

The Green Pearl

Dr. Night Trilogy, #2

by Aidan de Brune, 1879-1946

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in various papers

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Chapter I

"MR. ROHMER, I am certain that a woman entered my room last night."

Carl Rohmer sat back in his chair and smiled.

During the twenty years he had managed the Hotel Splendide he had listened to stories and theories sufficient to fill a library. Few of the confidences received by him ever became public. It was his uncanny ability to stifle gossip and scandal that had won for him his position in Sydney's largest and most luxurious hotel.

"And, the lady, M'sieu. What did she do?" Rohmer carelessly picked up an ivory, paper-knife from the desk, tapping with the blade, softly and irregularly, on the polished wood.

"You think I had a pipe-dream?" the man on the opposite side of the desk, laughed lightly. "Let me tell you, Mr. Rohmer—"

"Tut, tut!" Rohmer's white hand waved away the suggestion. "I asked the question, Mr. Therrold, in the way of business. It is well to commence at the beginning of the story. M'sieu had supper and retired to his apartments, yes?"

Mark Therrold nodded; A tall; clean-shaven man of about 35 years of age, he seemed strangely perturbed, huddling down in the big lounge chair and running his fingers, continually, through his fast-greying hair.

"My supper, if you call it so, consisted of a few sandwiches and a whisky-soda at the bar," he retorted. "Then I went up to my room. It was a hot night and after a shower I sat I smoking and reading for an hour. Then I turned in."

"And the time?" The hotel manager nodded encouragingly.

"When I went to bed? About 12.30, I should say. I did not look at my watch."

"M'sieu slept well, eh?"

"No. It was too hot to sleep. S'pose I dozed a bit. Anyway, it was some time after I turned in that I had an idea that there was someone in my room."

"The person—a woman, M'sieu suggested—made, some noise?"

"Hardly a sound. I woke suddenly with the idea that there was someone in the room; but I could hear nothing." Therrold shifted restlessly. "I simply felt there, was someone hear. Oh, I can't explain. I had the feeling that there was a woman near."

"A woman?"

"I saw her, later. I lay still, with my eyes half-opened, watching. Shifting restlessly, I managed to roll over so that I could watch the half-lights through the windows. After some considerable time, I saw a shadow lift before the light. I thought she was making for the bathroom, but she came to the side of the bed and bent over me."

"M'sieu says that the lady bent over him as he lay in bed. What then did she do?"

"Nothing. She stood for a minute as if listening to my breathing. Probably wanted to see if I was; asleep. I lay quiet, hoping to find out what she was after, but she seemed to move quite aimlessly around the room. Once I caught a fair view of her. She appeared to be about 25 years of age, and fair. I noticed that her hair was closely cropped, just like a boy's."

"Yes?" The drumming of the paper-knife on the table became insistent. "You say the lady was young—and possibly of good looks and—M'sieu did not say what she wore—possibly evening dress?"

"I shouldn't call it; that, Mr. Rohmer." Therrold laughed. It was a pleasant laugh, and softened the lines of his face. "To my ignorance it appeared to be more like night attire—just a long coloured wrapper, caught up at the side by a button or a hook."

"M'sieu has good eyesight. If I mistake not, he said that the only light came from the window—and the night, it was dark."

Therrold flushed. "The girl bent over me; I saw her quite close. S'pose she wanted to make afire that I was asleep. When I moved, to try and get a clearer view of her, she disappeared."

"M'sieu missed nothing from his room?"

"Not a thing. When I was certain that she had left the room I got up and searched. She had taken nothing."

"M'sieu intrigues!" Rohmer hesitated. "Has M'sieu with him anything of value?"

For a few seconds Therrold did not reply. He stared intently at the little hotel-manager, then let his eyes wander around the beautifully appointed office. Rohmer's room was more like a sitting-room than the nerve centre of a busy hotel. The large desk in the centre of the room, was of rare black oak, in keeping with the other furniture. Around the walls were black-oak bookcases, filled to overflowing. On the bookcases and tables stood rare specimens of china and statuary. The floor was of highly polished parquet blocks, over which were scattered valuable rugs and skins. A few pictures hung oh the walls, but each of them was signed by some noted Australian painter.

The hotel-manager watched his guest carefully. Except for the incessant tap-tap of the paper-knife, he as immobile. Once he glanced across at a tall Japanese screen in a corner—and then a little smile played on his lips.

At length Therrold appeared to have made up his mind to some action. Leaning forward, he pulled from his waistcoat pocket a small enamelled box. From it he took a roll of black velvet and, placing it on the blotting pad before Rohmer, flicked it open.

"A pearl!" The manager leaned forward, with a quick whistling intake of his breath. "M'sieu, the Queen of Pearls!"

It seemed as if a ball of lambent fire lay on the small velvet square. The pearl was medium, in size and almost pure oval in shape, containing within its far depths a wonderful green fire. A lover of rare and beautiful jewels, Rohmer, bent worshipfully over it. His fingers twitched as if anxious to lift the beautiful thing and fondle it.

"The Romanoff Green Pearl." Therrold spoke softly. With a pencil he gently rolled the jewel over. The movement seemed to set the iridescent green moving in long, surging waves of colour.

"So!" Rohmer could not take his eyes from the jewel. "It is wonderful, Unique! There is not another like it in all the world. M'sieu, I have heard of—this, but I never hoped to see it. Behold—it is priceless—no money can buy it! But so, it is worthless, for who will pay for it—anything? It stands alone—the one green pearl known to men. Ah, you beautiful—beautiful thing!"

"Beautiful, yes." Therrold spoke bitterly. "It should be beautiful; bathed in the blood of countless, men and women. Mr. Rohmer, can you realise the misery and sin this overlaid grain of sand has caused through its existence? Can you picture

the thousands who have marched to misery and death—because in the depths of the ocean an oyster conceived the only known green pearl? You cannot—nor can I. Yet, if its history were known and published, the whole world would demand its destruction. Wherever it has rested it has caused misery, covetousness and—"

"And, you, m'sieu?" Rohmer lifted inquiring eyes at his guest.

"I?" Therrold shrugged. "Yes, Mr. Rohmer, you can number me among its victims. Five years ago I accepted a commission from the Grand Duke Paul, the heir to the Romanoff Crown, to venture into Russia and recover the Green Pearl. For nearly five years I have lived a life I shudder to remember. I have lived with men—no, beasts, devoid of all human instincts. Men drunk with the lusts of blood and rapine. For over a thousand days I have lived, not knowing if I was to see the morrow's light. I staked my employer's money—my own life—on the quest. Oh, I've succeeded—but at what cost?"

"Behold, you have accomplished!" Rohmer waved his hands over the jewel.

"I entered. Russia from—Europe—intending, when successful to retrace my steps. With almost incredible luck I got in touch with the men who had the jewel. When opportunity offered, I stole the pearl from them—the men who had stolen it from among the Russian Crown jewels. Unluckily, their suspicions against me were aroused. Failing to regain the jewel they denounced me to the rulers of Russia claiming that I had been the original thief—that I had stolen it from among the regalia. I was thrown into prison; my belongings and person were searched again and again—but I had hidden well. I was questioned—tortured. I escaped—and was recaptured; to be again questioned—again tortured. Again I escaped and for months lay hidden within a few miles of my former prison. Then a chance came for me to leave Russia, across the old German frontier.

"The opportunity appeared too easy—or perhaps I was over-suspicious. Yet I accepted the venture. On the frontier I was again arrested and searched; but the pearl was not on me. For a time I thought that they would put me across the frontier. In that case I would have lost, for the pearl was hidden in Russia. One night I was taken from prison and carried into the heart of the empire. Months of questioning and torture followed—and again I escaped. Now I had to retrace my steps to where I had hidden the pearl. It was still there.

"Then a friend warned me not to venture towards the European frontier. I turned east, lacking food; money, and, even clothing; almost dead from the privations and injuries I had sustained at the hands of men who preached a universal brotherhood. Day after day I plodded on, towards the rising sun. Man, if I told you one tithe of what I saw and suffered you would call me a liar.

"One day when I had almost given up hope of getting anywhere, I crossed the borders of the Chinese Empire. There wasn't; much chance—for me; I had evaded the emissaries of the Russian Government, but now I faced the Chinese bandits. News of what I carried seemed to have flown before me. Again and again I was searched—but always managed to conceal the pearl. Even when I got into districts where European influence held sway I found, that. I had enemies, secret and unscrupulous. Then, suddenly, I had to face an added danger—and a strange passport."

"In what, m'sieu?" Rohmer questioned, interestedly.

"I found that the Green Pearl was borne sort of sacred jewel of some long-forgotten Central Asian Empire. This meant, that while: I had not lost my enemies—and indeed they Seemed to multiply the closer I got to the coast—I had friends. It was through those friends I at last managed to get on hoard a boat—bound for Australia; That is all, ex—"

"Except that you have arrived here."

Rohmer gazed curiously at the man who had, into a few short years, crowded the adventures of a lifetime. "Now, m'sieu; as to the woman—the woman of the night. M'sieu suspects—"

Therrold shrugged. "The Soviet commands strange agent, and have a nation's wealth to forward their aims. Then," he hesitated. "There are others."

"The pearl, m'sieu." Rohmer spoke firmly. "You should have deposited it in the safe of the hotel. It is my duty to warn m'sieu, that the proprietors cannot except any risk occasioned. If it were stolen—"

"A not uncommon incident in the life of the Green Pearl," Therrold laughed. "No, Mr.—Rohmer. The pearl has its—home and would be hard to find; even if I did not stand in the way; Point of fact; it has been stolen from me three times since I left Russia. Then I stole it from the men who stole it from the Russian Government. They stole it from the Romanoffs, who probably stole it from some race they conquered. Possibly that race had to record a theft—Who can tell how far back its history goes—of theft and murder, for a jewel weighing only 18 grains. It's safe with me—"

"What's that?" Therrold was on his feet, automatic in hand. The air of weariness had fallen from his shoulders; Again he was the alert Secret Service Agent holding his life of less value than the safety of his charge.

Backing slowly, he came to the corner of the desk so that he commanded not only the screen, from behind which had come the noise that had startled him, but also the alarmed hotel-manager.

"You—behind that screen! Come out, quick! I've got you covered!"

"M'sieu!" Rohmer held out an explanatory hand.

"M'sieu, let me—"

"Be silent!" Therrold spoke impatiently. He turned to the screen again. "Come on out. I shall count three and then fire." He waited a moment. "One—two—"

The screen was swept to one side and a tall, slender, pale-faced girl walked into the room. She held an open note-book in her hand. Falteringly, she came towards the desk, her terror-stricken eyes fixed on the automatic, levelled at her. Therrold's hand dropped to his side. He stared at the girl in amazement.

Chapter II

CARL ROHMER ran round the desk and placed himself between: the girl and Therrold, waving, his arms wildly, and pouring out words in half the languages of Europe.

The Secret Service Agents stood back, watchful. He made no attempt to gather the meaning of the manager's excited torrent of words. He knew that in time the

man would exhaust his excitement, and a proper, explanation would then be forthcoming.

"M'sieu! M'sieu!" At length Rohmer dropped into English

"I, Carl Rohmer, am to blame, it is not the young lady—No, she is but an employee of the hotel—the establishment. It is the rule; and m'sieu must pardon that I make it obeyed, that she place herself behind the screen. I—I—myself—I am desolate—despairing. It is my fault, m'sieu. I blame myself that I did send for the girl that she might make for me a record of a story most marvellous."

So that was the meaning of the tapping with the paper-knife. Therrold laughed in relief.

