose declared. “Look at me. I am a poor, unsightly mortal, yet you know that the only days of happiness I have ever enjoyed were when we tramped together and sang for our living. Alone, Chicot and I are miserable, whether we are rich or poor, hungry or fed. Come back to us, Christine. Your life shall be different, I promise you. I ask no more than to be your humble slave, your courier, your faithful attendant. You shall travel where you will, how you will. I have money, money at last. It is yours to do what you will with. Only come with us. Then I promise you that he shall be safe.”

“I do not understand,” she faltered. “You do not mean that I shall come back once more and sing in the streets, that I shall give up—”

“You will give up nothing,” Ambrose declared. “There is no need for it. For every shilling that you spend now you shall spend a sovereign. For every carriage that you own now you shall have a dozen. You shall be a queen. You shall have prettier clothes than any other woman, jewels and flowers and all the luxuries which life can fashion. Only you must come away to some other country. You must live near Chicot and me, with no one to creep nearer your heart. If you do that he shall go free.”

“And if I refuse?” she asked, with a sudden apprehension of the things that were working in his brain. “If I refuse?”

“If you refuse,” he answered, “I shall go to this Monsieur Jacques Leblun. I shall say to him: ‘Walk a little way with me, and I will show you the man who wheeled my barrow from the Place Noire in the clothes of a workman, the man whom we sheltered, and whose escape we planned. He is here, an aristocrat, a rich man to-day, known and honored throughout the country, and yet the associate, once upon a time, of a herd of assassins, the man who shot a gendarme through the heart, the man who has cheated a French prison, the man whose life has been a lie.’”

She looked at him as though fascinated. There was something of horror in her distended eyes. “It is a bargain, then, which you propose?” she asked.

“It is a bargain,” he admitted. “Why not? What other chance have I? You threw me over like a discarded garment when the day arrived that you could do without me. Why should I shelter myself beneath false illusions? To you I am only Ambrose the dwarf, Ambrose the poor cripple, who kept you and fed you when things went awry. How else can I win for myself a few hours daily of your presence, a few kind words, the glorious knowledge that you are near? No other way, Christine. I know it well, and that is why I say that you, if you will, shall buy his safety. You shall buy his safety, or you shall sign his death-warrant.”

Christine shrank back in her chair. This was more awful than anything which she had feared.

"Don't misunderstand me," he went on. "I ask for no more, to be no more to you than I have been hitherto. I am content with that. It may seem little to you. For me it makes life a heaven. You know it. You believe me. If you hesitate for a moment, send your thoughts backward. Ask yourself what has been the text of my life through the long days, through the weary months, through the slow, crawling years. You, Christine! To keep you safe, to keep you free from harm, to minister to your wants, to win a poor word of gratitude or a smile. A dog's life, perhaps. Why not? What other life is there for me? Come, what do you say?"

"Do you mean," she asked, "that if I tell you that I do not wish to come away with you, that I wish to stay here, that I have other thoughts and other hopes, do you mean that you will still drag me away to be your companion, that you will do this or betray him?"

"I do mean it," he answered firmly. "I mean it so surely as you and I are now speaking to each other words of naked truth."

"If I refuse—" she faltered.

"If you refuse," he interrupted, "I search for this Monsieur Jacques Leblun. I say to him, 'Come with me, and I will show you the man you came here to seek.' Oh, I know, and he knows that I know! He watches me. He watches Marcel. What do you say, Christine? What have you to say to Chicot and to me?"

Her head dropped into her hands. "I cannot tell," she moaned. "I think you are cruel. I do not want to go away with you. I want to stay here."

"Want to stay here!" he echoed scornfully. "To stay here in this pall of smoke, under this gray sky, in this sad city! It is a disease, then, which bids you stay. It is not life, it is not freedom, it is not anything worth having. Tell me, Christine, will you come?"

She looked at him with the air of one who has made a resolution. "You ask me too suddenly, Ambrose," she said. "I cannot answer you. Give me a few hours, until morning, say, to think it over."

He rose from his chair. "Very well," he said, "I will give you until to-morrow. I cannot give you longer, for Marcel is in a strange way. He is half mad with drink and fear. I am afraid every moment that he will blurt out who he is and all he knows. There are spies around him at every corner, if he did but know it—spies, doubtless, of the great Jacques Leblun."

"Till to-morrow morning," Christine faltered. "Let me have till then, at least."

Chapter XXXI

Monsieur Jacques Leblun was comfortably ensconced in a large easy chair drawn up before the fire in the small smoking-room adjoining the bar of the Altona Hotel. He held in his hand several half sheets of paper, the contents of which he had been carefully reading, not, apparently, for the first time. One by one, as he had finished with them, he laid them on his knee, until at last the little pile was

complete. Then, with a faint sigh, which might have meant either satisfaction or despair, he tore them into small pieces, and threw them into the fire. From a case of curiously chased silver he selected a cigarette, lit it, and began to smoke, very slowly and very thoughtfully. His eyes, as usual, seemed half closed, certainly his head was turned away from both of the doors to the room, and yet, curiously enough, without turning his head or even looking away from the fire, he addressed the man who had entered from the hotel side and was making his way toward the door which communicated with the private suites of apartments.

"How do you do, Mr. Hannaway?" he said.

Gilbert Hannaway stopped short. He came slowly toward the fireplace, and for the first time recognized the little man in the easy chair. "Mr. Leblun!" he exclaimed.

Jacques Leblun nodded his head thoughtfully. "Come and sit down for a few minutes," he said. "You will take a drink with me, perhaps."

Gilbert Hannaway hesitated. Leblun turned toward him. His forehead was a little wrinkled. Even as he spoke he stifled a yawn.

"I am tired of your sad country, Mr. Hannaway," he said. "I have no friends here, and I am lonely. In Paris, at this hour, I would be sitting in the Café de la Paix, and friends would come and go all the time, friends with whom I speak for a moment, or only grasp their hands perhaps, or give them a cheerful salutation. But here I am alone, and I am a man who loves company. Remember l'entente cordiale. Be kind to the foreigner, forced to sojourn for a few days among your fogs. Take a chair here, and talk with me."

Gilbert Hannaway divested himself of his overcoat, and drew an easy chair up to Leblun's side. "I was on my way to my rooms," he said, "to indulge in the luxury, unknown in your cafés, of a cup of afternoon tea. If you will allow me I will take it with you. You have been destroying letters, I see. It is always rather a sad task."

Leblun smiled faintly. "There are things which are sadder," he answered, "and one of them is to have to admit failure in anything one undertakes. Personally," he continued, assuming a somewhat retrospective air, "I have not often had to confess myself beaten. This afternoon I am in that sad position. I think that before I go to bed to-night I shall ask that exceedingly assiduous waiter who ministers so cheerfully to our wants to bring me the Continental time-table. In short, I fear that there remains for me nothing but to look for a train back to my beloved Paris."

"You surprise me, Monsieur Leblun," Hannaway admitted, with impassive face. "Failure is a thing which one has not learned to associate with your name. Nevertheless, if what you say is really the truth, I do not doubt but that you have run up against a problem impossible of solution."

Once more Leblun sighed. His eyes were still fixed upon those smouldering pieces of paper. "Frankly, my dear Monsieur Hannaway," he said, "I believe that I have done all that an intelligent man could do. I have reconstructed my story. Listen to it for a moment with me. Ah! Your tea arrives, I see. I trust that you find it in order. Permit me to drink your health in another cup of coffee."

He paid the waiter, and in a few moments they were once more alone.

"I was speaking," Leblun continued, "of a reconstruction. All that is so simple. We see, flying from that scene of violence in the Place Noire a few years ago, three persons and a monkey. We see a man, the man whose identity we wish to solve,

clad in the garb of a workman, pushing a street-piano. Hastening along by his side, we see the hunchback, to whom that musical instrument belongs. On the other side of it walks a child—girl perhaps I should call her—who only a few weeks before had thrown in her lot with that dwarf, and was singing in the streets for her living. On the top of the piano, reclining in a basket, and rudely shaken, I fear, by the speed at which that barrow is being pushed, reposes the monkey Chicot. They turn the corner of the Place Noire, they are seen somewhere in the Rue Pigalle, there is a rumor that they pass through the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre. After that, silence. Space swallows them up. They are gone."

Leblun ceased with a little sigh. Hannaway produced his cigarette case.

"You smoke, I see," he remarked. "Permit me." He lit a cigarette, and leaned back in his chair.

"Circumstances, as you know," Leblun continued, "induced one to take once more an interest in that somewhat remarkable trio. One comes to London. One follows a fugitive, who should surely be as eager as I myself to discover these mysterious persons. The hunchback, well, that is easy. He reveals himself without the slightest trouble. One learns that from the moment he turned the corner of that square until to-day he has been to all appearances no better off for his little adventure. He has tramped the streets, he has thumped out his miserable attempt at music, he has lived and drunk and starved, being cold or warm according to the vagaries of that section of the public who are in the habit of dispensing copper coins to itinerant musicians. To conclude with the hunchback, it is only, curiously enough, this very day that a sudden change comes over him. This morning, at an early hour, he presents himself at various establishments devoted to the clothing of those who need their clothes quickly, and are not scrupulously particular as to fit. In other words, early this morning our friend Ambrose Drake, with money in both pockets, throws aside his rags, purchases for himself the outfit of a gentleman at large, saunters through the streets respectably attired, a new hat on his head, new gloves in his hand, new boots on his feet, new clothing to the last stitch on his body. Attired in such a fashion, he sallies out to pay a call upon a young lady."

Gilbert Hannaway turned his head slowly. It was not long since he had left Christine. This man was indeed wonderful.

"So much for the hunchback," Leblun continued. "Of the mysterious stranger, alas! one learns nothing. Indeed he seems to have vanished into space. The monkey, I rejoice to say, flourishes, and from the fact that he ate a hearty meal after his master's assumption of the garb of respectability we will conclude that his future is assured. We come to the girl."

Once more Hannaway, who had resolved not to open his lips until his companion had finished, stole a glance at him. There was no increase of animation in Leblun's manner. He still leaned back in his chair, watching the blue smoke of his somewhat odoriferous cigarette.

"Here," Leblun continued, "we must permit to ourselves the license of a little imagination. We learn that for years the girl and the hunchback tramped side by side along the highways and the byways of the Continent. They tramped through France, they tramped through Germany, they were heard of, even, in that home of all mendicants—the north of Italy. Then at last, not so long ago, they came to

England. One hears of them in London. Things, apparently, have not gone well with them. Ambrose is in rags. The girl walks as one whose interest in life is finished, in soiled clothes, in gaping boots, broken-spirited, broken-hearted. And then, one day, presto, the magician's wand! One looks again. One sees the girl in a handsome apartment, with carriages and motors, with her own French maid, clad in furs and silks and laces, a customer at the best shops, a person with apparently a limitless purse. The hunchback's days of prosperity have not yet come. Still he tramps the gutters. The mud from the wheels of his quondam companion's motor splashes him as he makes sad music in the forlorn streets. One asks oneself, whence her prosperity?"

Leblun looked down from the ceiling. He seemed to have fixed his attention upon one particular scrap of smouldering paper.

"One is not kept long in doubt," he went on. "One hears of the visits at her apartment of a mysterious gentleman. She is seen with him at luncheons and dinners. There is even talk of a trip to Paris. The truth is very soon apparent. How she first attracted him one cannot tell. She has her share of good looks. It may even have been pity which first attracted his notice. But we are able to assure ourselves with every certainty that the singing girl Christine has become the mistress of the Marquis of Ellingham."

"It is a damned lie!" Hannaway thundered out.

Leblun turned his head, turned it as swiftly as the head of a mechanical toy. His hand flashed out. He was suddenly alert. "Then why," he asked, "is she living upon the Marquis of Ellingham's money? Tell me that. You say that she is not his mistress, and you say it with conviction. Then what remains?"

Chapter XXXII

The two men sat looking at each other for several breathless seconds. Hannaway felt all the angry impotence of a man caught in a trap. His face was still being raked by Leblun's merciless eyes. He had betrayed the secret which he was so anxious to guard. Leblun had played with him as with a child.

"So you deny my very natural inference?" Leblun said, breaking the silence at last. "You believe that Mademoiselle de Lanson has some other claim upon Lord Effingham? It may be so. You may be right, my friend."

"I know nothing of the matter," Hannaway said slowly. "It was foolish of me to discuss it with you."

Leblun shrugged his shoulders. "Between comrades," he said, "what does it matter? To talk is always interesting. It would astonish you to know it, my dear friend, but I am not at all sure that you have not supplied me with the missing clue. By the by, have you any acquaintance with Lord Ellingham?"

"None," Hannaway answered briefly.

"A very interesting personality," Leblun said. "I read his speeches always. A friend of France, too. It would be interesting to meet him."

Hannaway rose to his feet. “Mr. Leblun,” he said, “I will wish you good afternoon.”

“If you must go,” Leblun remarked.

Hannaway left the room, made a circuit of the building, and issued again into the courtyard. He called a hansom, and was driven at once to Cavendish Square. The majordomo of the household came forward to answer his eager inquiries. The marquis was not at home. He had lunched out. He was probably now at his club, or on his way down to the House.

Hannaway stepped back into his hansom, and drove to Pall Mall. The doorkeeper of the very exclusive club to which Lord Ellingham belonged showed him into a waiting-room.

“Any card, sir?” he asked. “His lordship is in the reading-room, I believe.”

“I have no card,” Hannaway answered, “but if you will tell Lord Ellingham that my name is Hannaway, and that I wish to see him on very important business, I think he will come.”

Hannaway was left alone for almost ten minutes. He smoked one of the cigarettes with which the room was lavishly supplied, took up the papers one by one, and threw them down. Christine would never forgive him, he was sure of that. It was he who had betrayed this man. Fool that he was, to have measured his wits for one second against the wits of Jacques Leblun!

Lord Ellingham came in at last. His manner was perfectly composed, and he showed no signs of hurry. Hannaway looked at him in admiration. The man must know that he was living on the brink of a volcano. Neither his face nor his manner showed any signs of it. He greeted his visitor civilly, but without enthusiasm, and waited to hear what he had to say.

“I have come,” Hannaway said quietly, “because I think you ought to be told of the presence in this country of a man named Jacques Leblun, and also the reason for his presence.”

“I am perfectly well aware of it,” the marquis answered. “At the same time, I shall be happy to hear what you have to say.”

“We need not play with words,” Hannaway said. “We both know a little. We can both assume a little. Leblun came here to discover the man who escaped from the Place Noire on the night of the raid. You were that man, Lord Ellingham. It is you for whom Jacques Leblun is searching.”

Lord Ellingham stood quite still. He made no sign. His cheeks, indeed, had no color to lose. “Well,” he asked quietly, “have you come here to tell me that? Or have you come here to tell me that you have already told Leblun?”

“I had no thought of anything of the kind,” Hannaway exclaimed hastily. “But I want to explain to you something that has happened. Leblun laid a trap for me, and I fell into it. He spoke of Mademoiselle de Lanson. He spoke of her as a beggar, and he spoke of her life to-day. He smiled—an irritating, maddening smile. Mademoiselle de Lanson had done well for herself, she had for her lover the Marquis of Ellingham! He said this with his eyes watching my face. I told him that he lied. I was a fool—it was so obvious a trick. And when I flung the lie in his teeth all that he did was to smile. Then why, he asked, does the money of the Marquis of Ellingham provide luxury for Mademoiselle de Lanson? I could not answer. He knew that I could not answer.”

Lord Ellingham was silent for several moments. “I wonder,” he remarked, “how he ever got hold of my name at all?”

“He traced Christine,” Hannaway said. “Then, of course, he searched for the explanation of her altered circumstances. His inquiries led him to you. Perhaps he was not absolutely certain that his explanation was not really the truth. At any rate, he tried it on me, and I fell.”

“Does Mademoiselle de Lanson know this?” the marquis asked.

“She does not, as yet,” Hannaway answered.

“Keep it to yourself,” the marquis ordered. “Leblun may come and see me. At any rate, I shall be prepared.”

He looked at his visitor as though expecting him to go. Hannaway hesitated.

“If I could be of any assistance, Lord Ellingham,” he suggested, almost timidly.

Lord Ellingham shook his head. His face showed no signs of fear, or emotion of any sort. “Pray do not disturb yourself, Mr. Hannaway,” he said. “I need not, I know, mince words with you. If this thing has to come, I must meet it. Afterward—well, it doesn’t much matter. You will excuse me, I am sure. It is more than time that I was on my way down to the House.”

* * * * *

The marquis, as was his daily custom, walked from his club toward the Houses of Parliament. Acquaintances whom he met, and whom he unfailingly recognized, noticed nothing altered in his demeanor, except, perhaps, a slightly added graciousness, a smile more noticeable than usual. Yet, indeed, he walked very much like a man in a dream. All the time that one terrible question seemed to be ringing in his ears. When would it be? How soon would the blow fall? Would he be allowed to reach the House, to make his speech, to take up the cudgels once more on behalf of his hard-pressed party? How soon? he asked himself. Would he be allowed to return home? Would he see his wife again? His face grew gray, and his lips quivered, as he thought for a moment of the shock this thing would be to her. There was no way to avoid it now. Leblun was on his track. Nothing in the world, to a past master like Leblun, was so easy as to bridge over the years, to trace his career back, step by step, to that terrible night when he fled from the Place Noire. He had no defense, there was no hole for escape. He was guilty. He was the man who should have suffered in prison, as Marcel had suffered. He was the man, indeed, whom the authorities had thought they were punishing. There was no hope, he told himself; nothing to do but to keep a brave face to the world, and perhaps—But that he must think of more seriously. The ethics of suicide had always interested him. Surely, if any one was justified in escaping from life, he was.

A beggar with a tray of matches touched him upon the arm. “Only one penny a box, sir. Buy a box, guvnor.”

The marquis shook his head. The man still kept his place. They were passing a four-wheel cab, drawn up against the curb. The beggar leaned over his tray. “Step into that cab for one moment, sir,” he muttered under his breath. “It is Marcel who waits for you there.”

The man glided away. Lord Ellingham turned involuntarily toward the cab drawn up against the curb. Inside was a furtive figure with black-rimmed eyes and

ghastly face. It was Marcel, hiding among the cushions, afraid to look out, and yet eager to attract his attention. Lord Ellingham paused. After a moment's hesitation he crossed the pavement and stepped into the cab.

Chapter XXXIII

There was a change in Marcel which Lord Ellingham, surveying him critically, found somewhat surprising. He was well dressed, although the clothes were ready-made, and a certain elegance of bearing, for which in the old days he had been distinguished, had reasserted itself. He was clean-shaven, his hair was cut, and even his nails had been manicured. He was conscious of his companion's somewhat surprised scrutiny, and his lips parted in a slight smile.

"My consideration for you, dear friend," he said, "has led me to take this unusual care with my person. I have decided to forget the untoward events of the last few days. I have decided to believe that I am free from pursuit, and that I am now *tête-à-tête* with a generous friend. It is the the optimism of my race, you see—a quality worth cultivating."

"I congratulate you," Lord Ellingham said dryly. "I do not exactly know why I accepted your pressing invitation, but since I am here, perhaps you will tell me why you extended it to me."

"Willingly," Marcel answered.. "This man is going to drive us slowly along the Embankment. I have engaged him for half an hour. A portion of the time has elapsed already. First, then, I want to tell you that we have failed to discover those four million francs, or any trace of them."

"You and Pierre?" Lord Ellingham remarked quietly.

Marcel looked at him swiftly. "Pierre and I," he repeated. "The money is not in the place where it was hidden. The hunchback we find still a beggar upon the streets. The girl alone seems to have prospered."

"From which you conclude?" Lord Ellingham asked.

"It is the girl who found the money," Marcel declared. "Listen. There is another reason for believing this. Anatoile—you remember Anatoile—he too knew of the four million francs. To whom did he go? He did not come to you. He did not waste time with the hunchback. He went to the girl, and in her rooms he was found murdered."

Lord Ellingham frowned slightly. "I am perfectly convinced," he said, "that the girl knows nothing of the four million francs."

Marcel laughed hardly. "My friend," he said, "you were always easily deceived by women. Christine's mother twisted you round her little finger. Christine herself, I have no doubt, could do the same. How else do you suppose that she lives in luxury, drives in carriages, wears a string of pearls, lives, in short, as a lady of wealth? Of course there is another way."

Lord Ellingham stopped him. "You forget," he said, "that Christine is my stepdaughter. She lives on an allowance from me."