"You gave me quite a scare, Mr. Rohmer. I'm not yet used to civilisation again. S'pose I must offer my apologies to the young lady, for the shock I must have given here. Also to you, Mr.—"

The quick pause made Rohmer turn suddenly.

Therrold was staring at the desk. The manager's eyes went to the blotting pad. On it still rested the square of black velvet—but the Green Pearl had disappeared.

Illustration:

The pearl was missing!

"The pearl!" Rohmer gasped; "it had—!"

He made a step towards his chair to feel the Secret Service Agent's automatic touching his chest.

"Quite so!" Therrold's smile was chilly. "I am beginning to understand. Quite an interesting plot, yet I don't quite fathom the reason for the lady of the night. Did she search for the pearl on her own account, Rohmer, or was she but a decoy to make me betray where she had hidden it? No, you needn't answer, unless you really want to talk—that is at present."

For a few moments the Secret Service Agent stood motionless; his automatic covering the manager and the girl.

Then he laughed, harshly. "Of course, the lady of the night was a decoy. She drove me to you, I was fool enough to let you know that I carried the pearl and—yes, you had your plans ready—that girl behind the screen to draw my attention at the psychological moment. I fell into the trap. Very pretty. Looks to me that I'll have to accuse you of stealing the pearl, Rohmer. You were behind me for a few seconds, while I was engaged in persuading your confederate to come out into the open. Yes, yes! You alone had the opportunity to steal it! But, how do you mean to get away with it? The pearl's in this room, I'll swear to that! Bluff me? I don't think so!"

Again Therrold paused, his keen eyes searching the room and its appurtenances. He lowered his gun and bowed mockingly.

"Rohmer, unless you hand me that pearl at once I shall accuse you of its theft. Oh, I know it's not on you." The agent laughed at the motion of denial from the manager. "I don't have to search you to know that. I don't think it's in the desk, or on it; for you expect, the desk to be searched. The girl hasn't got it; I'm certain of that, unless you two can act quicker than I believe. Is it in the room? You must

have guessed that I'd search everywhere—to drop it into one of those delicate pieces of china would be absurd. Well, well, I'll be absurd, just to please you."

With lithe, swift steps the Secret Service Agent moved around the desk and seated himself in the manager's chair, his automatic ready for instant use. For a moment he stared at the pair before him, the hotel manager a picture of distressed dismay, the girl pale, but more composed.

"We may save a lot of unpleasantness—" Therrold hesitated. "Pardon me, I am forgetful. Mr. Rohmer, may I trouble you to place a chair for the lady—before the desk. Miss—er—I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name—will you please be seated. Thanks, Rohmer, you'll find that chair comfortable. Yes, like that! Your hands well in sight, please. Thanks. Now—but it is understood, Mr. Rohmer, that neither you nor the lady attempt to communicate without my consent. Now I'll place my gun on the desk—so. Please remember, I have the reputation of being an excellent snap-shot—and I shan't be careless again, to-day."

He drew the telephone towards him, keeping a keen watch on his prisoners. Calmly, he requested the switch operator to connect him with police headquarters. A few moments and he gained the connection and requested that a couple of detectives be sent to the hotel.

Replacing the receiver he looked up at Rohmer.

"Perhaps I might have asked the direct question, before calling in the police." Therrold's voice was almost careless. "I believe you realise that I command the situation. I can assure you that I possess credentials that will ensure me all the help that I require." He paused, then added suddenly: "Rohmer, have you the Green Pearl?"

The hotel manager shook his head, slowly. His eyes were on the automatic on the desk, but a few inches from Therrold's hand. He was strangely pale, his eyes glittering, dangerously.

"Quite so!" The Secret Service Agent laughed. "And you have no knowledge of where it is. No? Really you are very, stubborn. Mr. Rohmer. Now, Miss—er—well, names don't matter. Have you the pearl?"

The girl shook her head. Therrold frowned. He picked up the paper knife and tapped with it, meditatively on the desk.

"Strange!" The adventurer spoke after some moments meditation. "I was just beginning to feel safe in this big *caravanserai* of yours—and hearing English spoken around me again. S'pose I relaxed a bit. That gave you the opportunity. Careless, very. Should have remembered that those devils of modern Russia manage to get quite decent people in their employ. No, there's no need to talk, Rohmer, unless you want to tell me where the pearl is. Just keep your hands in your lap and—"

He paused, the paper knife still drumming on the desk. Suddenly, its tapping changed from the rhythmic drumming to an irregular, staccato beat.

Therrold's eyes lifted, staring directly at his prisoners.

"Got that, Rohmer? No?" The man laughed slightly. "Well, it was a simple request, in rather poor Morse, for the return of the pearl. Really, that tapping was a brilliant idea. Didn't use the Morse, or any code. Just the steady beating—and it caught me. I'd have read the Morse, if you had used that."

A knock came at the door. Therrold left the desk and opened the door, peering out. Then he stood back, admitting a couple of men. An hotel attendant, who attempted to follow them, was thrust back and the door locked, and bolted.

"Mr. Rohmer, the manager of this hotel, and the young lady, name unknown, who he states to be his typist." Therrold introduced his prisoners, in response to the bewildered looks of the detectives. "I'm staging something like a hold-up, y'know. May I ask who is in charge?"

"Detective Sergeant Saunders, from headquarters." The elder man spoke brusquely.

"Who are you and what are you doing with that gun?" Sergeant Saunders repeated.

Therrold; he stepped close to the man. "I think this has a meaning for you, Sergeant." He held up his closed hand. As the detective's eyes came down to his closed fingers they opened. On his palm lay a queerly cut and marked disc of gold.

"I understand, sir." The officer glanced sharply at Therrold. "This is plain-clothes constable Browne. May I ask your name?"

"Mark Therrold—" For a moment the Secret Service man's eyes met the constable's. "It happens that I am a guest at this hotel. A bare half hour ago I was seated in this room alone, as I supposed, with Mr. Rohmer. I was lodging a complaint that someone had entered my room during the night. He asked me if I carried anything of value. I showed him a very valuable pearl that I was carrying out to England. I had taken it from my pocket and placed it on a scrap of velvet, on the blotting pad before Mr. Rohmer. I heard a sound behind that screen. At my challenge this young lady walked into the room. After explanations with her and Mr. Rohmer I turned to the desk—to find that the pearl had disappeared."

Sergeant Saunders looked puzzled. A largely-built man, of ordinary intelligence, he had gained his present rank in the service by hard plodding work. Crime was to him but the happenings of the day and to be solved on rigid, orthodox police lines. Happenings of uncommon nature perplexed and confused him.

"Mr. Rohmer is a responsible person, sir," he suggested, after an interval.

"I agree." Therrold smiled. "I'm holding him entirely responsible. Only we three were in the room—and he, alone, was in a position to take the pearl, unobserved."

"And the lady, sir?"

"A matter of precaution. Understand, Sergeant, no one enters or leaves this room until I get that pearl back—or am satisfied that it is not in the room, or on the person of anyone here."

"Are you giving Mr. Rohmer and the lady in charge, sir?" Saunders stared at the Secret Service Agent in dire perplexity. He had not the faintest notion of how he should act.

Had it been the case or an ordinary theft—yes; but, here he had been shown an emblem of power that awed him.

"Don't be an ass, man!" Therrold spoke sharply. "I don't want anyone arrested. I want that pearl. Rohmer will not make any fuss at anything you think fit to do. He has his hotel to think of. Now, get busy and find that pearl."

As Therrold turned impatiently from Sergeant Saunders, his eyes caught those of Constable Browne. The man stepped forward saluting sharply.

"S'pose you've forgotten me. Captain Therrold. Sergeant Browne—Tom Browne! Knew you at once, sir."

For a fraction of a second the Englishman looked at the constable. Then his face brightened and he held out his hand. "Thought I knew your face. Sergeant Tom Browne. Say, Browne, can you get some action in this country of yours. I want this room searched for the pearl. If it's not in this room, then it's on someone here—one of the there of us. Shouldn't be difficult."

Browne saluted again and with a muttered word to his superior officer, took charge of the proceedings. Here Sergeant Saunders was on safe ground and showed great ability. Therrold watched with keen admiration, yet with sinking hopes. The pearl was not in the room. At length the young man went to where the Secret Service agent stood.

"It's not in this room, sir. I'll swear to that." The man spoke in a low voice. "Unless—?"

"If you can't find the pearl in this room you'll have to search them," stated the adventurer, firmly.

Rohmer started an energetic protest, which was supported by the red tape sergeant.

"Fraid you'll have to give them in charge first, sir," interpreted Browne, with a broad grin. "We're not on the Somme here, sir."

"Charge, nothing." Therrold spoke irritably. "My authority carries me, I believe?" Browne shook his head, dubiously. For the moment the Englishman was perplexed. During the past five years he had lived where his warrant for his actions was his ability to shoot first, and straightest. The laws and regulations of civilisation irked and baffled him.

The girl broke the tension. From the moment she had walked from behind the screen she had not spoken, obeying Therrold's orders, passively. "Send for a woman and she can search me," she said in a low voice. "I have not stolen your pearl, Mr Therrold, and I am not afraid."

Detective Browne immediately called headquarters, asking for a woman searcher to come to the hotel. Then he went to the Japanese screen and righted it, then turned to Therrold.

"There's two in this room you can't suspect, Captain," he said, briskly. "Sergeant Saunders and I came in long after the pearl was lost. I suggest that you give Mr. Rohmer a lead by allowing the sergeant to search you. Then he can't think you're trying to put one over on him."

Therrold looked at the hotel manager, who nodded assent. He went to the screen, beckoned the sergeant to accompany him. Five minutes later he emerged into the room, pulling on his coat.

Without a word, Rohmer left his seat and joined the officer behind the screen. Almost immediately a knock came at the door. Browne opened it and a middle-aged woman entered. A few words from the police officer and she walked to where the girl sat. Almost immediately Rohmer and the sergeant came from behind the screen. The police woman touched the girl on the arm and walked to the screen. For some minutes the four men waited. At last the woman came out, shaking her head, negatively.

"No results, sir." Brown swung round to face Therrold. "The pearl's not in this room, and it ain't on either of you three people. It fairly beats me."

Therrold looked uncomfortable. For a second he hesitated, then went to where the girl sat. "I owe you an apology for the indignity of the search," he said, haltingly. "I know you must think badly of me, but—"

"You forget." The girl smiled slightly. "I was behind that screen during your interview with Mr. Rohmer. I can't understand how the pearl has disappeared. It is very valuable, you said."

"It is not the value, exactly." Therrold hesitated. "The pearl is valueless, except to three groups of people in the world. It is so unique—the only Green Pearl—that it would be absolutely valueless to anyone but one of the three claimants for it. It is unsaleable, yet—"

"Some jewels carry a fate beyond their worth," completed the girl.

Therrold did not reply. He looked at her with interest a moment, and with renewed apologies, he turned to the detectives.

"I'm afraid—"

An exclamation from the hotel manager caused him to turn sharply. Rohmer was standing before the desk with the square of velvet in his hand. On the blotting pad, where the velvet had rested, was drawn a large red chalked **IV**.

Chapter III

Therrold gazed at the red chalk mark on the desk in amazement. A few minutes and he walked to the windows and stood staring out over the Domain, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. Detective Browne went to him.

"Queer business, Captain." The officer spoke in a low voice. "Make anything of it?" Therrold smiled, but did not answer the question. He pointed out of the window towards the Harbour. "One of the finest views in the world, Browne. This country of yours is magnificent. A great pity you cannot attract a big population."

"Not all immigrants are acceptable, sir." Browne stared out of the window, following the line of Therrold's pointing finger. "No! Yet Australia takes any immigrant, so long as he can pass a simple language test, is in fair health and is not a known criminal. I suppose the riff-raff of the European continent come here—Greeks, Italians, Russians, Maltese, Swiss—' The Englishman made quite an appreciable pause between each nationality. At the word 'Swiss' the detective made a slight sign.

"The Swiss make good immigrants, sir," he protested, somewhat loudly. "Mr. Rohmer has quite a number of them in his employ."

"Is that so? I thought there were only three in the hotel."

"That's so; but there is a fourth coming soon." Browne turned. "Mr. Rohmer. I've been telling Mr. Therrold about your Swiss waiters. Is it three or four that you have?"

"The Swiss are the finest hotel men in the world." Rohmer left the Sergeant and came across to Therrold and Browne. "All my waiters are Swiss. I will have no others."

"Then we were both mistaken, Browne." Therrold laughed. He turned to the senior police officer. "What do you propose to do next, sergeant?"

The man scratched his chin, meditatively. "All I can do is to report the matter to headquarters, sir," he announced after an appreciable pause. "Mr. Rohmer's story agrees with yours. The pearl was certainly lying on the desk when you heard the young lady behind the screen, and turned. He says that he is certain that it was lying on the velvet when he jumped up from his chair to come round the desk. As there is no door on that side of the room, I can't understand how it could have been taken."

"Seems we're all at fault, sergeant." Therrold laughed bitterly. Without detective Browne, he would have been at the mercy of this slow-witted official. "I've lost the pearl that I sacrificed five years of my life to gain. I've failed in my mission, and that at the time when I began to think of success."

Browne looked curiously at Therrold. The Secret Service man was taking the loss of the pearl far too easily. Even if he had not known the Englishman Browne would have been suspicious; but he had worked with the captain, he knew his tenacity of purpose. He guessed that the present attitude of careless ease—of quiet acceptance of defeat—must cover some rapidly evolved scheme.

"By the way, Mr. Rohmer," Therrold continued, speaking directly to the hotel manager for the first time since the police officers had entered the room. "I must apologise for the unceremonious manner in which I held you up. I have apologised to Miss—"

"Miss Easton," supplied the hotel man, hastily. "It is not necessary for m'sieu to apologise. In the excitement of the happening it was a mistake forgivable. In the room happened only M. Therrold, myself and the young lady. Would m'sieu steal his own pearl? No, no!" The little manager held out a white hand. For a moment Therrold hesitated, then barely touched it and turned to Browne.

"Come and see me, sergeant. Any time you're free, and we'll have a yarn over war days. My telephone number is—let me see—Ah, yes, 519. That's it."

"Pardon!" Rohmer interrupted quickly. "M'sieu is mistaken. The number of the telephone is the number of the hotel. It is B0 3175. M'sieu has the room with the number 519."

The Englishman laughed slightly. "I must again apologise to everyone for the trouble I have occasioned."

He walked to the door and opened it. Miss Easton followed him. As he stood aside to let the girl pass out he caught Browne's eyes. A glance, full of significance, passed between the men.

In the big lounge, filled with the usual gay, inconsequent throng, Therrold paused and watched the girl pass through the swing doors leading to the general offices. A slight frown puckered his brow, a frown that deepened as the girl glanced back, and hesitated. For the moment he thought that she was going to return, but with a little shrug she passed out of sight.

Passing to the lifts, Therrold went up to his rooms and dropped wearily into a chair. He had lost the Green Pearl—the Queen of Pearls—he smiled at the title the hotel-manager had bestowed on the jewel. It fitted somehow; fitted a jewel that had glowed in the crown of more than one monarch in Europe and Asia.

Thrice, as he had told Rohmer, the pearl had been stolen from him. And—each time it had come back to him—sometimes in circumstances that might be named decrees of fate. Now he had lost it again—for the fourth time. Well, he would have to recover it.

In the big city under the Southern Cross he had relaxed his precautions. He had thought himself safe, forgetful of the fact that the Soviet agents are scattered all over the world, unmindful of the fact that from the moment he passed the frontier into China every Soviet agent in the world had been apprised of his possession of the jewel—that world-wide orders had proceeded from Moscow that the pearl was to be regained at any cost. The years that he had spent in Russia had convinced him that the Green Pearl in Russian eyes was something very sacred—a belief even held by men, who protested a violent disbelief in God.

His experiences in Asia had convinced him that in some remote corner of that vast continent lived a race that looked upon the jewel with the utmost veneration—that the Romanoff possession of the pearl had made for their great ascendancy over the country. He knew that if he escaped from the east with the pearl in his possession—if he succeeded in fulfilling his mission and placing the jewels in the hands of the Grand Duke Paul—that the Russian Government would go to any lengths—even to inciting a fresh world war, to regain it.

They dared not let it rest in the hands of the Romanoffs. The pearl would become the centre of innumerable plots and revolutions. Even in European Russia there were men who looked upon the jewel as a definite sign of empire—men who could follow any aspirant to the Russian throne who carried on his standard the sign of the Green Pearl.

He knew that he would regain possession of the pearl and carry it to England—to the man who had set him a task others had proclaimed impossible. He was confident of his ultimate success. He had worn the Green Pearl over too many weary miles to doubt—carried it through too many trials and dangers to lose confidence now that he again walked under the British flag.

Therold was aroused from the reverie into which he had fallen by a knock at the door and the entry of detective Browne. A sign from the Secret Service man prevented him closing the door.

"Thought you'd come up," remarked the Englishman. "Sit down. I'll get some drinks." Browne dropped into the indicated chair and watched Therold go to the telephone.

"Queer how the pearl disappeared." Therold spoke inconsequently. "Can't understand it. What did that chalk **IV** mean? If it means that this is the fourth time the infernal jewel's been stolen from me, the writer isn't far out."

"Keep an eye on the mirror," he whispered, as he passed the detective when returning to his seat. "There's quite a bunch of spies in this house."

Browne glanced up sharply. The door was set at an angle that prevented him seeing through, though in the mirror he had a fair view of the corridor. Therold's seat commanded a smaller, but direct view, at a different angle. No one could be in the corridor, before the room door, without one of the men being aware of their presence.

"S'pose you haven't formed a theory about that chalk mark, Browne?" Therold was mixing the drinks. "Say when?"

"Thanks, sir. Not a ghost of an idea. Quite a mystery."

"Many Soviet agents in this city?"

"Reds' you mean, sir? Quite a few but noisy—not dangerous." The Englishman sipped his drink, meditatively. Suddenly he swung to face the detective.

"How many Internationals have there been, Browne?"

The police officer was silent for a minute.

"The Third Conference of the Third International was held at—" He hesitated. "In Europe about a couple of years ago!"

"There'll be no more Conferences." The Secret Service man laid a strong emphasis on the last word.

"You mean that a new International will be held?" Browne asked quietly. "That will be the Fourth International?"

"The Fourth International." The eyes of the two men met. In their minds rose the 'IV' chalked on Rohmer's desk.

"I asked you as to the strength of the Soviet agents in Australia." Therrold spoke after a pause. "You state they are negligible."

"Others might hold a different opinion, sir." Browne looked perplexed. "It is not for me—"

Therrold's hand shot forward and opened. Under the police officer's eye glittered the queerly shaped badge. The man sprang to attention. "Before wife, children and parents." The Englishman spoke as if reciting a ritual. "Before love of women, honour of men, our country, king and Empire."

"Sir?"

"Tomorrow I shall ask the Commissioner of Police to transfer you to special duty—and gazette you for long leave of absence. You will report to me, here. I think you understand that the Green Pearl has to be recovered—at any cost."

Therrold's manner suddenly changed. Again he became the careless English officer travelling for pleasure—an attitude he had assumed on reaching Australian soil. He stood up and held out his hand, cordially, to his subordinate. Some sixth sense drew the eyes of the two men to the mirror. The door had swung slightly more open. Framed in the glass was a young girl and behind her a slim grey-faced man, on his head a queer-shaped skull cap from beneath which straggled long locks of grey hair. His features were decidedly Asian.

Chapter IV

FOR SOME seconds the two men stared at the figures in the doorway. Then Browne jumped to his feet and dashed towards them. He tripped over a rug and fell heavily. Therrold, more deliberate in his actions, sprang over the detective's prostrate body and reached the door, pulling it violently open.

The corridor was empty. Fifty feet along the corridor was a corner, where the passage led to the elevators. Glancing to the left, and seeing no one in that direction, the Secret Service man dashed to the corner and raced down to the lift gates. The indicators showed that both lifts were near the bottom floors, one of

them descending and the other rising. The man and woman could not have escaped that way.

Going back to his room, Therrold examined the doors on either side of the corridor. He wanted to knock at each door and enquire who occupied the room, but he had no excuse for the action. At his own door he met Browne, who had searched the corridor in the opposite direction.

"No luck, sir," the man reported. "Gosh! I went a thud that time."

"Perhaps it is just as well we didn't catch them," Therrold laughed. "All they did was to peer into a room where we were enjoying a drink. That's not illegal. Did you Recognise either of them?"

"Can't say as I did, sir." Browne set the door at the old angle, before returning to his chair. "The man didn't look quite natural—rather funny, in fact."

"A Chinese?" queried the Secret Service man. "I thought so, too. That help, Browne?"

The police officer thought deeply for a few minutes. He drew a small memorandum book from his pocket and turned the leaves. "There was a Chink here, two years ago, sir, who gave the Department a bit of trouble. Name, Dr. Night—or that's what he chose to call himself."

The detective paused and looked up at the Englishman. "From what we discovered it appeared that he was the big noise in the Sydney dope-world. Get away after wrecking the house he occupied and killing a bunch of our fellows who were raiding the place. The description broadcasted stated that Dr. Night looked like a Chink, yet had points that might lead one to think him to be of partly European ancestry."

"The man at the door was certainly Chinese—or from one of the Central Asian countries," observed Therrold, thoughtfully. "If he is not pure Chink, then he comes from one of those mysterious tribes in Central Asia that seem to have provided the population for Europe and Asia. I heard quite a lot of queer yarns about those tribes while making my way from Russia to Singapore. One of them ran that in almost prehistoric days a Central Asian monarch over land that is now China, and most of the other parts of Asia, establishing what he claimed to be world-wide empire. From what my informant said, that empire lasted some hundreds of years."

"What became of it?" Browne asked the question idly. He appeared to interested in his manuscript book.

"Drowned in its own success." Therrold stretched out: his hand for the soda siphon. "Degenerated until they could not hold their sway over the many tribes they had conquered. The legend tells that they were driven back into the hill fastnesses of their country and disappeared from those days practical politics. Most of the legends of Central Asia are founded on similar themes—and always with the same ending; that they or their descendants, are to come back in the fullness of their old glory, reconquer their old territory and establish a far larger and more lasting empire. In; that is embodied the instincts of all races—the hope of a Messiah, to lead the lost nation back to their past glory."

Browne was gazing into space, a puzzled frown on his face. He held the little book open in his hand, apparently forgotten. At length, he sat upright and closed the book. A quick glance towards the door and he leaned forward.

"That was Dr. Night, sir—the man who peered in at the door," Browns spoke in a whisper. "He comes from somewhere out of the heart of Asia and claims to be a sort of prophet king. There was a reporter on the Mirror. He could tell you quite a tale about him. From what was rumoured at the time, this Dr. Night kept aim a prisoner in his house for days—and he was in the underground room when Dr. Night blew it and Inspector Frost and his men up. Hardy's his name, Robert Hardy, and he tells some queer story of being transported into some hidden city in Asia and seeing Dr. Night on his ancestral throne, wearing a wonderful Green Pearl in—Lord!"