Marcel laughed once more. “My dear Marquis,” he said, “that may be, or it may not be. Who cares? Money I must have, not a little money, but a great deal. I want my share of that four million francs. I want it either from you or from her.”

“Neither of us,” the marquis declared, “knows anything whatever of the money you speak of.”

Marcel shrugged his shoulders. “I repeat,” he said, “that there are four million francs to be accounted for. I hold you and her responsible. Half of that sum I demand. I demand it from you, and if you refuse it me I shall demand it from her. If you both refuse, if I see no chance of getting it, then I will earn my pardon. I will seek for Mr. Jacques Leblun. I will say to him: ‘Here is the man who can solve for you the mystery of that house in the Place Noire. I will prove to you that what I said when I was on trial was the truth. Come with me, and I will show you the man who should have stood by my side in the dock.”’

Lord Ellingham was thoughtful. He looked out of the window at the great sluggish river. “I am not sure,” he said, “whether it would pay me to buy your silence. There is the hunchback too, who knows. He is a strange creature, and I think he has no love for me. Besides, between ourselves, I fancy that my time is nearly up. Leblun is in this country even now, and I think he means to know the truth.”

Marcel’s thin lips parted, showing his white teeth. It was a snarl of fear, of angry fear. “Leblun here!” he muttered. “If so, he came after me.”

“In any case,” the marquis continued, “I do not see why I should beggar myself for nothing. I have had some years of life, life that has been worth living. I think that I may as well make my bow to fate as gracefully as possible.”

“You talk like a fool,” Marcel declared. “You are in no real danger at all. There is no reason why you should not remain unsuspected all your days. The hunchback amounts to nothing. He is half mad, drunk most of the time. He counts for nothing. The girl will not betray you. There is no one else. Let me tell you, life in prison is a horrible thing. The cells, oh, my God! There are no words to describe them. It is a life for vermin, not for men.”

“I have not the slightest intention,” the marquis said, “of experiencing it. There are other ways.”

Marcel shrugged his shoulders. “Death!” he said.

“One speaks of it easily enough, but, after all, it is the end. I have held a revolver against my own temple, but the thought of the black gulf will make one’s hand tremble a little, my friend. One sees so quickly, one sees so much,” he added, leaning a little forward. “All the past horrors seem to loom up. All the dead men one has ever caught a glimpse of seem to lie, cold and ugly, before one’s vision. No more the wine, the kisses, and the sunshine, the flow of life in one’s veins. Death! Extinction! Ah!”

His face was gray with fear. His companion looked at him curiously.

“Prison life,” he said calmly, “has shaken your nerve, my dear Marcel.”

“We talk like children,” Marcel declared suddenly. “I am not here to play with words. Will you give me money, or will you not?”

“I will not,” the marquis answered. “If I gave you any sum that I could afford, you would be back for more the moment it was spent. If I treat with you at all I hang a millstone around my own neck. I have burned my bridges. I have nothing

to do with the past. I do not remember the house in the Place Noire, and you, you are a stranger. Tell your story to whom you please. My mind is made up."

"You are not serious?" Marcel whispered hoarsely.

"I am entirely serious," Lord Ellingham answered. "I owe you nothing. There was never any comradeship between us. You were a bad lot from first to last. You ruined the life of the poor woman I was beguiled into marrying. I had courage, which you had not, but it was you who were responsible for all the wickedness, the real treacherous wickedness, which went on in that cursed house. I hated you then. I despise you now. Go to the first policeman you find. Tell him all you know. I am ready to meet whatever Fate may have in store for me, at any time. Permit me," he added, letting down the window. "I am going to tell the cabman to stop."

Marcel sprang at him, but Lord Ellingham easily threw him away. Then, of its own accord, the cab stopped. The door was thrown open. Marcel glared wildly out.

"Where are we?" he exclaimed.

Lord Ellingham stepped from the cab and looked around him. Five or six policemen were close at hand Two inspectors were on either side of the vehicle. They were drawn up before a gray stone building.

"Why, I believe," Lord Ellingham remarked, looking around him, "that this is Scotland Yard."

Marcel was speechless for a moment. He allowed himself to be led from the cab. Before he realized what had happened handcuffs were upon his wrists, he was being led into the building. Suddenly he stopped.

"This is your doing," he shrieked, turning to Lord Ellingham. "This is a trap."

Lord Ellingham shook his head. "I can assure you," he remarked pleasantly, "that I had not the faintest idea where we were."

"I am arrested, am I?" Marcel cried out. "Then arrest him too," he added, pointing to where Lord Ellingham stood, calm and unruffled. "He may call himself what he chooses now, but five years ago he was a very different person. He is the man who escaped from the Place Noire with the hunchback and the girl. He was one of us, the boldest of us all. If I am to be taken back again he shall come too."

They tried to drag him away, but he protested, shrieking, and trying to throw himself at Lord Ellingham.

"Don't you hear me?" he cried. "This is the truth I am telling you. The truth, I swear it! Don't let him go."

The marquis turned to the chief inspector, who at once raised his hat. "I presume, Inspector," he said, "that my being found in company with this person does not render me liable to arrest? I certainly did know him in Paris years ago. He is the Vicomte de Neuilly, and in those days he was a person whom every one knew. He came to me to-day with a pitiable story, and I was induced to listen to him. If I am required for any purpose you will know where to find me."

"Certainly, my lord," the man answered. "Will you allow one of my men to fetch you a hansom? He is a bad lot, I am afraid," he added, motioning with his head to where at last Marcel was being dragged away. "I did hear, though, that he had been a gentleman once."

A hansom drove up, and Lord Ellingham stepped in. "The House of Lords," he directed. "I am a little late. Please hurry."

Chapter XXXIV

The marchioness, who was spending a dull evening at a very large reception, welcomed her husband with a brilliant smile. “Positively, my dear Francis,” she declared, abruptly dismissing the little man who had been her escort, “you are the only reasonable person I have seen for hours. I never have been so bored. Why you have come, I cannot imagine, but since you are here, please take me away.”

“Exactly what I came to do,” he answered, smiling.

“It was nice of you,” she murmured. “There are two more places I ought to look in at before I go home, but I don’t feel in the least sociable. It is shockingly early, though, isn’t it?”

“It is scarcely past eleven o’clock,” the marquis answered.

“We must do something,” she declared. “It is too absurd to go home.”

He handed her down the broad steps, and a footman called their carriage.

“I have an idea,” he said. “Let us go to one of the large supper restaurants.”

“Delightful!” she exclaimed. “I have been wanting to go to the Altona for supper. I nearly went with Lord Hardington the other night. It will be far more piquant, dear, to go with you.”

They carried out their program faithfully. It was not until they were seated at a small round table in a comfortable corner of the great restaurant and were watching, the marchioness with some amazement, the throngs of people who streamed in that she noticed anything unusual in his manner.

“Why, my dear Francis,” she said, “you are not well to-night. Your face looks drawn, and your eyes are feverish. Did things go wrong in the House?”

“Things went well enough,” he answered. “I am a little bothered, but it is a matter which has nothing to do with politics.”

“I am sorry,” she answered. “Can you tell me about it?”

He shook his head. “It is not worth while,” he said. “It is one of those little storms that sometimes blow across one’s life. They look formidable enough when the clouds are gathering, but they pass—oh, yes, they pass.”

She leaned across the table and laid her fingers upon his arm. “Yet to-night,” she said, “I do not seem to understand you. I seem to feel a long way off.”

“Perhaps,” he said, “it is because I, too, have been in a distant country. One’s thoughts play the truant in a strange manner sometimes. To-night, when I was sitting in my place, waiting to speak, instead of collecting my ideas on the subject of Morocco, I found myself thinking of the days when you and I were boy and girl together.”

“It is a long time ago,” she murmured.

“It is not so very long,” he answered; “not so long, indeed, but that sometimes the very days themselves seem to stand out, easily recognizable, even through the tangle of years. I remember the day when your father told me that the fourth son of an impecunious peer, penniless, and with none too good a reputation, was no match for his daughter. I remember our last walk together across the park and up the Beacon; a clear October evening it was, with a snap in the air and a sky like

crystal, a sky full of strange lights. We walked down the broad green path hand in hand, and the lights began to break out like little points of twinkling stars in the valley below. Your house, too, was all ablaze. Do you remember? It was the night they were expecting the man to whom you were to be married."

"I remember," she answered, a little sadly.

"I remember the day I left England," he went on. "I was a little desperate just then, Margaret. I could not see into the future. I did not know that if I had only been content to wait my time would come."

She touched his hand for a moment. "It has come," she murmured.

"Yes, it has come," he answered, but without a smile, without any change in the settled gravity of his features. "It has come, but a little late, Margaret. I did not know then, or I should have left England in a different spirit. I should have left undone," he added, with a sudden bitter note in his low tones, "I should have left undone many things. I lived a bad life, Margaret, in those days."

"Don't!" she begged. "I do not want to hear about them. You were badly treated. You were disappointed. I think you were a little in love with me. What you did is wiped out. Think of it no more, please."

"There are stains," he answered, "which nothing can wipe out. No," he added hastily, "don't think that I am suffering from the pangs of a troublesome conscience. It is not that. But sometimes, Margaret, even the events themselves rise up and stretch out their hands toward my throat."

She set down her glass and looked at him fixedly. "Something has happened," she whispered.

"Dear Margaret," he answered, "something may happen."

Neither of them spoke for several moments. People were passing their table. An officious maître d'hôtel wag at his elbow with suggestions. They were both people with all the self-control of their order, a self-control which had become a habit of their lives. She looked around and criticized, kindly but humorously, some of their neighbors. She spoke of the music, the decorations, the perfume of the flowers. They were to all appearances a couple like all those others, well-bred, appreciative, interested, and yet a trifle bored. When they were alone, however, she leaned a little forward.

"What is it, Francis?" she asked.

"In Paris," he answered slowly, "I had friends who were criminals. I was a criminal myself."

She laughed. "We all are," she answered. "There is not a day that every one of us, in our thoughts, if not in our actions, does not offend against that marvelous code of laws by which we are surrounded."

He nodded. "Some of us," he said, "escape. I have escaped until now. I want to prepare you just a little, Margaret. There is a chance that one of those ugly chapters may be reopened. There is a man in this country who is determined to bring home to me a deed, or a series of deeds, rather, for which I was certainly jointly responsible with others, and which were certainly offenses against the laws."

"You are sure," she asked, "that it is not some one who is trying to blackmail you?"