"The Green Pearl!" Therrold was all attention. "The legend of the Green Pearl is that it once adorned the crown of some great Asian monarch. Why, Browne, even the rumour that I was carrying it gave me a queer sort of kudos in many districts I passed through."

"Then Dr. Night came after the jewel, sir. You can bet on that." Browne stared at the Englishman with wide eyes. "And that girl; she is in it, too. Acting for Dr. Night, no doubt. That's why she was in your room last night."

Therrold lit a cigarette, thoughtfully. For a time he lay back, blowing rings towards the ceiling. Suddenly he sat up. "You've given me quite a lot to think about, Browne," he said. "Yes, I think our friend at the open door and Dr. Night are the same person. What's his game. The Green Pearl, you claim. I don't think you're far out. Now, does he know that I lost it in Rohmer's office? If not, how long will it take him to find that out. Once he gets that information, what will he do. Go after Rohmer? If he does, should I keep tabs on him or stick to the trail of the Green Pearl. I'd rather he thought I still had it; then he'd only watch my dust. Anyway, the pearl's gone for the present."

"Doesn't seem to trouble you, sir," Browne chuckled.

"The thing that's troubling me at the moment is that 'IV' on Rohmer's desk. The pearl will come back. That's certain. I've lost and recovered it before."

"Who's got it now, sir?"

"Quién sabe!" Therrold laughed. "So far as I know there are three groups of people after it—and intend to possess it, by hook or by crook. The Soviet Government claims it because they rule Russia. The Romanoffs claim it because they ruled Russia and wore it in their crown. This Dr. Night appears likely to put in a claim for it because his ancestors once owned it. Who'll got it, eventually I'm not going to try to guess. One thing only I know—that is that I shall recover possession of it and deliver it to the man who sent me in search of it. If he's wise, he'll put it under a hammer until it's dust—but he won't do that."

"Who was the girl with the doctor, Captain?"

"The girl who came into my rooms last night and searched my belongings." The Englishman rose to his feet. "Well, Browne, I'll see the Commissioner and get your release. Then we'll take the trail of the Green Pearl. By the way, you might tip your chief that Dr. Night is loose in this city. If he can jug him for a time that would help us considerably. We'd only have our Soviet friends to consider then. See you to-morrow, sergeant."

For some time after Browne had left the room Therrold sat thinking deeply. Then he threw off his coat and waistcoat and stretched out on the lounge, closing

his eyes. For nearly an hour he lay; then sat up and looked at his watch. It was just on two o'clock.

Dressing leisurely, he sauntered down the corridor to the elevators. Opposite the lift-gates a long bench stood against the wall. As he came towards the gates, Therrold noticed a man on the bench, apparently asleep. He looked at him curiously, but his face was bowed, concealing his features. Therrold rang the lift bell then turned again to face the man.

Illustration:

Therrold noticed that a man was sitting in one corner of the bench,
apparently asleep.

There was something strangely familiar about him. He went to the bench and stooped to peer into the man's face; then straightened, with a low whistle. When the elevator reached the floor, he was standing square before the gates.

"Get down to the offices and bring up Mr. Rohmer as quickly as you can," he ordered tersely. "Tell your mate not to bring anyone up to this floor. That applies to you, too."

The man looked doubtful, but Therrold was imperative. When the lift had dropped out of sight, the Englishman returned to the seated figure. Taking care not to touch him, he bent and made a careful examination. The man's hands attracted attention. The Englishman tore his handkerchief in two and with the linen covering his fingers wrenched the man's hands apart. Something small and glistening fell from the hands and rolled under the bench.

The Englishman bent and flicked the article into the open. With a sudden gust of rage he made as if to crush the thing with his foot; then changed his mind and rolled the article into a piece of paper. In his hands he held the Green Pearl. Whistling thoughtfully, he carried it to the window and made a careful examination. For some seconds he rolled it from side to side, on the paper; a grim smile forming on his lips.

The opening of the lift gates behind him caused him to turn swiftly. He crushed the Green Pearl into the paper and slipped it into his pocket, as Carl Rohmer stepped on to the floor.

"The attendant at the elevator informed me that you required my presence, m'sieu?" The hotel manager glanced curiously from the Englishman to the seated figure. "Is it of the Green Pearl that m'sieu would speak?"

"Send that man down and stop all persons coming to this floor, Mr. Rohmer." Therrold spoke in an undertone.

When the manager hesitated, he added: "You don't want a scandal here, do you?"

When they were alone Therrold turned to the seated figure on the bench, beckoning the hotel manager to approach.

"Know him?" Rohmer bent down, peering into the grey face. "Mon Dieu! It is—he is—"

"Detective Browne," snapped the Englishman. "Murdered! No, don't touch him, man! There's something damned queer here."

Chapter V

"ON THE FACTS, Detective Browne was murdered by Dr. Night," said Mark Therrold.

"Loose reckoning!" Superintendent Dixon grumbled. The head of the Detective Branch of the New South Wales Police was a heavily built man with a square rugged face, relieved only by keen blue eyes, shining from under shaggy eyebrows. "Thought you'd do better, Captain Therrold, with your reputation. All your facts are, that you and Browne saw a Chinese looking individual spying on you—a Chink that Brown thought he could identify with a Dr. Night who gave us some little trouble a few years ago. As to the cause of death—nothing. Can't understand what medical science has come to. We've had half a dozen deaths in this State during the past two years—suspected murders—and the doctors can't tell me what drugs, or means, were used."

"You're forgetting the presence of the Green Pearl in Browne's hands," reminded Therrold. "By the way, Superintendent, you have the pearl. I should like to try a small experiment with it."

Dixon turned to a large safe behind his desk and brought out a small -box. Removing the lid, he exposed the Green Pearl, lying on a bed of cotton wool.

"There's the cause of Browne's death." The Englishman spoke sadly. He stooped and from a case at his feet took a live rabbit and placed it on the desk. From his pocket he took a pair of strangely shaped pliers.

"What's the game?" inquired Dixon interestedly.

"A little experiment in doctored jewels. I want to find out how close I was to death yesterday."

The Secret Service man picked up the Pearl with the pliers. "Hold that rabbit's head, please."

Very quietly Therrold brought the Green Pearl to the rabbit's nose and rubbed it gently over the nostrils. Then he placed the rodent on the office floor, allowing it to roam at will. In sudden tension, the two men rose to their feet, watching the little animal. For some time it appeared interested in the worn rug, then started to hop across the room. A derisive smile was forming on the Superintendent's lips when the rabbit showed signs of uneasiness. It sat up and rubbed its nose with its forepaws. Suddenly it toppled sideways; a few convulsive struggles and it lay still.

Illustration:

A few convulsive struggles and it lay still.

Therrold bent and felt the still-warm body.

"So died Sergeant Thomas Browne." The Englishman spoke with some emotion. He lifted the body into the suitcase.

"The evidence is complete, Dixon. Now we can reconstruct what happened in the hotel corridor. Some time after leaving my room, Browne picked up the Green Pearl, probably in the corridor. He held it clasped in his hand. Why he did not come back to me with the jewel I cannot yet fathom. Perhaps he was close to the

elevators and sat down on the bench he sat there until he died. Take care to reason things out first. Anyway, of that pearl, Dixon. It is coated with some subtle poison that acts through the pores of the skin."

"Not very strong," Dixon grumbled. "Why, it took all of ten minutes for the poison to kill that rabbit."

"Possibly the power of the poison is disappearing by evaporation," Therrold answered quickly. "Possibly when Browne handled the pearl the drug was new and very strong."

"But you and Rohmer handled the pearl only a few hours before," objected the Superintendent.

"We handled the Green Pearl." Therrold emphasised the two words.

"What do you mean?"

"That thing is not the Green Pearl." Therrold lifted the pliers holding the jewel with an expression of disgust. "This is an imitation. Why, its weight alone gives it away. This bit of glass weighs possibly thirty grains or more and the Green Pearl's only eighteen and a half grains. I knew it was not the Green Pearl the moment I lifted it from the floor."

For some moments the Superintendent was lost in thought. Therrold lifted the pearl on to its bed of cotton wool and replaced the lid of the box. The pliers he placed in the case with the dead rabbit.

"Where is the Green Pearl, Therrold?" The Superintendent spoke suddenly.

"I should like notice of that question," the Secret Service agent smiled grimly. "Long notice, too. For I guess I'll suggest that the Soviet agents in this city have a better knowledge of the pearl's whereabouts than anyone else."

"They're—" Dixon expressed contempt.

"That is a popular attitude towards Communism." Therrold shook his head. "Surely you know better than that, Dixon. It's all very well to express disbelief in the abilities of the exponents of that creed and to sneer at it a fad that will soon be exploded. Yet, in your heart you realise that it is a great force—one that will have to be very seriously reckoned with in the near future. We know that it is gaining fresh adherents every day, not in ones and twos but by thousands. You know that Communism, as preached by Soviet Russia, has the wealth of a powerful nation behind it."

"The Communists have no political support here. Every party is against them. They've got a little support anywhere in the world. There's not a Government in the world that has given them anything but the most partial recognition."

"Yet the Communists have active agents in every political party and organisation." The Englishman spoke emphatically. "Even among the 'die-hard' Conservatives they have agents working for the general unrest that is to forerun the world war that is to sweep capitalists and bourgeoisie from this globe. You ask, what are they there for? To encourage unrest; to persuade the unthinking employer to press more rapidly on the working man. They're put there, and provided with capital to establish futile businesses, by the Soviet Government of Russia. Money talks. The exponents of the Third International have unlimited capital for their propaganda—not only from the Russian nation, which they now own, but from the tribute they draw from their adherents all over the world. Of course we know that quite a lot of that money sticks to the fingers of the men who

handle it, but there's enough and to spare. Russia, of today, is the big financial centre for the world revolution to Communism."

Dixon shook his head disbelievingly.

"Of course, it is difficult for you to see it," continued the Englishman. "You Australians are living in an era of prosperity, high wages and general comfort. So long as the present standard of living is maintained at the present level there is little to fear from Communism. Let the standard of living be lowered, however, below the line where the working man will have no spare cash to play with; below the margin at which the working man's wife has to forgo the luxuries she has learned to look upon as necessities—and the Soviets will quickly gain adherents."

"Some people would say that you were preaching Communism, Captain!" Dixon laughed.

"There are many rich and powerful men in Sydney who do more than I do to help along the Soviet revolution," Therrold continued. "Let me instance. Some little while ago a body of Australian employers went to the Arbitration Court pleading that the working man required but two shirts a year, and the working man's wife needed only one new dress in every four years. That plan, did more to help Communism among the working classes than all the sermons and speeches delivered in your Domain—more than a whole year's income of Soviet Russia could command."

"There's no Communism in Australia," asserted Dixon, doggedly. "A few talkers, that's all."

"Keep the workers employed and amused and they won't heed Communism," laughed the Englishman. "I've spent five years in Russia, studying their methods: They can only succeed where there is poverty, discontent and envy. While the worker has a neat, comfortable home, plenty of clothes for his family, money for a fair amount of amusements, he won't listen to anything that suggests a change. Why, man, the Communists themselves acknowledge that. They openly state that there can be no revolution unless the workers are starving and discontented. You can hear that any Sunday afternoon in the Domain. But, go among the crowd that cheers the speakers and tell them there's a bookie up the street who is paying greater odds on the favourite for the next big race than is general, and that crowd will melt like snow before the sun. Why? Because they've got money to burn—and while the workers have that Communism can knock at their doors in vain."