“I am sure,” he answered. “The man is above that. He is not to be bought. They say he is the cleverest detective in France. If so, he can scarcely fail to find me out.”

She was not in the least daunted. She raised her glass and drank to him with a little nod. “My dear Francis,” she said, “there are hundreds of people who go through life with some such shadow dogging their footsteps. It always seems worse than it really is. Take my advice. Refuse to believe in it, refuse to believe that fate could be so cruel. At any rate, there is no need to poison the days or the hours that lie between. Forget it for a little while, at least. If it comes—well, we will meet it hand in hand. Our life is sometimes almost too absorbing. Let us try to forget that you are a great politician, a peer of England, and that I am your wife and a person of consequence in society. Then if it comes we can be primitive. We are man and woman together. We can at least be as brave as those others underneath.”

He looked’ at her for several moments, and there was something in his eyes which brought the color to her cheeks, something which he never attempted to translate into words. He felt his heart beating with a new vigor. The shadows which had been leaning over him suddenly melted away. The courage of his race—he had always had more than his share—reasserted itself. They talked for half an hour or more, but gaily, and as two people to whom the world is still an enchanted garden. And when they sat in their carriage, on their way back to Cavendish Square, his arm went around her waist and her lips sought his.

“I wonder,” she whispered, “why you did not take me straight home to-night? We could have talked there.”

He smiled at the recollection. “My dear Margaret,” he said, “I was a slave to my fears. I was afraid of finding some one waiting there for me.”

“Foolish!” she murmured.

He opened the door of the house in Cavendish Square with his own latch-key. The lights were burning dimly in the hall, for it was almost one o’clock, but the hall-porter, who was still up, came hurrying to meet them.

“Any letters or telegrams, Jameson?” the marquis asked, as he suffered himself to be divested of his overcoat.

“There are none which Mr. Penton has not attended to, my lord,” was the respectful answer. “Only, about two hours ago, a gentleman called to see you. He said that his business was very important, and he has been allowed to wait for your coming.”

The marquis did not answer for a moment. He was straightening his tie, which had been momentarily disarranged, and he turned away from the mirror with a smile. “Well,” he said, “I do not know who my late visitor may be, but I shall have an excuse for a cigarette. Our little supper was so delightful,” he added, “that I forgot even to smoke. Where is this person, Jameson?” he asked, turning to the man.

“I showed him into the library, sir,” the man answered. The marquis turned to escort his wife to the foot of the stairs. She shook her head.

“Why, no,” she said. “I am not in the least sleepy. If you do not mind I will come and help you interview your late caller. I don’t suppose his business is particularly private.”

The marquis stood still for a moment. Then, with a little acquiescent bow, he motioned for her to precede him toward the door which the man was already opening.

Chapter XXXV

The man who had been waiting rose with a little gesture of relief as the door was thrown open. He looked with some surprise toward the marchioness. The marquis was silent for a moment. This was not the man he had expected to see. It was necessary for him to rearrange his ideas.

Gilbert Hannaway bowed, and turned toward him. “I hope you will pardon the liberty I have taken, Lord Ellingham,” he said, “in awaiting your return. I wished to see you upon a matter which is of great importance to me, and I ventured to hope that you would give me a few minutes of your time at once, if possible.”

Lord Ellingham was acquiescent, almost urbane.

“I shall be very glad to hear what you have to say, Mr. Hannaway,” he said. “Permit me,” he added, turning toward his wife, “to present to you this gentleman. It is Mr. Gilbert Hannaway—the Marchioness of Ellingham.”

Hannaway bowed low. “I must apologize again, Lady Ellingham,” he said, “for disturbing your husband so late. If you can spare him to me for a few minutes, though, I shall be very glad. I wish to consult him about a somewhat important matter.”

The marchioness smiled pleasantly. “Please don’t mind me a bit,” she said. “I am going to sit over there in the easy-chair and—I hope you won’t mind—smoke a cigarette.”

Gilbert Hannaway looked from the marquis to his wife in some embarrassment. “If I may say so,” he began, “the business which I have with you, Lord Ellingham, is of a private nature.”

“Mr. Hannaway,” the marquis said, “I have no secrets from my wife. Every word which you could possibly say to me, connected with any subject whatever, I should even prefer you to say before her. I have great confidence in my wife’s judgment.”

The marchioness smiled. “My husband,” she said, “has been indulging in a little retrospection this evening. I am quite sure that he would like me to hear anything that you may have to say. And so far as you are concerned, I can assure you that I am a most discreet person.”

Hannaway bowed. “If it is your wish, Lord Ellingham,” he said gravely, “there is no reason why I should not say what is in my mind before your wife. I have come to make something which to you may sound like an appeal. I have come at this hour of the night because there is very little time to spare.”

The marquis seated himself in an easy chair, opposite to his wife, and placed one for Hannaway between the two. “Go on,” he said. “You are sure that you will not smoke?”

Hannaway shook his head. “Not at present, thank you,” he answered. “I want to talk to you, Lord Ellingham, about something which happened in Paris nearly five years ago.”

“I imagined so,” the marquis murmured.

“It is very largely a personal matter, after all,” Hannaway continued, “which has brought me here. In those days I was a young man, with a love of adventure which led me into strange places more than once. It was this love of adventure which made me an habitui of the night cafés in Paris, and a visitor at a certain house in the Place Noire, where I met you, Lord Ellingham, more than once.”

Lord Ellingham nodded. “Go on,” he said.

“I am not here,” Hannaway continued earnestly, “to speak of the things which went on in that house. They do not concern my present mission at all. It used to amuse me to imagine myself an inspired solver of mysteries. I used to like to set myself imaginary tasks, to trace down imaginary criminals. It was only the outcome of my natural love of adventure; the fancy or hobby, or whatever you like to call it, passed away. I am not here to-night to pose as a person who by chance has stumbled across a secret.”

The marquis raised his eyebrows. “No?” he asked politely. “You are aware, of course, that there is one close at hand?”

“I am aware of it, Lord Ellingham,” Hannaway answered. “It is not my business. I am here neither to warn nor to intimidate you. I am here to crave a favor.”

The marchioness leaned a little forward in her chair.

“A favor?” her husband repeated, with knitted eyebrows. “I do not quite understand.”

“I was young in those days, and I think I have told you that I had romantic impulses,” Hannaway continued. “There was a girl—she was little more than a child—who when I first knew it was an inmate of the house in the Place Noire. For some reason, I am not sure why, but I think I can guess, she left it. She left it, penniless, except for a generous gift from you. She left it, I know, against your will, but feeling that from you, at any rate, she had never met with anything but kindness. I used to watch her. I used to wonder what attraction there was in her somber dark eyes and her somewhat sullen bearing. But there was an attraction. Other people, as you know, felt it. She left that house—it was as well for her that she did—and she sang in the streets with a hunchback who came from the village where she was born, who had followed her to Paris, and who seems all his life to have borne for her a wonderful affection. I saw them occasionally in Paris. I often tried to renew my acquaintance with the girl. Always she was cold and distant. She seemed to have become imbibed with a great and ever-present distrust of my sex. Then came that fatal night when the police made their raid upon the house in the Place Noire. She and the hunchback were there, outside. He had many strange friends, and he had heard of what was coming. They had hastened up at the bidding of the Vicomte de Neuilly—the man Marcel, as he is now called—the girl’s uncle. There was some scheme by means of which he was to escape with them. You managed somehow to take his place. Sheltered by their presence, wheeling, in fact, their piano, you escaped. You passed down the little cobbled hill which led from the Place Noire, and you passed also out of that life. No one can be more sorry than I, Lord Ellingham, that you did not pass out of it forever.”

Illustration:
„I am not here to-night to pose as a person who by chance has stumbled across a secret.“

“I am very much interested,” Lord Ellingham murmured. “Please continue. If you had told me that you had come once more to warn me I could have understood your presence. But a favor?”

“I am coming to that,” Gilbert Hannaway continued. “I was wounded that night, as perhaps you know, and it was some months before I was able to get about again. All the time I found myself thinking of that girl with the dark eyes and the strange, sad little face. When I was well I set myself to find them, and I failed. They were not in Paris; they were not in any of the cities where I sought for them. In whatever city I chanced to be I looked for them. At night in my rooms, if I heard a piano in the streets, I hurried to the window. It was always the same—failure. I did not see the girl again until a few months ago.”

“In London?” the marquis asked.

“In London,” Hannaway assented. “I looked down from my rooms in the Altona Hotel, and I saw a melancholy trio in the passage below. I saw a hunchback thumping out miserable music, and I saw a girl standing with her hands behind her back, singing with lifeless despair. I was out there in a moment. It was they. The girl at first did not recognize me. She was still the same, inaccessible, only to me far more fascinating. I felt my heart beat with a return of all the emotion which I had felt years before. I knew that I had never forgotten her; she seemed somehow to have become a part of my life. As I talked to her I felt years younger; I felt again that the world of romance was a real pulsating thing. I made myself known, and for some reason or other she was alarmed. They tried to escape; I persisted, the hunchback stole round behind and struck me on the head. I was giddy for a few moments, and when I came to they had disappeared.”

“Since then,” the marquis remarked, “I suppose you have met the young lady more frequently?”

“I saw her twice again,” Hannaway answered, “and then she disappeared with you in a carriage at Victoria Station. A few days later we came back from Paris on the same steamer. She was no longer a street singer. She was a creature of another world, the world to which I had felt all the time that she belonged. I made her acquaintance by chance. Since then there is a considerable interval which I need not enlarge upon, because the facts are known, Lord Ellingham, to both of us. I discovered that the girl was your stepdaughter; that you had married her mother, Madame de Lanson, in Paris; that she was, indeed, the daughter of the woman who died in the house at the Place Noire a few weeks before the raid.”

The marchioness shivered a little, but she did not speak. The marquis turned his head and looked toward her. She smiled, and nodded back at him.

“The girl is your stepdaughter,” Hannaway continued, “and directly you found her out, or rather she found you out, you of course provided for her. I had hoped that before now she would have become my wife.”

The marquis raised his eyebrows. The corners of his mouth twitched with a faint smile. “My dear Mr. Hannaway,” he said, “if the favor which you are going to ask of

me, is my permission to pay your addresses to my stepdaughter, I can assure you that in all such matters her wishes are entirely mine."

Hannaway held out his hand. "Lord Ellingham," he said, "it is not so simple a matter. You remember the hunchback of whom we have spoken?"

"Quite well," Lord Ellingham answered.

"His devotion to Christine," Hannaway said, "seems to be one of those strange and unaccountable passions which people who are in any way unusual, mentally or physically, seem to be most capable of. Practically since his boyhood he has given his life for her. He has kept her from want when he himself has been near starvation."

"I appreciate all that," the marquis said, interrupting. "I will tell you something. So fearful was he lest they should be separated that he came to warn me that she was in England searching for me. I was, in fact, on the point of leaving England, when some other person brought us together."

"It was I," Hannaway admitted. "I knew for whom she was searching, and I told her. You will not blame me for that? There was no reason why I should not. Your secret I was guarding, although there was no reason whatever why I should not have cried out to the world that the Marquis of Ellingham had once been an habitui of a house of very evil repute, in a low quarter of Paris. I did not do that. I had no thought of doing it. I was even glad that you had been able to re-establish yourself in the world. Never a whisper passed my lips of the things I knew, nor did I in any way bring myself to your notice."

"It is quite true," the marquis admitted.

"But with the girl it was different," Hannaway continued. "I saw her in want. I knew that she would never take anything from me. Naturally, having it in my power, I showed her how to find you."

"I have no word of complaint against your behavior, Mr. Hannaway," the marquis said. "In fact, you have shown a considerable amount of forbearance."

"I want to return to the subject of the hunchback and his devotion," Hannaway continued. "What he suffered after their separation I can only imagine. Christine herself was a little cruel, but even when she did offer him the means to leave his miserable life he refused almost fiercely. Still he played his piano and dragged himself about London, living God knows how. All the time he was watching her. All the time, I fancy, things were smoldering in his mind. One knows nothing. One cannot even guess what such things may mean," he continued, dropping his voice a little, "but Anatoile, the Frenchman, who came over most surely to rob her, was found dead in her rooms, and I alone know—a knowledge I have never shared with a single person—that that night Ambrose played his piano outside. I am very sure that he has been in communication with the other Frenchmen, Marcel and Pierre. All the time there has been something in his mind. He had given his life for Christine. In a way it was an epic. He had asked for nothing from her save her presence. She was not even kind to him. His life was one unending sacrifice for her. When she left him, do you think that a creature like that would accept his fate?"

Hannaway paused. His listeners leaned a little forward. Both seemed deeply interested.

“What can he do?” the marquis asked. “If he refuses money from Christine, and she has money to give him if he will accept it, what else can he ask?”

“I have come to tell you what he does ask,” Hannaway said. “Only yesterday he came to Christine. He was dressed in new clothes. His piano he declared was smashed. He had been left a great sum of money. He announced himself a rich man. Then the things which had been smoldering in his mind broke forth. He told her that there was no life for him in which she did not share. He told her that he had solved the mystery of the man who escaped from the house in the Place Noire. He told her that it was you—you, for whom Christine has a deep and constant affection at which I never guessed. He told her that unless she would consent to come back to him on any terms—to treat him like a dog if she wished, but to let him see her day by day—he would go to-morrow to Jacques Leblun, who is here in London, and tell him the truth.”

There was silence for several moments. The marquis seemed wrapped in thought. His wife was watching him earnestly.

“This money,” Lord Ellingham said, “where did it come from?”

Hannaway shook his head. “I have no idea,” he said.

“I think,” the marquis said, “that I can tell you. I think that it represents a sum of four million francs, which Marcel believed that I had.”

“Four million francs?” Hannaway repeated.

The marquis nodded. “It was hidden in the piano that night,” he said. “Marcel hid it there when he planned to escape.”

Chapter XXXVI

“Marcel,” the marquis said thoughtfully, “was arrested to- night. Pierre and Anatoile are dead. There is no one else left. Now, Mr. Hannaway,” he added in an altered tone, “we come to the favor which you crave from me. Continue, if you please.”

ristine,” Hannaway said, “is leaving on the nine o’clock train to-morrow. She is going away with Ambrose, thinking that by doing so she will save you. I am very sorry, Lord Ellingham, but in that she is mistaken. Nothing that Ambrose could say or do would affect your future. Leblun is here, and I am confident that he knows.”

For the first time the marchioness allowed a little exclamation to break from her lips. She recovered herself almost directly, and looked anxiously across at her husband.

“Leblun knows?” he repeated. “You are sure?”

“There is no doubt about it,” Hannaway answered. “I told you this afternoon of the trap into which I had fallen. The very fact that he mentioned your name showed clearly enough what was in his mind. Lord Ellingham, your stepdaughter’s self-sacrifice would be absolutely unavailing. Will you not intervene and save her?”

The marquis glanced at the clock. Hannaway shook his head.

“She has left her rooms and gone to a hotel, so as to avoid me,” he said. “Her maid would not tell me where, but after nearly an hour’s persuasion I got her to tell me that she was to meet her mistress at Victoria for the nine o’clock train to-morrow morning.”

“I will be there,” the marquis answered.

“We will both be there,” his wife echoed.

Hannaway looked from one to the other. A sudden wave of pity swept over him. “You are very good,” he said simply. “Lord Ellingham,” he added, rising to his feet, “I need not say that if there is a single thing which I can do to help I am entirely at your service. If you would like me to go to Leblun—”

The marquis shook his head. “I think,” he said, “that we had better let events take their course. I am, of course, responsible for some portion of the misdeeds that were planned in that house, and if justice demands it I must answer for them. Are you quite sure, Mr. Hannaway, that you won’t have a cigarette before you go?”

Hannaway accepted one simply because he was reluctant to leave.

“You will be at the station to-morrow morning?” the marquis asked.

“I shall,” Hannaway answered. “I was going there to do what I could to prevent her from going.”

“She shall not go, I promise you that,” the marquis said, smiling. “A very devoted person, the hunchback, no doubt, but a dangerous creature to be the owner of four million francs. He would lose his head at once. Whatever happens, they must not be allowed to leave London together. Good night, Mr. Hannaway.”

The marquis had touched the bell, and a servant was waiting to show his guest out. Hannaway made his adieu and left, wholly unable to realize the success of his mission. The marchioness had given him her fingers and a very gracious smile. Lord Ellingham had bidden him good night with the utmost good-will. There was not a sign of tragedy in either of their faces. And less than a mile away Jacques Leblun was already crouching for the spring!

* * * * *

Christine, almost invisible beneath a heavy black traveling- veil, came hurriedly along the platform, followed by her maid. In front of the open carriage-door stood Ambrose, moody and perturbed; yet underneath his darkened face some other part of the man seemed suddenly on fire. He had lost that look of tender humility which had always shone in his eyes as he followed her every movement. He had struck his great blow. Was it for this he had been waiting, he wondered, through all the years? She was coming back to him, and yet in his heart he knew very well that it was all a mirage, an apple of Sodom to his eager hand. She was coming because he had worked upon her fears, but she was coming with a new loathing in her heart for him. He knew very well that the barriers over which he had sometimes fancied himself gazing now reached to the skies.

He stepped forward to meet her, but at that moment Lord Ellingham, who had just issued from the booking-office, intervened. He laid his hand upon Christine’s shoulder.

“My dear Christine!” he said reproachfully.

She shrank back, as though terrified at his touch. Ambrose stood quite still. The lightning shot from his eyes. Lord Ellingham, who had no notion of making a scene, glanced carelessly around and nodded to Ambrose.

"My dear Christine," he continued, "this little excursion of yours cannot be allowed to take place. Mr.. Drake will excuse me, I am sure," he continued, turning toward Ambrose, "if I point out to him its impossibility."

She clutched at his arm. "You don't understand," she murmured. "Don't make him angry."

"Oh, but I understand very well," Lord Ellingham answered indulgently. "He is going to a little wizened-faced man named Jacques Leblun, and he is going to tell him all about me, if you do not go. That is also foolish. I have hurried down here—excuse my reminding you of it, but I hate to breakfast before ten o'clock—on purpose to assure you that Mr. Jacques Leblun already knows everything that your friend could tell him."

"Is that true?" she whispered.

"Absolutely," Lord Ellingham answered. "Your friend can carry out his amiable intentions without a moment's delay, and he will yet find himself too late. He knows nothing about me that is not already known to Leblun. On the other hand," the marquis continued, turning to Ambrose, "there is a little matter of four million francs."

"Not mine!" Ambrose gasped. "Not for me! For years I have starved rather than touch one penny of that money. It is in her name. I am only her guardian. It is there waiting for her."

"I do not doubt your amiable intentions," Lord Ellingham said smoothly, "but you must not imagine for a moment that I could allow my stepdaughter to profit by them. I have made many mistakes in trying to keep secret from my wife, from the world, from every one, events of which I have every reason to feel ashamed. That is over. I am going to take Christine back to my house, and when you, sir, are in a different frame of mind I shall be glad to see and talk with you, for, after all, Christine is very much in your debt."

The guard came hurrying up. "Take your seats, please," he ordered.

"You, perhaps," Lord Ellington continued, "may think it worth while to continue your journey. The carriage is waiting outside for you, Christine."

He turned away, with his arm drawn slightly through Christine's. There seemed to be nothing at all unusual in the little scene. Even Ambrose spoke no word in protest.

"Take those things out," he ordered the porter. "I shall go by the next train."

Christine and Lord Ellingham passed out in silence to the carriage which was waiting.

Chapter XXXVII

Hannaway, later in the day, came face to face with the man who was most in his thoughts, on the steps of the Altona Hotel. He stopped short.

“Mr. Leblun!” he exclaimed.

Leblun greeted him courteously. Hannaway drew him a little to one side. “Could you spare me five minutes?” he asked.

“With pleasure,” Leblun answered. “Five hours, if you wish. I am one of the most idle men breathing.”

They turned back into the lounge, and Hannaway led the way to two easy chairs, drawn a little apart.

“Mr. Leblun,” he said, “I want to speak to you, if you will allow me, concerning the matter which brought you to England; concerning the matter, in fact, which we were discussing the other night.”

Leblun slowly inclined his head. “I remember perfectly,” he said.

“We need not beat about the bush,” Hannaway declared earnestly. “You came to England to discover the identity of a certain person, and I am very sure that you have discovered it.”

Leblun smiled. “You flatter me, Mr. Hannaway,” he said. “Well, I will admit that I do not often start upon a search without bringing it to a successful conclusion. This, I fancy, will be no exception; but there, one must not boast.”