Picking up the suitcase, Therrold turned to the door. On the street he hesitated. He had to get rid of the dead rabbit—and he would have to wait until nightfall to do that. He turned and went back to the hotel. Too restless to remain indoors, he came out on the street again. Pangs of hunger reminded him that he had missed his midday meal. He glanced at his watch. It was past three o'clock. He half-turned to retrace his steps to the hotel, then halted. He did not want to go back here; the place held too many unpleasant memories.

At the foot of Hunter Street a sign above a door attracted his attention. It advertised a first-class restaurant. The place looked quiet, and that was what he wanted. He ascended the stairs and looked about him. There was only half a dozen people in the room. He sauntered across to a table. He ordered a meal that made the pert waitress raise her thinned eyebrows, then sat back to await its arrival. He had much to think over.

The Green Pearl had to be recovered, and he had but one solitary clue to the theft. That clue pointed to Carl Rohmer, the hotel manager. He was certain that the man could explain the disappearance of the pearl, if he chose. True, the search of his office had proved abortive, but the pearl was small and easily hidden. There was the girl behind the screen to be taken into account; and the Asian and the girl who had peered into his room while he had talked with Browne. That girl—

The crash of broken china brought Therrold from his reverie. A lady rising from an adjacent table had swept some crockery to the ground. The waitress hurried forward and the lady opened her purse to pay for the damage, accidentally dropping a book she carried. Therrold stooped to retrieve it. As he handed it to her their eyes met. The Englishman stared at the girl in blank amazement. It was the girl who had searched his room the previous night—the girl who had been with Dr. Night a few minutes before Sergeant Tom Browne died.

Chapter VI

THERROLD only betrayed surprise by a sudden setting of the muscles of his face. As the girl took the book from him he bowed and turned indifferently away. But the desire for the meal had now left him. He watched the girl keenly, yet very puzzled. When she had taken the book from his hand she had looked straight at him. She must have recognised him, yet not for a single moment did she betray recognition. He watched her walk to the door. As she disappeared down the stairs, Therrold suddenly beckoned the waitress and obtained his check. Avoiding any appearance of hurry, he went down to the street. The girl was not in sight.

For some moments he searched the street in vain; then returned to the restaurant. The waitress stated that she had never seen the lady before. Therrold then sought the manageress. A carefully garbled tale, with a grossly untrue sentimental motif, resulted in a promise that if the lady again visited the restaurant the Englishman should be immediately advised.

Therrold left the place, cursing himself for a fool. He had been daydreaming and had let a valuable clue slip through his fingers. If he had watched more closely he would have recognised the girl immediately he had entered the restaurant. Then he could have turned back to the street and watched. When the girl left the place he could-have traced her, unobserved.

In Pitt Street, Therrold caught a tram to Bathurst Street and walked up towards Hyde Park. At Railton Chambers he went up to the third floor halting before a door bearing the name and designation "Martin Thorne, Foreign Agent."

Illustration:
Martin S. Thorne.

Entering the general office, he asked for Martin Thorne, using, no courtesy title. The clerk looked up quickly, then, without a word, went to the inner office. He returned almost immediately and lifted the flap of the counter, in invitation. A nod indicated the inner room.

A short stout man with a ruddy, clean-shaven face, looked up at Therrold. For half a minute the Englishman stood in the doorway, then entered and placed his hat and stick on a side table. He turned to the man behind the desk.

"Martin S. Thorne?" The Secret Service Agent slightly emphasised the "S."

"Ah!" Thorne raised his brows. "You are?"

"Mark Therrold. And you?"

"B13." The words were scarcely breathed.

"Good." The Englishman held out his hand. On his palm lay the strangely shaped gold disc. Without a word the head of the Australian Branch of the British Secret Service indicated a chair beside the desk. Therrold seated himself, leaning forward. He traced an intricate pattern on the desk top. Thorne smiled. "I heard you were in Sydney," he said. "I hardly expected that you would come here. Is there trouble?"

"The Green Pearl has disappeared—stolen." Therrold spoke without emotion.

"Not for the first time, I believe." The stout man slipped down comfortably into his chair.

"Suppose you want help. You know we're short-handed here."

"One good man will do. I must have someone I can depend upon during the next few days. I suspect the manager of the hotel—he, alone, appears to have had the facilities to annex the pearl. Who he is working for I have yet to discover. I know the Soviet agents in Sydney have been instructed to recover the pearl at any cost. Then, there is a mysterious Asian who appears to have an interest in the jewel. His name is Dr. Night. But, you know the pearl's history. I want someone to watch my room."

"But you say the pearl has disappeared." Thorne looked up inquiringly.

"That is right." The Englishman hesitated. "Yet I believe that my room will be searched again by both groups interested in the Green Pearl. Of course, an agent of one of the groups has the pearl. The other group, possibly, does not yet know that the pearl has passed from my possession. I want to know and identify, the active agents of both parties. Then—"

The Secret Service Agent hesitated.

Thorne opened his eyes questioningly.

"A girl entered my room last night. I believe she was after the pearl. After the jewel had been stolen from me I saw her watching me through the half-opened door of my room. With her was Dr. Night. This afternoon I saw her in a restaurant in Hunter Street. Unfortunately she got away too quickly for me to follow. I have arranged to get word if she returns to the restaurant. I want her traced. I want to know her connections with Dr. Night." Therrold paused, to continue in a graver tone. "I warn you, Therrold, your man will be sitting in on a dangerous game. Already Detective Browne has paid the penalty for attempting to assist me. Your man will be in danger from the jump-off, for he will be a menace to both groups, as I shall have to use him as a screen behind which operate."

Again he paused.

"I don't think that I am in much personal danger, for the moment. One group has the pearl and has no reason to act against me, unless I get too closely on the pearl's tracks. The other group might even protect me; a kind of double chance of getting the pearl from where it is now. Understand?"

"Well?" Again the chief unclosed his sleepy eyes. "Your man had better act apart from me, for a time—until I give him different instructions. I will find some way to communicate with him as occasions require. Of course, we can recognise each other as guests at the same hotel. That's all, I think."

"The message from the restaurant—in regard to the girl."

"That will be a telephone message. If I am not in the hotel the slip will be placed in my room by one of the pages. Your man will have a key to my room and will get the message as soon as possible and act as he considers best." Thorne nodded. He sat up and drew the telephone to him.

"Hotel Splendide?" He spoke after obtaining the connection. "Yes? Captain Leslie Thomas speaking. I shall arrive in Sydney this afternoon. Will you please reserve a room for me. No. Yes. I have been advised to ask for No. 519. Well, if I can't have that one—what? No? 520? Yes? Oh, opposite 519. Yes, I suppose it will do. Right. Book it, please. Yes, Captain Leslie Thomas." The stout man hung up the receiver and turned to face Therrold.

"No. 520 will suit us, I think. Opposite your room. You'll remember the name—Captain Leslie Thomas. His own name; we find it best to use our proper names, if possible. Tall, fair man, with a small military moustache. Good stand, and has his wits about him. Should suit you. M'm! Well, Therrold, am I to know the full story?"

Therrold nodded. For many minutes he spoke in a guarded whisper, recounting his adventures from the day he left London for Russia. When he came to the point where he landed in Sydney and went to the Hotel Splendide the Secret Service chief became more markedly attentive. As the Englishman finished his account of the search of Rohmer's office, he interrupted:

"Let's straighten that out, Therrold. You say you took the pearl in to the office and placed it on the desk before Rohmer. The only door to the office was behind you. Before you were the windows and the desk. The Japanese screen was on your right. You are certain that Rohmer, the girl and yourself were the only persons in the room. The girl never came near the desk until after the pearl had disappeared. Rohmer was the person closest to the pearl—closer than you, in fact. You allowed no one, except the police, to enter the room until some time after it, and you three persons, had been thoroughly searched. Ergo, the pearl was in the room all the time—and after you left it."

"So?"

"You are certain that Rohmer could not have thrown the pearl out of the window?"

"I was facing the windows all the time. Again, he would have had to chance losing the pearl. The windows open directly on to the pavement."

"Then the windows are discounted. You say the room was effectively searched?"

"Very effectively." Therrold spoke decidedly. "Sergeant Browne was an experienced and thorough man. The room was thoroughly searched."

The chief meditated a moment; then cleared the centre of his desk with a sweep of his hand. Picking and choosing from the common articles, he questioned Therrold as to the places they occupied on Rohmer's desk. At length he had the scene set to his satisfaction. "Does Rohmer use a fountain pen?"

"Don't know."

"Ink well on desk?"

"Yes." The Englishman thought a moment. "Rather a wide-mouthed one—open; you know the sort of thing I mean."

"Very handsome carpet on the floor, I think you said?"

"A very fine one. Old Turkey, I should say."

"Then Rohmer was in luck that you didn't guess his trick." Thorne smiled secretly. "Yes, I'm certain that if you had guessed you'd have emptied that inkwell over his handsome carpet."

"What do you mean?" Therrold stared curiously at the man.

"You'd have found the Green Pearl—if you had emptied that inkwell over Rohmer's very handsome carpet." The chief laughed gently. "Clever trick! Just waited his opportunity and slipped the pearl into the ink well. That man's got brains. Pearl under your eye all the time and you and the police searching the room. Very, effective!"

Silently the Englishman cursed himself for a simple fool.

"Never thought of that, eh? Probably would though, if you'd tackled the problem as you gave it to me just now. One's apt to get hot at the moment and miss points. Still, you did well, Therrold; don't see how you could have acted better. Now, I've got some information that may help. At the same time you mustn't rely on me too greatly. You know you've been permitted to use your position rather largely on a private matter—the B. G. winked the other eye—but, then, there are limits."

"I had word from—you know." The chief made a slight motion with his hand. "To give you what assistance I could. You understand, of course, that we are greatly hampered here. Men and money are both lacking. You know what the Home Government is—get results without cost. We get little or no help from the Federal Government—they've got a police of a sort—remarkable inefficient. You'd better rely on the ordinary police for detail work. I'll have word got to Dixon to help you all he can. Now, get out! It was dangerous for you to come here—for you're being watched. Still, you had to risk it. I'll pass the word to London and if you want to communicate with me, tell Thomas. Good luck, man!"

Again in Bathurst Street, Therrold looked at his watch. It was a little after five o'clock, almost too early to return to the hotel and dress for dinner. He sauntered down to Pitt Street, determined to call in at the restaurant on his way to his hotel, to find out if they had learned anything about the girl. A few yards from the Market Street intersection he stopped so abruptly that several people bumped into him.

He was staring across the road at the corner of the block known as "Fashion Row." A moment's hesitation and he crossed the road and sauntered more slowly towards King Street. Before him, utterly unconscious of his presence, walked the young lady of the restaurant—the girl who had entered his rooms the previous night.

Therrold sauntered on, certain that the girl had not seen him or, if she had, did not know that he had recognised her. She was walking slowly, stopping every few yards to examine some shop window. At the King Street corner she turned abruptly and retraced her steps.

The Englishman felt caught and wondered if she would speak to him, but she passed without a sign of recognition. Again, at Market Street, she turned up towards Hyde Park, crossing the open lands to the Oxford Street corner. Here she

had to wait a few minutes before the traffic at the five ways intersection allowed her to cross to the opposite side.

In Oxford Street she quickened her pace and about three hundred yards up the road entered a small antique shop. Therrold wandered if the girl lived there. He determined to wait. In about a quarter of an hour the girl emerged from the shop and walked to a tram stop. There she boarded a Bondi tram.