“Mr. Leblun,” Hannaway said, “I know very well that as a solver of mysteries, a tracker down of criminals, you have had no equal in this generation. You set yourself a task, and you have accomplished it. Your hand is even now stretched out to strike. For one moment I want to ask you to consider. Look a little beyond the immediate result which you have achieved. Do you think that your success in this instance is worth while?”

“Worth while?” Leblun repeated thoughtfully. “I fear that you will have to be a little more explicit.”

“You have it in your power,” Hannaway continued, “to create a huge scandal and bring a lasting disgrace upon a man whose sins, after all, were the sins of youth, and who in a different position has lived a worthy life. Why not pause? Is it worth while to denounce him? What does it mean, after all? He was mixed up with some daring robberies, but the part he took in them was always the part where the risk was greatest. He carried his life in his hands more than once. I never heard of him, in those days—and I knew something of them—I never heard of him, I say, robbing the poor, or cheating, or joining with Marcel in that wretched baccarat. He was an adventurer, but if there can be a proper spirit in which one may become a criminal he certainly had it. Since those days he has atoned. Justice does not demand his punishment. Why should you? You are the only one who knows, unless you have already acquainted Scotland Yard—you and that wretch Marcel, whose word would go for nothing. You have behind you a great career. I believe that none of your achievements would be more splendid, more notable than the present one, if—”

“If?” Leblun asked softly.

“If you left for Paris by, say, the two-twenty train this afternoon.”

Leblun’s face was immovable. He showed no signs of approval or of sympathy. From his little silver case he drew a cigarette and puffed blue smoke out into the room. “You are a sentimentalist, Mr. Hannaway,” he said.

“The world which takes no heed of sentiment,” Hannaway answered, “is fast drifting onto the rocks. The man who governs his life with no thought of sentiment

is a machine, not a human being. The great rules of life are but a shining background for brilliant exceptions. This is one, Mr. Leblun. Be merciful. You are great enough. Your reputation will be undimmed, even if you have the courage to announce your present search a failure. You will never regret it."

Leblun flicked the ash from his cigarette. "You are even more than a sentimentalist, I see, my dear friend," he said. "Frankly, I do not understand you. I may be a man, or I may be a machine, but what I work for I accomplish. If a man has sinned against the laws of society, God or his conscience may forgive him, but it is not the privilege of any part of the human system to ignore his misdoings. Crime and its punishment are as certain as the swing of the pendulum. It is not vanity alone which inspires me when I tell you that I would as soon cut off this right hand as let the Marquis of Ellingham remain untouched."

"But this," Hannaway declared, "is not reasonable."

Leblun shrugged his shoulders. "My dear friend," he said, "it depends upon the point of view. I have called you a sentimentalist. More or less you are one. I myself—look at me." He threw out his hands with a little typical gesture. "I am fifty-nine years old, hard, withered, with scant power of enjoyment in any shape or form. I have no relatives, no wife, no child. The man who passes by in the street is no more to me than the snail that crosses my path. I do not care for him. He does not care for me. If he were crushed under foot I would turn my head lest I should look upon an unpleasant sight. Apart from that I would not care. Thirty-nine years I have been a hunter of men. Do you think that at the end of that time there is a single chord left in my being which could respond to so clumsy a touch as yours? If Lord Effingham were three times a marquis, if he were three times married, if his punishment were to be death, it would not trouble me. It might even add to the zest with which I bring my search to a successful termination. To tell you the truth, the matter would have been arranged before now, but that I wished to do it single-handed. My English friends are too curious. They would rob me, if they could, of this last, my crowning success."

Hannaway knew then that his appeal was worse than useless. The man before had been a sealed book to him. There might have been joints between his armor, accessible to such an appeal as he had made. He knew now that there were none. He knew that nothing he could say or do could stop the inevitable. He rose slowly to his feet. "I can see that your mind is made up, Mr. Leblun," he said. "If you are really such a person as you profess to be I am quite sure that nothing I could say would be likely to move you."

Leblun smiled mockingly. "My young friend," he said, "that is the most sensible thing I have had the pleasure of hearing you say."

* * * * *

Hannaway went up to his rooms with a heavy heart. He stood for several minutes looking out of his window, down upon the stone-flagged passage below, into which, only a few months ago, that weary little group had turned. He saw them again now: Christine, her hands behind her back, her head upturned, her lips parted, singing with effortless and weary monotony. He saw the bent figure whose hands thumped the worn keys. He saw the wizened-faced monkey gazing around, his brows puckered, all the pathos of generations of silence shining in his

dark eyes. He had found her again, indeed, but she came to him under the cloud of tragedy.

The telephone bell rang, breaking in upon his thoughts. He took up the receiver and listened. He heard some one from the office in the hotel speak sharply: “You are through to Mr. Hannaway’s apartment. Speak up, please.”

There was a moment’s silence, then a strange voice asked, “Is that Mr. Hannaway?”

“I am Gilbert Hannaway,” he answered. “Who wants me?”

“I do,” came the loud reply. “I want you, or any one else who will sit and drink with me, and talk. I, Ambrose Drake. I am waiting for you. Come! Come here, and you shall have all the brandy you can drink. Last time it was you who paid. To-day I will be host. Get a hansom. Come quickly.”

“It is Ambrose Drake?” Hannaway asked.

“Who else?” the voice growled.

“Where are you?” Hannaway asked.

“At the same place,” came the quick answer. “There is no other. There is no place in London like it. The seats are all cushions, it is warm and light, and the brandy—man, it is like fire! You know where. You have been here with me before.”

Hannaway hesitated. “What do you want with me?” he asked.

“I want you, and you had better come,” was the answer. “I have something to say to you, and I must have some one to drink with me or I shall go mad. Come, I say. Come, come!”

Hannaway looked at the clock upon the mantelpiece. All day long he had been waiting for a message from Cavendish Square. None had come. Perhaps he was better away for a little time.

“I will be there in ten minutes,” he said.

He heard the man at the other end chuckle as he replaced the receiver. Then he put on his coat and hat and descended to the street.

Chapter XXXVIII

“There is but one friend in life for a man, one friend only,” Ambrose declared, his eyes fixed covetously upon the glass he held out before him. “Women are faithful sometimes, money comes and goes, this remains.”

He sipped at his tumbler with the air of one deliberately testing the quality of its contents. Then he set it down and looked steadily at Hannaway, who sat by his side.

“You,” he said, “have not learned yet to appreciate the joy of numbed senses, of artificial life. Why should you?” he added, half dreamily. “You are young and straight, handsome, I suppose. The woman you love will be faithful to you—for a time, at least. Men do not look strangely at you in the streets. You are a reasonable part of the great wheel of life. The hidden joys are not for you. You mean something.”

Hannaway shrugged his shoulders. “Why did you send for me?” he asked curiously.

Ambrose was silent. He was still wearing the blue serge clothes, the correct collar and tie, with which he had started the morning, but the clothes were splashed with mud, the tie was disarranged, the collar crumpled. His eyes were bloodshot, his face was patchy. Hannaway had the idea that he had been sitting there for many hours.

“Why did I send for you?” Ambrose muttered. “Why, because there are times when I must talk to somebody, even if it be only Chicot, or one of those louts who hang about the bar. I must talk to some one or I shall go mad. To-night,” he continued, passing his hand across his forehead, “there is a band here. I feel it pressing, pressing all the time. Sometimes there is a singing in my ears, then a quiet. I can hear the wind blowing in the poplar trees, and I can feel the music of the organ growing again beneath my fingers. I can hear her step as she came up the aisle, a truant child, dark eyed, eyes bright with daring, but softened a little with the joy of the music. She was gay in those days, gay indeed.”

Hannaway passed his cigar-case across the little table, but the hunchback shook his head.

“No!” he said. “If I smoke, I cannot drink so long, and smoking does nothing for me. Did you know her mother? he asked abruptly.

“I saw her once or twice,” Hannaway answered.

Ambrose shook his head. “She went wrong,” he said. “She was at heart an evil woman. That poor Englishman over there was after all but a tool in their hands, her brother Marcel’s and hers. They made him marry her. He was desperate, and he did not care what he did. They thought he was an Englishman, and rich. But they were wrong. He too was a pauper in those days.”

“They were bad days for him,” Hannaway said thoughtfully. “You know, I suppose, what is going to happen?”

A fire flashed in Ambrose’s eyes. “I know,” he answered, “and I am glad. He has taken her away from me. He must pay the price. Leblun is waiting and watching. Leblun knows. Soon he will strike. Oh, I am glad I She will be sorry soon that she did not trust me. I would have saved him, I would have saved him somehow.”

“Not even you could have done that,” Hannaway answered. “Besides Leblun, there is Marcel, in prison, to be brought before the magistrates to-morrow and sent back to France.”

The dwarf laughed. “You do not read your newspapers,” he said. “Marcel was arrested last night, but it was a corpse that they dragged into the cells. He took poison as they led him into the office at Scotland Yard. He lived for an hour or so, but he never opened his lips.”

Hannaway stared at the other, incredulous, amazed. Ambrose reached out his hand and caught hold of an evening paper.

“Read for yourself,” he said. “It is all there. They kept it dark until this morning. It was in all the twelve o’clock editions.”

Hannaway read with a little thrill. It was as Ambrose had said.

“What else was there for him to do?” Ambrose continued. “He had many years of his sentence still to serve, and he had murdered Pierre. There was no escape for him. He was a man of evil temper, and he was half mad with the desire for money,

crazed with it. Four million francs were missing," he went on, "four million francs, gathered together by that little band of thieves, waiting to be divided. Marcel had hidden the money. He risked everything in coming here to search for it. And when he came it was gone. Some one cleverer than he had been before him. You look at me, Gilbert Hannaway. You look at me as though you would ask a question. Bah I What does it matter? For four years that four million francs has been in a bank in France, accumulating slowly and surely for her. It was in her name. I never meant to touch it. I never should have touched it. But she left me. Then nothing mattered. I determined at last to make it the means to win her back. As you know, I failed. Where is she now? Do you know that?"

Hannaway nodded. "I think she is with her stepfather," he said.

"She went there willingly?"

"Of course," Hannaway answered. "After all, he has been very good to her. He was penniless himself when he fled, but as soon as the money came he set lawyers to try to find her."

"He was not over-anxious," Ambrose muttered. "There was a time I know of when he fled from England to escape from her."

"It was from the past he wanted to escape, not from her," Hannaway answered. "With her came you, and perhaps others, who would have recognized him. I am sorry for him. He has made a splendid reformation, only to be hunted down by that brute Leblun."

Drake raised his glass and drank slowly, with closed eyes. "Men must live and die," he said, setting his empty tumbler down. "We are but cattle, after all. The Marquis of Ellingham will spend to-night or to-morrow night in a prison cell, perhaps. What does it matter? He and half a dozen more may find it terrible enough. For the rest, it will be but a thrilling little episode in their morning paper. We must learn to regard these things as others do. They are trifles."

"It is no trifle to Christine," Hannaway said. "She feels somehow that it is her own fault. Certainly, it is through her that they have tracked him down."

"What does she care for him?" Ambrose muttered. "She has little enough of heart. In a month she will have forgotten."

Hannaway shook his head. ristine has changed," he said. "I thought her heartless myself. I do not think so now. I believe she would give everything she possesses to save him."

Ambrose called to the waiter. "More drinks," he said. "More brandy. I have fresh food for thought here. I must drink with it. Brandy and hot water. The bottle! Good!"

He helped himself with steady fingers. Once more the fierce content stole into his face. "After all," he muttered, "we beat about the bars of our lives. What am I, a poor broken-limbed creature, the sport of boys in the street, the object of shuddering pity to passers-by? Who am I, to look for life as you others, to crave for happiness? Even in the days when I was satisfied and content because she was near and because she depended upon me, even then underneath it all there was the black cloud. She was not happy. She was miserable all the time, dissatisfied, discontented, hating her coarse clothes, hating her simple food. Sometimes I realized it. Sometimes I could have cursed whatever power gave me a body like this and a brain to realize what I was losing in life."

He drew Chicot from his pocket. Chicot sat up and blinked, looking inquiringly at his master, who called for biscuits.

icot, little one," he said, as he fed him, "thou at least art faithful, and it is because I feed thee. See him," he added, turning suddenly to Hannaway. "His eyes are bright with gratitude. He looks at me without a shudder. I am his master. Mine is the hand that beats or feeds him. It is something to have a living creature of any sort dependent upon one. It is something."

He drank again, deeply. Hannaway glanced at the clock.

"Soon," he said, "it will be closing time. You had better come away now. Where are you staying? I will take you home if you like."

"I shall not move from here," Ambrose answered gruffly, "until I am pushed out. Where I go afterward is no concern of any one save myself. But I assure you that I shall not leave here until I must. As for you, go when you please. I had a fancy to talk with you, and you came. I am grateful, but I have no more to say to you. I think I would rather be alone."

Hannaway put his hand in his pocket, but Ambrose, with a laugh, threw upon the table a handful of sovereigns. "Money!" he said. "Do you want money? I have played for ha'pence myself, but all the time I knew that if I cared to raise my hand I could bring gold down from the clouds. But what is the use of it? Tell me, man," he shouted, striking the table, "will it buy a woman's love for a creature such as I am? No! You know-it will not. Don't hesitate to say so. Nor will it buy Chicot's love. Money! What is it worth?"

"I should advise you," Hannaway said, "to put that back in your pocket. This is not the most reputable neighborhood in the world, and a man with gold like that might easily be robbed or worse."

Ambrose laughed. "No harm," he said, "comes to those who are reckless. Death or a bed! If both were there I scarcely know which I would choose. If you want money help yourself. If not, leave me to pay my bill, and go."

Hannaway rose to his feet. "There is one thing," he said, "which I had it in my mind to say when I came. Perhaps I should be truthful, and say that it was the reason I accepted your invitation. If Leblun should call upon you to help him, if you should be summoned as a witness against Lord Effingham, remember that after all he is Christine's guardian, that he has been kind to her, and that his sufferings are hers."

Ambrose's eyes seemed to narrow and brighten at the same time, till they shone like points of fire. "I know," he answered impatiently. "I know."

Chapter XXXIX

Jacques Leblun rose early on the following morn-ing, and made a careful toilet. There was no evidence in his hard, withered face of any special gratification, yet so far as he was capable of feeling emotion he felt it as he donned his carefully brushed clothes and tied a newly purchased tie. To-day was to witness the close of a career which he had every right to consider memorable. To-day, with this final

and dramatic triumph, he was to make his exit from the profession which he had adorned and create a gap in the ranks of his order which he was complacently sure would never be filled. With the love of secrecy innate in the man, he had kept his triumph to himself, kept it even from the authorities on the other side. He wished to startle everybody with a coup, a little theatrical, perhaps, but so brilliant that for days he saw himself almost a popular hero. Who else could have drawn together these threads till he held them all securely in his hands? No one else knew what he knew. He had worked alone and secretly. Marcel had died before he had had time to give away his secret. There was no one else left who could solve the mystery which still hung around the personality of that man who had escaped from the house in the Place Noire one November night. He himself was about to solve it. It was a wonderful day, this.

He descended to the barber's shop, was shaved, and after critically examining his hair decided to have it cut. He sent for his hat and had it ironed while he waited. Then, as he was in the act of issuing from the hotel, a hansom drew up, and a small familiar figure descended from it. It was Ambrose who stood hat in hand upon the pavement.

"Monsieur Leblun," he said, "can I have a moment's conversation with you?"

The great detective hesitated. He guessed very well why this man was seeking him out. He had of course brought him information wholly superfluous, information for which he would probably require payment. Yet, after all, he was a necessary witness in the prosecution. His good-will was worth securing. Then again, it was very seldom indeed that Leblun refused to listen to anything which anybody might have to say. He responded, therefore, with courtesy to Ambrose's request.

"I can spare a few minutes," he said. "I was just going out. Perhaps we could drive a little way together?" Ambrose shook his head. "My voice," he said, "is not strong. I cannot talk in all this roar. If you will give me five minutes in your room I think I can promise that you will find my information worth while."

Leblun turned back to the elevator and rang the bell. Together they mounted to the eighth story. Leblun drew his key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and they entered the little suite of rooms. Ambrose nodded as he looked around.

"Very charming!" he remarked. "Very nice rooms, Monsieur Leblun."

"I find them convenient," Leblun answered, his eyes fixed upon his companion. "Will you sit down? Or perhaps what you have to say will scarcely take long enough to render it worth while?"

"I come," Ambrose said, "from the house of the Marquis of Ellingham."

Leblun bowed. "Indeed!" he said.

"They were kind enough," he continued, "to receive me. I was shown into the breakfast-room. Lord Ellingham sat there dictating letters to his secretary. His wife was by his side. She was holding his hand when I went in. Mademoiselle Christine—you may remember her, perhaps,—she too was in the room."

"Most interesting!" Leblun murmured.

"They were kind to me," Ambrose continued, "but it was not difficult for one who notices things, like yourself, Monsieur Leblun, or, in a smaller way, myself—it was not difficult, I say, to realize that they were living in the shadow of some fear. The marchioness—a very beautiful woman that—was pale, and there were rings under

her eyes. She looked always at her husband, as though she feared to lose him. Lord Ellingham himself seemed like a man whose thoughts are in another world. Christine, my dear companion Christine, was crying."

"All this," Leblun remarked politely, "interests me exceedingly. A little family group, suffering, perhaps, from fear of some impending trouble. Still, I scarcely see—you will excuse me, I know—but I scarcely see why the recital of it has procured for me the pleasure of this visit?"

"The fear of impending trouble," Ambrose repeated. "That is good. The fear is there, and the trouble is there. Monsieur Leblun, they sit there and they listen for your footsteps. They listen for your ring. They listen for a servant to throw open the door and announce, *Monsieur Leblun!*"

The detective nodded gravely. "It was in my mind," he admitted cautiously, "to pay a visit to the household you mention."

Ambrose nodded. "Five years ago," he said, "that man Ellingham was a criminal, not a vicious one ever, yet certainly a criminal. Retribution comes to him a little late."

The detective bowed. All the time he was watching his companion. He was not sure what this visit might portend.

"I am one of those," Ambrose continued, "who may be called lookers-on at this game of life. I have no part or share in it. Kicks and buffets of fortune I have known, hunger and thirst I have known, but the joys which come to other men pass me by. Therefore, Monsieur Leblun, I have never known what it is to have a heart. I am like you. I can watch suffering without flinching. I can see other men in agony, and it either amuses or bores me, according to my humor. You too, Monsieur Leblun, are like that."

"Perhaps," Leblun assented, a little impatiently. "But I presume that it was not to discuss my characteristics that you paid me this visit?"

"Not in the least," Ambrose answered. "There was a little proposition I wished to make. It may sound ridiculous to you. I trust that when it is made you will not think too scornfully of me. But, indeed, there were days, before I was as you see me now, when the girl Christine was a child in short frocks—there were days, I say, which I have not altogether forgotten, when she was in a sense a part of my life. I will not weary you with details. I will only say that when her mother was led away in Paris into becoming the associate of gamblers and thieves, when Christine escaped from that house for fear of unutterable things, it was to me she came. For years we crept about the world together. Somehow or other a slight weakness seems to have developed itself in my nature. If I could I would do her a kindness."

Leblun had ceased even his polite interjections. He glanced meaningly at the clock and back again quickly at his visitor.

"This morning," Ambrose continued, "she threw herself on her knees before me, she even raised her lips to mine. We were alone for a moment. She had come into the hall with me, and she had drawn me into another room. Do you know what it was that she begged of me, Monsieur Leblun?"

The detective shook his head slowly.

"It is not for me to imagine," he answered coldly.

"She asked me to come to you, to beg you to stay your hand," Ambrose said thoughtfully. "A strange errand, you will think, yet I offer you a consideration."

“A consideration of four million francs, I presume?” the detective remarked.

“Monsieur Leblun,” Ambrose replied, with a little bow, “you are marvelous. Those others who rushed about so clumsily, seeking for the money, they did not guess that a man who lived in rags, a poor creature like me, might know where that money was. But I do, and it is yours if you abandon that visit to the Marquis of Ellingham.”

Jacques Leblun looked coldly upon his visitor. His face did not change a muscle, but he came a little forward, advancing toward the door. “Ambrose Drake,” he said, “I looked upon you as a man of some intelligence, yet you come here and you offer me a bribe of stolen money, which I know perfectly well how to become possessed of to-morrow. There are various little documents which I am sending to headquarters to-night. In them, I may tell you without any breach of confidence now, the little matter of your four million francs is fully dealt with.”