Impatiently, the Englishman looked for a taxi. He would follow the girl and discover where she lived. Then, another thought came to him. What had the girl been doing in the shabby shop? Telling the taxi driver to follow he walked to the antique shop window. The shop door was open and Therrold hesitated whether to enter or not.

He could see a slatternly woman, lazily wielding a feather duster amid a motley collection of antiques. As he watched she called on someone in the rear room, and the man came into the shop. He spoke to the woman and then went to a corner and switched on the shop lights. As the man turned again to face the woman Therrold started in surprise. The man, evidently the owner of the shop, was an Asian—in every point answering to the description detective Browne had given of the master crook, Dr. Night.

Chapter VII

THERROLD awoke late the next morning. It was a Sunday and the weekend newspapers lay on the floor, before the door. Dressing leisurely, he went down to breakfast. During the meal his thoughts turned to the incidents of the previous day. He had had big luck, in spite of the loss of the Green Pearl. He had found the lady of the night—and she had led him to the lair of the one man he had always feared—the man he now knew to be Dr. Night. Yet the mysterious Asian had not the Green Pearl. Therrold was certain of that.

If Rohmer had acted for the Asian in the theft of the pearl, then the murder of detective Browne had been wanton violence, totally at variance with the character of the Asian, as described by Superintendent Dixon and detective Browne. Both men had insisted that Dr. Night would not use violence, except as a last resource.

That Dr. Night had returned to Sydney after his escape from the police two years previous, was remarkable. That he should live in the same police district—a district where the police would retain a vivid remembrance of him—was astounding daring.

Why had the man returned to Sydney? Why had he been about the Hotel Splendide at the time when the Green Pearl was stolen. Therrold was certain that the man was after the pearl; but he had not obtained it. Therrold was inclined to believe that Rohmer still had the pearl; that for the present he would retain it, too frightened to try to pass it on to those who employed him. Who were the hotel manager's employers?

Now that he had traced down Dr. Night and the "lady of the night," the Englishman had little doubt. Rohmer was an agent of the Russian Soviet, perhaps not directly but certainly one detailed to obtain the Green Pearl from him. A

scheme formed in the Secret Service Agent's brain to lure Rohmer into his room. It would be easy to overpower and search him—but would the man dare carry the pearl on his person?

The previous day Martin Thorne had cleared many points that had puzzled Therrold. But he had not been able to explain the red-chalked 'IV' that had so mysteriously appeared on Rohmer's desk.

If Rohmer had stolen the pearl, then he had made that strange chalk mark. Therrold remembered that Rohmer, himself, had discovered the sign. He remembered that the man had been shifting aimlessly around the room while he had been talking to the detectives. He could not remember if a red-chalk pencil had lain on the desk—but the man might have had one in his pocket.

Sergeant Saunders would not have considered a red pencil an article of suspicion when he searched the man—but the search was long before the sign appeared on the desk and the drawing of the 'IV' would not take more than a couple of seconds.

Leaving the restaurant, Therrold went to the elevator doors. Before him was standing a tall, fair man, a small military moustache decorating his upper lip. As Therrold waited, the man turned and surveyed him, screwing a monocle into his left eye. He gave no sign of recognition; yet the Secret Service man was certain that he was Captain Thomas. The description Thorne had supplied was exact. When the lift came to the floor, Therrold held back, allowing the fair man to precede him. At the fifth floor the Englishman was compelled to alight first, being close to the sage door. The fair man followed him on to the corridor.

Passing Therrold, the man walked quickly down the corridor, to stop before room 520 and fit a key into the lock. The man acted ostentatiously, as if he was trying to attract Therrold's attention to his acts. As the Englishman halted at his door the fair man looked back, and winked. As Therrold entered his room he stopped abruptly. Someone had been in his room while he had been in the restaurant. The Sunday newspapers still lay on the floor, where he had thrown them, but on the table, under one of the windows, lay another newspaper. It was opened at one of the central pages. One of the advertisements had been outlined in red ink. The Englishman read the advertisement. It was notice of a meeting to be held that evening at a small hall in Sussex Street. Comrade Vivian Atkins was to deliver a lecture on his visit to Soviet Russia.

Who had placed that newspaper in his rooms? Whoever had done so was evidently anxious that Therrold should know of that lecture. Had the newspaper been brought to his room by Carl Rohmer? That was possible; but what reason lay behind the act? What connection lay between a lecture on Soviet Russia, in Australia, and the Green Pearl? Therrold's thoughts flew to the man in the opposite room. Had he watched for Therrold to go down to the restaurant and had then come across and left the newspaper on the table? That theory appeared reasonable.

He believed the man to be Captain Thomas who was to help him in his task of recovering the Green Pearl and Thorne had said that he possessed information that might be of value to him. He had told the Secret Service chief that he did not want Thomas to recognise him until he gave the signal. Had the man taken the newspaper as a means of conveying certain information?

The Englishman strolled leisurely into the corridor. As he turned to lock his door he whistled a few bars of a quaint melody. A moment and Thomas' door opened and the fair man came out. As Therrold turned from the door they collided slightly. "By Jove, old chappie! Awfully sorry, and all that!" Thomas picked up his monocle and screwed it into his eye. "My fault, you know."

"Fraid I must accept some of the blame." Here Therrold grinned amiably. "Hope I didn't hurt you?"

"Please don't mention it, old chappie." Thomas hesitated. "Do y'mind if I ask if you're English? I am, y'know. Quite a few of us in this 'better 'ole,' don't y'know. Beastly bore, Sunday, what? Nothing to do and all the time to do it. Eh, what?"

"It is dull," agreed the Englishman. "I've been wondering how to put in the time. Mess about the lounge, I suppose."

"Oh, I say!" The Australian appeared staggered. "How beastly awful. Now, I try to improve my mind, y'know. Only time during the week, I assure you. There are dandy meetings in this town, Sunday nights. Serious, old bean! It's the thing, y'know! They all do it. Shouldn't be surprised if they had to. Act of Parliament, and all that. It's a Labor Government, y'know. Strong on improving the mind of the proletariat, and so on, y'know."

So Thomas had left the newspaper in his room. It was a clever trick and one not likely to be suspected by the hotel servants, if they had had entered the room. An hour in the lounge wearied the Secret Service agent. Thomas had disappeared or he might have started an acquaintanceship with him.

He sent a page for his hat and stick and wandered into the city. There were few people about and they wore a dejected air. Therrold turned into Hyde Park and then through the park to Oxford Street, and up to the antique shop. The door was fastened and from what he could see, there was no one in the shop. For some minutes he stood scanning the dusty articles in the window. Then suddenly he stiffened.

At one end of a glass shelf was a small enamelled box—the exact replica of the box in which he had carried the Green Pearl. He had thought his enamelled box unique. He knew that the Green Pearl had rested for centuries in a similar box, among the Russian Crown jewels. So far as he was aware the box was still in the possession of the Soviet Government. He had tried to get possession of it and had failed.

Illustration:

Therrold saw an exact replica of the box in which he carried the Green Pearl.

While passing through China he had chanced to be of service to a mandarin of high rank. The nobleman had been grateful and had opened his treasure house to the Englishman, asking him to select from the array of exquisite *bijouterie* and jewels a souvenir of their friendship. To his surprise Therrold had seen there a duplicate of the box in which the Green Pearl had so long reposed, in Moscow. He had selected the box, deeming it to be of ordinary value.

To his surprise the mandarin had hesitated. Therrold had immediately withdrawn his choice. The Chinese had, however, insisted on him accepting the

box. In answer to his question, Therrold learned that the box was a relic of some long-forgotten empire and that it was held in great veneration in the district.

Three enamelled boxes of the same pattern and history, were known to be in existence; and all of them related to the Green Pearl. One was in Moscow, the second passed from the Chinaman to Therrold, the third was supposed to be still in the possession of the heir to the last kingdom. And here was the third box, in the heart of Australia; in the window of an antique shop!

In that shop he believed he had seen Dr. Night. Detective Browne had stated that Dr. Night had claimed to be the heir to some long-lost Central-Asian empire.

Walking back to his hotel, Therrold decided that he would try to purchase the enamelled box. First, the purchase would be an excuse to visit the shop. If he found any objection on the part of the man he believed to be Dr. Night, to part with the box, then he would know that it was genuine. More, he would have uncovered another source of danger to himself.

The hotel lounge was crowded with guests and visitors. Therrold went up to his room. As he placed the key in the lock he heard the faint echo of the melody he had whistled himself that day. Turning swiftly, he saw the Australian's door open and a hand beckon.

The door was shut very softly and Thomas pointed to a hole bored in the panel of the door. Peering through the hole, the Englishman found he commanded an excellent view of his own door.

For nearly five minutes the two men watched and waited. Then the door of the room opposite opened and two men emerged. The first was a stranger to Therrold, and he took him to be one of the hotel servants. The second man was Carl Rohmer.

Chapter VIII

THE TWO men waited until Rohmer and his companion had turned the corner before passing across to Therrold's room. A glance showed that a very close search of the room had been made.

"How long was Rohmer here, Thomas," asked the Englishman.

"About an hour," Thomas grinned. "I didn't disturb them for you're not the johnnie to leave things about."

"What were they after?" Therrold asked the question, partly of himself. If the hotel-keeper had the Green Pearl, then why had he searched that room?

The memory of the enamelled box he had seen in Oxford Street antique shop came to Therrold. Did Rohmer and his Soviet friends believe that he had possession of the box in which the pearl had rested while in Moscow. Rohmer had seen him take the pearl from the box. Had the hotel-keeper sought to obtain the box as well as the pearl?

From under a pile of clothing in one of his suit-cases the Englishman brought out a large box of cigarettes. He carried it to the window table and turned it upside down. Under the cigarettes was the enamelled box.

Thomas was making a systematic search of the room. Therrold, lighting a cigarette, watched him, admiring the thoroughness with which the Australian went about his work. It was evident Rohmer and his companion had taken nothing from the room. They had failed to find what they had come in search of.

Therrold knew what they had sought. The little hotel manager had received instructions from his employers to gain possession of the box. He wondered. Did the men who ruled Russia know that there were three enamelled boxes. Now he knew that he was faced by two sets of foes; the agents of Soviet Russia, acting through the Australian Communistic organisation and Carl Rohmer, and Dr. Night.

He had thought that his task was to recover the jewel; to wrest it from the Communists before Dr. Night knew that they had possession of it. Now he knew that he had not only to regain the pearl, while safeguarding it from the Asian, but he had also to guard the enamelled box.

Impatiently, and waiting for Thomas to finish his search, Therrold caught up part of the newspaper. From it dropped a single sheet of writing paper. He picked it up and turned it over.

On the other side was a red-chalked **IV**.

Illustration:

On the surface was drawn in red chalk a large IV.

"Thomas!" The Australian turned quickly. "Did you put that copy of Advance on my table?"

"Yes."

"And, this sheet of notepaper?"

"No." The man stared at the paper in surprise. "That's queer, old man. What does it mean?"

Thomas ignored the question. "I'll swear that this was written by the same hand that drew the red IV on Rohmer's desk."

"So." Thomas whistled softly. "Rohmer told me that only you, the girl, Rohmer and the police were in the room when that sign was uncovered."

"You can count out the police." Therrold laughed. "I believe Sergeant Saunders did handle the piece of velvet on which the pearl had rested, covering the sign; but he had previously picked it up. He had quite a lot to say when Rohmer showed the sign."

"Well, count the police out."

The Australian was examining the paper.

"For one thing, Saunders hasn't the imagination to play that sort of trick. Browne was one of us, and you could trust him. That leaves only you, the girl and Rohmer."