Ambrose sighed. “I fear, then,” he said, “that my intervention is useless.”

“Absolutely!” Leblun answered, with the first note of actual impatience in his tone. “There is no bribe in this world, nor any persuasion, which could save Lord Ellingham.”

“Except this!” Ambrose answered, with a sudden spring.

* * * * *

Jacques Leblun lay quite still upon the floor, and there was very little to show that he was dead. His face was pallid, and his lips were a little twisted in that last effort to shout for help. So truly had Ambrose driven home his knife that there was scarcely a drop of blood to be seen upon his chest: Nevertheless, a great career had ended. In a sense, his words had been prophetic. The career of which he had been so proud had terminated that day.

Ambrose stood for a moment breathing quickly, trembling a little with the effort which he had used. Then he stepped over the prostrate body and made his way to the writing-table. There were five letters there, all stamped and addressed—one to the chief of police in Paris, one to Scotland Yard, another to the Minister of Justice in France. One by one he threw them into the still smoldering fire, lit matches, watched them consumed, raked over the ashes, put more coal upon the fire. Then, without hesitation, he searched the man’s pockets, destroyed every paper he could find, transferred the pocket-book, with its wad of bank-notes, to his own pocket. He searched the room for more papers. There were none. His task was ended!

There was a knock at the door. Silence for a moment, and then the sound of a key. Only just in time, Ambrose shot the bolt and then stepped back. The knock was repeated, more loudly still. There was whispering outside, the knocking grew louder and more persistent. Ambrose gave one more look around the room. Then he walked to the window and threw up the sash. Far below were the tops of the trees in the Embankment gardens. Beyond was the Thames, unusually brilliant in the stream of clear winter sunshine. A soft wind was blowing. The sky was almost blue. Ambrose closed his eyes.

“Let me forget,” he murmured. “I want to think of the poplar trees, and the organ, and the little girl who stole down through the meadows, across the river, up the path, up the stone-flagged aisle. Yes, I hear her feet!”

The knocking at the door became a thunder. Once more Ambrose closed his eyes.

ristine!" he said. ristine!"

His left wrist stiffened upon the window-sill. ristine!" he murmured once more, and disappeared.

Chapter XL

"Music and starlight, the laughter of fair women, the company of those we love!" Lord Effingham exclaimed, raising his glass. "What is there left in life for which we could ask?"

"Nothing," Gilbert Hannaway declared, with conviction. "If this is a toast, I drink to it."

They were a *partie carrée*, dining out of doors in the courtyard of an ancient but fashionable Parisian hotel. The round table at which they sat was brilliant with silver, beautiful cut glass, and drooping clusters of scarlet flowers. A few yards away the water from a dainty fountain fell with a soft insistent splash into a marble basin. A band was playing quiet music in some hidden retreat. All around them were other little parties of diners; beyond, the high gray walls which screened the hotel gardens from observation. Chicot, fat and sleek, but with his face more wrinkled than ever, reclined upon a chair, regarding with disdain a small gold bracelet on his arm.

Illustration:
They were a *partie carrée*, dining out of doors in the courtyard of an ancient but fashionable Parisian hotel.

"It is beautiful," the marchioness murmured, "and yet in a way it is a little unnatural. From the silence, the breeze in the trees, the open skies, we should be buried somewhere in the country, surrounded by woods and meadows and hills. And here we are in the heart of Paris. Scarcely a quarter of a mile away is the Boulevard. One can even hear the roar if one listens."

"One need not listen," Christine remarked, smiling. "As for me, I think that I have heard enough of the tumult of cities to last me all my life. I am looking forward to spending the rest of it in the quiet places."

"It is fortunate," Hannaway whispered in her ear, "that my home is in the country."

The marchioness leaned toward her husband. "You have told me nothing," she murmured, "about your interview."

He smiled. "There is very little to be told," he said. "I was received by the chief of police, and introduced to two members of the government. We talked intimately for more than an hour. I learned from them, among other things, that Leblun had never communicated to them any of his suspicions. They had absolutely no idea as to the identity of the person for whom he was searching in London."

She shivered a little. “It was dangerous, was it not, to open the subject at all?” she asked.

“It was dangerous, perhaps,” he answered, “but I was very anxious to turn down that page and seal it fast. I am more than ever glad now that I determined to do so. We avoided, of course, anything in the nature of direct statements. The case I put to them was a supposititious one, but I am quite sure that they understood. The restitution of the four million francs made everything exceedingly easy.”

“You will never be troubled again?” she said softly.

“Never again,” he answered. “I have the word of one of the greatest men in this country.”

“And poor Christine,” she said, “has lost her fortune.”

“Christine,” he declared, “will have to come to me for a dowry.”

Christine sighed and stroked Chicot. “I am afraid,” she said, “that it will never be necessary.”

“Let me relieve you of all fears,” Hannaway said. “I am so urgent a suitor that I declare at once that the matter of a dowry does not interest me.”

The marquis laid his hand upon his shoulder. “You are the son-in-law for me,” he declared. “What with an extravagant wife and my falling rents, it will be a godsend to have some one from whom I can borrow money. Now What are you people going to do Y Margaret and I are due at the embassy. In fact we are rather overdue now. Do you want to send for tickets for the theater?”

Christine shook her head. “We are going to drive in the Bois,” she said. “I am going to sit hand in hand with Gilbert, and I am going to try to make up my mind whether it will ever be possible for me to marry him.”

“We shall see you later, then,” the marquis remarked. “You are ready, Margaret?”

They left the table together and made their way toward the hotel entrance, a very notable couple. The marchioness, with the figure of a girl, the carriage of an empress, and the toilet of a Parisian, excited the admiration of every one. The marquis, too, slender, distinguished looking, seemed years younger than a few months back. His servant was waiting in the foyer with his coat and hat. The marchioness turned toward the elevator.

“I told Hortense,” she said, “that I would come up for my things. She was so afraid that the breeze in the garden would disarrange my coiffure. Francis.”

“My dear?” he answered.

“You don’t think,” she asked, “that Christine regrets the loss of her fortune?”

“Not in the least,” he answered gravely. “You must remember that though it has lain for all these years banked in her name she knows whence it came. There was no course open to her but to return it.”

“I wonder,” she murmured, “what that strange little man would have said?”

“I think,” the marquis answered, “that he would have approved. Half mad though he was, there was one thing at least in which he was sincere, and that was his devotion to Christine and his desire for her happiness.”

The marchioness nodded thoughtfully. “You are right,” she said. “Yes, I am sure that you are right.”

They drove off together a few minutes later, in an electric coupe. Her hand stole into his.

"This is really the end of it, then, Francis," she said, "the end of our nightmare?"

"It is finished," he answered. "I suppose an impartial person would say that I am very lucky, that I got off very lightly. Yet I did discover that hell is not a mere scriptural parable. I felt the flames, Margaret. I think they have left their mark forever."

"It is over and done with now," she said softly.

He raised her fingers to his lips. "It has taught me more than endurance," he said fondly. "I think it has brought us closer together for all the years."

"For all the years!" she echoed, pressing his hand gently.

* * * * *

Hannaway would have called for an automobile, but Christine stopped him.

"No," she said. "I want to be really bourgeois to-night. I want one of those little crazy *voitures ordinaires*. Once I used to watch the couples drive out in them, up the Champs Elysées, on Sundays, and envy them. I want to see what it feels like."

He laughed as he handed her in and arranged a mat for Chicot. "Well, there are rubber tires, at any rate," he said. "I warn you, though, that I shall insist upon holding your hand."

"I should be very much annoyed if you did not," she answered, laughing. "In fact, I believe that when we get right up in the Bois it will be quite the correct thing for you to assume that I need even further support. Gilbert, what a wonderful night! Look at the stars, and look at the lights in front here, on the Place Concorde and up the Champs Elysées."

"It is a wonderful world," he answered. "Wonderful when I realize that we are sitting here side by side, when I remember the long years that I spent, looking everywhere, in every street of every city, for you."

"It is so hard for me to believe that, even now," she remarked thoughtfully. "What was there about me, in those days, to attract you? I was sullen and fierce. My temper had been ruined. I was suspicious of everybody."

He shook his head. "What it was I cannot tell," he answered. "Yet it is strange that you did not guess. I used to hang about at the fringe of the crowd when you sang in the Place Madeleine. I used even to follow you and Ambrose to your next place, and stand there again. You would never talk to me. You seemed always to look me through and through, as though I were some person belonging to another world, whose five-franc pieces, perhaps, were useful to Chicot and to Ambrose, but whom you yourself regarded with the most supreme and absolute indifference. Yet you smiled at me once or twice—a wonderful smile it was, Christine."

She laughed. "Well," she said, "we will not talk of those days. After all, they were terrible. I was never happy, even when we were successful. I wanted everything I had not. I was cruel to Ambrose. I was possessed with a rabid and unwholesome craving for luxury."

"Your life was not natural," he said quietly. "Your very association with so strange a creature as Ambrose Drake was enough to unsettle you."

She nodded thoughtfully. "I must not think of him," she said. "It makes me sad. And to-night I do not want to be sad. Gilbert, what a stream of people I Are they all lovers, I wonder?"

“In Paris,” he answered, “the whole world loves. It is in the atmosphere. I too feel it, Christine.”

“We had better turn back,” she murmured.

“There is no turning back,” he answered. “I think we have come far enough for me to offer you that other support, Christine, and I think we have come far enough in life for you to give me both these hands, and to tell me that never again in the world need I go wandering from city to city, striving always to realize a beautiful dream. The dream has become life, Christine! The dream is you!”

The road was narrow, and the arching trees touched overhead. Their lips met for one long moment. Then she drew him a little toward her with an impulsive gesture.

“I do not want you to go out to look for any more such dreams,” she said. “I am tired of wandering in foreign countries. I am tired of being homeless. I want to belong somewhere, Gilbert.”

A little reckless, he took her in his arms. “You belong to me,” he said. “The other days are finished.”

Chicot opened his eyes and looked up at them with a little yawn. Some latent—or was it lingering?—instinct of delicacy induced him to turn his head. He looked steadily out into the black shadows of the Bois. His eyes were set, his face was more wrinkled than ever. So the crazy little carriage rumbled on into one of the broader thoroughfares. The coachman cracked his whip, they took their place in the stream of vehicles, the bicycles with illuminated balloons, the swiftly rushing automobiles with their flaring lights.