"The girl never went near the desk. I was talking to either Browne or Saunders between the time Saunders searched the desk and Rohmer revealing the sign—"

"Then it was Rohmer." Thomas spoke with conviction. "We know the man's a Communist. He's been a constant attendant at the Communist hall for quite a time. What I can't understand is, why did he search this room just now? He's got the pearl. We're all satisfied as to that."

"He wanted that box." Therrold pointed to the table.

"Well, he didn't get it."

"But why advertise his search in this way?"

"M'm!" The Australian scratched his chin, thoughtfully. "Ask me something easier, old man. The only answer I can guess is—a sort of crowing over his own cleverness."

The Englishman did not answer. He plumped heavily, down in a chair, frowning thoughtfully. Suddenly he looked up and was about to speak when he hesitated, holding up his hand warningly. They could hear the tap-tap of high-heeled shoes in the corridor drawing nearer the door. A pause, then a sharp rap on the door panel. At Therrold's answer the door opened and Rohmer's typist entered.

"Miss Easton!"

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Therrold." The girl glanced curiously at Thomas. Therrold placed a chair but she refused it with a slight motion of her hand.

"Yes?" The Englishman paused; then: "Will you let me know what I can do for you?"

"I saw you pass through the lounge, and followed you up here as soon as I could." She held out a letter to him.

"You brought me this letter—that is very good of you. But, why have troubled? One of the pages would have brought it up."

"The letter is not addressed to you." The girl paused, then continued. "Mr. Therrold, I have been dismissed by Mr. Rohmer."

"I'm awfully sorry." Therrold spoke awkwardly. "Is there anything—?"

"This letter is notice of my dismissal." Again the girl held out the letter. "You will notice that it is dated to-day."

"Yes?"

"If you will read this letter you will see that Mr. Rohmer makes an indirect charge of theft against me—the theft of the Green Pearl."

"That's absurd." The Englishman spoke quickly, colouring with anger. "You were never in a position to take the pearl."

"Then you know nothing of my dismissal? You did not get Mr. Rohmer to write that letter?"

"Certainly not, Miss Easton. The only conversation I have had with Mr. Rohmer since the scene in the office has been in connection with detective Browne's death."

"Mr. Rohmer visited you in this room."

Therrold looked at the girl curiously. "Mr. Rohmer did visit this room—but I was not here—I was not even in the hotel."

For some minutes the girl hesitated then moved a couple of steps nearer the Englishman, lowering her voice to a whisper.

"Mr. Therrold, why did you take the pearl from Mr. Rohmer's desk and then accuse us of the theft?"

Chapter IX

Therrold was taken aback by the girl's accusation. The idea was absurd—to accuse him of stealing his own property! Yet one glance at her face was sufficient to show that she spoke seriously.

"I saw you." The girl was very serious. "I was watching you. You heard me move behind the screen and jumped up. You were then standing with your back to the desk, between me and the pearl. I saw you put your hand behind you. In a little while you moved aside and—and I saw that the pearl has disappeared."

"I put my hand behind me." Therrold was trying to recall his actions during those few minutes in the hotel office. "I put my hand in my hip pocket, to draw my gun."

"You had your gun in your right hand." The girl spoke with conviction. "You put your left hand behind you and took the pearl. I was watching you closely."

"But you were behind the screen."

"There is a hole in the screen. I was watching through that."

"You say, I put my left hand behind me."

The Secret Service man was chasing a vague memory. "I may have rested my hand on the desk, to steady myself. I jumped to my feet, in a hurry—for I did not know who, or what, was behind that screen. Did my left arm move while my hand was behind me?"

"I did not notice. I came from behind the screen when you told me to. It is probable that during those few seconds you took the pearl."

"You are certainly a remarkable young lady." The Englishman again indicated the chair. "Will you not sit down. You forget that I was searched by the police and the pearl was not found on me."

"What is the good of arguing?" The girl made a weary gesture. "You stole the pearl. You had me searched. Now I am discharged and—and you laugh and—and deny that you did it." She turned, dejectedly, towards the door.

"Please wait a moment." Therrold stepped towards her. "You said you were discharged on suspicion of being concerned in the theft of the pearl. You mean that you have been given notice because you were searched?"

"I am discharged. I am to go at once." The girl flared round on him, angrily. "Why don't you read that letter?"

Therrold opened the envelope and withdrew a typed sheet of hotel letter paper. The writing was brief, merely stating that the girl was dismissed for unsatisfactory conduct.

"What do you want me to do, Miss Easton?"

"If you are just you will go to Mr. Rohmer and tell him that you have found the pearl and that it was all a mistake. Perhaps, then, he will allow me to stay on."

"But, I have not the pearl." Therrold thought for a moment. "This letter says nothing about the pearl."

"Is it likely?" She laughed bitterly. "Mr. Rohmer would not commit himself to that—on paper. I went to him and asked for the reason for my dismissal and he told me that it was because I was concerned in the disappearance of the Green Pearl. He said it was a rule of the hotel that any employee concerned in—in anything like that, shall be dismissed. Oh, they're all like that, these foreign managers. They never give an employee notice. They kick you out on the slightest pretext and refuse to give a reference."

"Look here!" Therrold spoke impulsively. "I am not standing for that. You're all at sea in your deductions. I did not take the pearl and I have a very good notion who did take it and where is it now. I'm not going to see you discharged for something you never did. Now, go down into the lounge and wait there for me. I'll have a word with Mr. Carl Rohmer, and I think he'll squirm."

With a slight nod the girl walked out of the room. In the corridor she faced Therrold again. "You won't be long, will you. If Mr. Rohmer finds me sitting in the lounge he'll turn me out in the street, and without my things."

"I'll come right away." Therrold picked up his coat. Making a sign to Thomas to await his return, he followed the girl to the elevators. In the lounge Therrold motioned the girl to a seat and then went in search of the hotel manager.

Rohmer was not in his private room and the office boy could not say where he was. All the Englishman could discover was that Rohmer was somewhere in the building. He sent one of the pages to discover the manager and tell him that he wished to speak to him, in the lounge. Then he went back to the girl. She brightened when she saw him coming across the lounge to her.

For some time the Englishman paced the lounge, his blood boiling at the arbitrary and unjust action of the man he was now certain had stolen the Green Pearl. A quarter of an hour passed and then Rohmer hastily entered the lounge and went to Therrold. "M'sieu wishes to speak to me, is it not so." The man was all smiles and urbanity.

Illustration:

Rohmer advanced on the Englishman, profuse with apologies.

"Yes." Therrold spoke abruptly. "I have been accused of stealing my Green Pearl."

"The Green Pearl? But—that is impossible. M'sieu to take what he had already. It is absurd!"

"Just what I thought, at first." The Englishman spoke grimly. "Yet the accusation was made in good faith—and appears to be borne out by certain actions of yours."

"You say, M'sieu?"

"Miss Easton says that she saw me place my left hand behind me—at the time I jumped from my chair and ordered her to come from behind the screen—and take the pearl from the desk. She further states that you gave, as a reason for dispensing with her services, the reason that she was suspected of being concerned in the theft of the Green Pearl."

"Ach, Miss Easton!" Rohmer turned to the girl, roughly. "What are you doing here. You have been discharged and should be away from the hotel."

The girl did not reply. Therrold turned again to the man.

"Is it true that you have dismissed Miss Easton at a moment's notice, dismissed her for being under suspicion of the theft of the Green Pearl?"

"Miss Easton, she is discharged. She is not?"

"Let me get this right," Therrold interrupted sharply. "Miss Easton informs me that you dismissed her. When she asked for a reason for her dismissal you told

her that it was because of the theft of the Green Pearl. Is that correct. Did you make that statement?"

"M'sieu is angry." Rohmer spread his hands deprecatingly. "I informed Miss Easton that M'sieu would not steal his own pearl; that to suspect me—a gentleman in my position—that would be absurd. M'sieu must remember—"

"Will you please explain how the girl passed me and took the pearl from the desk. You remember that until the pearl had—had disappeared—I was always between her and the desk," Therrold interrupted. "You and I, Mr. Rohmer were the only two persons in the room in a position to steal the pearl. You have said that it is absurd to accuse you. You stated that I would not want to steal my own property—a jewel that has been in my possession for months. You have made an accusation—direct, or indirect, as you will—against this girl. Yet I, the person principally concerned, have made no accusation—yet."

"It is the rule of the hotel, M'sieu." Rohmer protested, eloquent with gestures. "She has, unfortunately, become involved in the theft of a valuable. It is the rule. I am desolate, M'sieu—but it is the rule. M'sieu is merciful, but what can I do?"

Therrold was puzzled. The excuse for the dismissal of the girl was absurd, almost childish. Had the girl knowledge that she had not revealed to him? He wondered. She had accused him of stealing the pearl. She had inveigled him into interviewing Rohmer, on the pretext of obtaining her reinstatement. Rohmer was apparently defiant; yet behind his air of bravado Therrold thought the man very ill at ease.

"Mr. Rohmer." He spoke after a short pause. "I have accused no one of the theft of the Green Pearl. For the present I did not intend to accuse anyone. I thought I might recover the jewel without unnecessary publicity. But your action against Miss Easton has forced my hand. If you insist on dismissing the girl, then I must call in the police again and place before them the evidence that I have already obtained. I shall have to ask them to make an arrest—where I indicate. In any case, Miss Easton stays in this hotel until the Green Pearl is once more in my possession; either as an employee or as a guest. In the latter case you will send the bill to me. Understand, please, that I am concerned only in the recovery of the jewel and no person who was in the room when it disappeared will pass from under my observation until I have gained that object."

He turned; on his heels and walked to the elevators. Rohmer would give way and reinstate the girl. He did not doubt that. But, what motive lay behind Rohmer's action. Either the girl saw something that incriminated the hotel manager, or—

He suddenly, remembered that he had left the little enamelled box on the table of his room. Rohmer had been in the body of the hotel when he had gone in search of him. Rohmer had already searched his room for the enamelled box. He must know that he had left signs of the search. Had he? With a sigh of relief Therrold remembered that he had bidden Thomas to stay in the room until his return.

Thomas was not in sight when he entered his room. Immediately his eyes went to the table before the window. The newspaper and cigarettes were still there, but the enamelled box was missing!

Illustration:

The enamelled box had disappeared!

Therold made one jump to the bathroom door. Thomas was not there. He went into the corridor and knocked at the opposite door. There was no answer. He waited a few seconds and knocked again, without result. The Australian was not on the floor, yet he had not come down to the lounge! Why had Thomas left the room, the door wide open and the enamelled box exposed on the table?

He knew that if the agent had come down, to go out, he would have seen him pass through the lounge.

"Some jewels carry a fatality beyond their worth." The girl's words came to the Englishman as he sat pondering the problem.

Had Thomas followed the long road trod the previous day by detective Browne? And, on the last journey they would not be alone. Time and again, during the years he had carried the fateful pearl, others had died who had come in contact with it. Pate dogged its path. Even the girl had recognised that. Or, had she meant her words for a warning. If so, what meaning lay in them. True, the man might return shortly, with a plausible explanation of his absence, but Therold doubted that.

What a fool he had been not to place the box in his pocket before he went down to the lounge. Had the girl's tale been designed to lure him from the room. Had the previous search of his room been for the purpose of forcing him to reveal where the box was hidden, Had Rohmer watched and during his absence returned and taken the box, There was no sign of a struggle in the room, but Thomas was not a man who would surrender without first putting up a bitter fight.

Therold was puzzled. He rose and commenced a systematic search of the room. A few minutes and enlightenment came. The room had been prepared; for his inspection. There had been a struggle there, and the signs had been carefully camouflaged. In half an hour he succeeded in reading the story of what had happened there while he was in the lounge. He crossed the corridor and, with a master key, opened the door of Thomas' room. The man's belongings were scattered about in entire confusion. So, Thomas's room had also been searched. For what reason? A few moments and he guessed. Someone wanted to discover if there was more than a chance hotel acquaintance between him and the man. Sincerely, he hoped that the Australian had had nothing connecting him with the Secret Service.

Chapter X

Leaving Thomas' room, Therold returned to his own apartment. His mind was racked with perplexities; with a sudden fierce anger against the men who resorted to any actions to promote their selfish ends. He smiled bitterly. Again he stood alone, fighting for his trust against overwhelming odds.

During the years that had passed since he first obtained possession of the pearl, he had made few friends; a few he had found willing to help him in his work. In

every case something had happened to those men. Some had died violent deaths, others had disappeared without leaving a single clue to their fate.

He had thought that when he landed in Sydney he would find helpers of his own race to assist him with his burden. Browne's appearance had appeared almost providential. The man had been in the Secret Service during the war. He was skilful, daring, resourceful. Browne had died, violently, immediately the men who sought the Green Pearl knew that he was associated with him. Now Thomas, revealed as a helper by one' unguarded movement, had disappeared. Therrold had little fear for his own life. For some reason those who sought the pearl had decided that he was not to die.

Possibly, the possession of the Green Pearl had constituted him neutral ground amid the warring forces. If they had reasoned in that manner, then they had betrayed themselves into a weakness. He had no doubts as to his capabilities to carry through his mission. He knew that he would again become possessed of the pearl, as he had on former occasions; he knew that he would carry it to England and place it hi the hands of the man who had sent him on the quest.

For a long time he sat, pondering his problems. His eyes, ceaselessly searching the room, came to the newspaper on the table. Thorne and Thomas had intended him to go to the lecture on Soviet Russia. Why, he could not fathom. He had intended to question Thomas. But he might not have known. The move—for that it was—had been designed by the men higher up—one of the cleverest men in the British Secret Service. It would be foolish to disregard the hint. He would go to the meeting. He would attend Comrade Atkins' meeting that night. Perhaps Rohmer would be there also. A grim smile played round the firm lips. He stretched out his hand to the table, to the litter of loose cigarettes, and drew back with an exclamation of surprise. Rising from his chair he bent over the scattered cigarettes. Surely there was a meaning on that table. A few moments study and he laughed. Those little cylinders were lying in symmetrical order.

--|--| |-|-|||----||-

Here was an adaptation of the Morse code signals. The upright cigarette represented dots and the parallel cigarettes dashes. The | followed by the - represented 'A'. The -|| spelt 'D'. The -| meant 'H.' The -||| 'B', and so on. Therrold found a pencil and scribbled down the code. For his first attempt he obtained A D N B O X.

From the ambiguous message stood out the word 'box.' But, what did 'ADN' mean?

Again he took up his pencil, attacking the puzzle.

|-, A; |--, W.

With an abrupt motion he tore the paper and started afresh.

|--||, L; -|-|, C; ||, I; --, M; --|, G; |-, A.

LCIMGA.

This was, obviously, a poorer attempt than the first. Again he turned to the paper:

|--|, P; |-, A; |-||, L; |---, J; -||-. X.

Here was no better result. Yet he knew that he was getting closer to the correct solution; working down the alphabet on a systematic plan. Only two more alternatives remained. The next attempt was also a failure. Then, taking the first

letter as 'W,' the Secret Service Agent determined to follow it with a vowel. The next two signs '| |' represented 'i' and the following pair of cigarettes must mean 'N.' Now his mind flew to his first attempt at a solution. He had had 'BOX'; with the first three letters of his latest solution he had a compound word: 'WINBOX.'

Had he succeeded? Was the enamelled box somewhere about the window. For some time he searched without success. The blind was half-way down. Therrold caught at the cord and jerked. The blind rolled up almost to the roller, then stopped without being checked. He pulled down the blind and sent it up again. It stopped in the same place. Pulling it down again he sought the solution of the check. Tucked in the torn salvage was the enamelled box.

Now he could reconstruct the happenings in that room while he had been in the lounge. Thomas had discovered that he was being watched. He had tucked the little box in the selvage of the blind and let it roll up. Then, hastily arranging the cigarettes, he had faced his assailants, confident that when Therrold returned to the room he would solve the puzzle. When Rohmer and his friends had overcome Thomas' resistance and had carried him away prisoner, they had returned and searched the room for the box, in vain.

For some time he sat fondling the little box, wondering where he should hide it. The blind had been a good, temporary hiding place, but was of little use as a place of permanent concealment. He could see nothing in the cold, bare, appurtenances of the hotel bedroom. There was no choice. He would have to carry it about with him, until he could again get in touch with Thorne and get him to take charge of it until he recovered the Green Pearl and was ready to sail for England.

He was about to slip the box in his waistcoat pocket when something in the patina of the enamel attracted his attention. Obtaining a powerful glass he scrutinised the surface of the box. A few seconds and he sat back, whistling softly.

This box was not the one he had brought out of Asia. Though alike in design and ornamentation, it was of very modern manufacture. This box had never had connection with the Green Pearl—it was not one of the three boxes manufactured by long forgotten men to the order of some prehistoric sovereign. The box was a fake; but where did it come from? Who had made it? and to whose order?

Immediately his thoughts went to the box on the shelf in the antique shop. Then to his memory came the imitation Green Pearl that had cost Sergeant Browne his life.

Box and pearl were imitations. Had they a still closer connection? But, from the imitation box he read more. Now he knew that Dr. Night, and not the Soviet Agents, were responsible for Thomas' disappearance. It was inconceivable to suggest that the Russian Government had had the box made and sent after him, to Australia. He did not believe that the Australian Communists knew of the box that had held the Green Pearl in Moscow.

Dr. Night, alone, had the knowledge to have the box made in this country.

Who would make the next move? Carl Rohmer or Dr. Night? It was possible that when that was made he would find an opportunity to butt into the game. He determined that when his time came he would administer a severe check to those who now thought they held the whip hand.

A glance at his watch showed that it was after six o'clock. Dressing quickly, he went down to the dining room. In the lounge he passed the little hotel-manager.

Did he fancy that in the small black eyes he could see a glint of triumph? He laughed quietly. Rohmer had certainly been very busy; but now it was his turn to play.

After dinner, returning to his room, Therrold changed into an inconspicuous suit of dark tweeds and picked up a book to pass, the time until he started for the lecture hall.

But the book would not hold his attention. For a time he fidgeted about the room, then went down to the lounge. There he found an almost quiet seat and idly watched the ever-changing throng.

"Mr. Therrold." A low voice brought him alert. He looked round. Miss Easton was standing behind him partly shielded by one of the ornate pillars. "Mr. Therrold, I want to thank you for speaking to Mr. Rohmer. He has reinstated me."

For a moment Therrold thought to tax the girl with the part he believed she had played in the theft of the enamelled box, and the disappearance of Thomas. But she would deny the charge and he had only a theory.

"Not at all. Very pleased to have been of service to you." Therrold tried to make his voice as inane as possible. "By the way, I hope you have abandoned the absurd theory that I stole my own property."

"You have not recovered—found it—yet?" The girl looked at him, he thought, strangely. "You know, Mr. Therrold, I did not accuse you to—to make you speak to Mr. Rohmer and get him to reinstate me."

"Then, you do not believe that I—er—acquired my own property?"

"I told you what I saw. Now—now, I am beginning to doubt." A pucker of perplexity was on her brow. "I—I asked Mr. Rohmer if you had made any claim on the hotel management regarding the pearl—and he said that you had not."

"A claim difficult to substantiate." Therrold laughed. "Do you know that soon after I landed in Australia I asked an expert what a green pearl would be worth. He said that he would give me a blank cheque—to write in my own valuation, if I placed in his hand a genuine green pearl, for sale."

The girl laughed quietly. There was a glint of amusement in the eyes that met Therrold frankly. "I suppose that while you were talking to that expert you had the Green Pearl in your pocket. Did you show it to him?"

"I did not. Do you know, young lady, that the Green Pearl is the best known jewel in the world. It has graced the crown of more than one line of monarchs. If I had shown the Green Pearl to Mr. Angus he would certainly have asked me where I got it from and probably detained me until the police arrived. That would have meant publicity—and publicity would be bad for my mission. It is well-known that the owners of the Green Pearl would never part with it; but, if it did come on the market it would be guarded night and day by armed men, not carried about in the pocket of a casual traveller. No, I kept the pearl and my knowledge to myself."

The girl glanced hastily round the crowded lounge, then bent to him: "Mr. Therrold, you mean to stay here until you have recovered the Green Pearl, or know where it is?"

Therrold nodded wonderingly.

"Then?"

Again the girl glanced, almost fearfully, around and bent lower. "Then, Mr. Therrold, I should change my room, if I were you."

Before he could reply she swung round and walked quickly to the office doors. Therrold stared after her, amazed; but she did not glance back.

Chapter XI

Almost at the south end of Sussex Street is a flat, ugly building of two stories, once a warehouse, now hall and offices in the occupation of the Sydney Communists. Access to the hall is obtained by a flight of narrow, steep stairs, opening directly on to the street. At one end of the rather square hall is a small stage; at the other end a refreshment bar, decorated with tea and coffee urns, and grey, thick, ugly china.

Therrold looked about him interestedly when he entered the hall. It was about three-quarters full, of an audience well dressed and, apparently of a thinking class of people. The Englishman crossed to the far side of the room and found a seat at the end of a row. A noise attracted his attention to the rear of the hall. There he noticed a group of men of a rougher type than the rest of the audience.

A few minutes after he had taken his seat a well dressed man passed into the row and took the seat next him. Immediately he opened a Sunday newspaper and became absorbed in the contents. Shortly after eight o'clock a group of three men marched down the hall and mounted the stage. Two of the men seated themselves at the lecturer's table, conspicuously decorated with a large water bottle and a couple of glasses. The third man advanced to the edge of the platform, clapping his hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen—or, should I say, comrades and friends." Then followed the usual rustle of attention. "We have with us to-night Comrade Atkins, one of the leaders of advanced thought in this country. For the past six months he has been visiting what we should call our spiritual home, Soviet Russia. There he has witnessed a contented working class; men working without the sting of the capitalist's lash on their back. Now, I'm not going to make a speech—that's not in my line. I'm going to call on Comrade Atkins, a man brave enough to tell the truth about what he has seen and experienced."

A slight, round-shouldered man, wearing collared glasses, rose from a chair at the table and came to the front of the platform. His voice was weak and his diction hesitating. He had no notes and wandered from point to point in a manner irresistibly comical.

Therrold smiled. The lecturer's picture of Soviet Russia was strangely unlike what he had witnessed, and lived, during the three years he had been in Russia. The idea of the Russian moujik as a free workman, working because he liked it, was laughable. The Englishman knew, no one better, that Russia had exchanged an autocracy of the most dominant type for a bureaucracy in which the rulers practised every form of corruption. He believed, sincerely, that in time Russia would settle down to a stable republic and again become a great nation—but those days were far in the future.

For over an hour the lecturer wandered, without point or plan in his remarks. He had abundant theories, but no facts. Of Russian conditions he appeared

strangely ignorant, knowing considerably less than many of his audience. Suddenly he sat down and the chairman asked if anyone wished to ask him questions.

Half a dozen men, at the back of the hall, were immediately on their feet, shouting and gesticulating. As each question was answered a fresh group sprang on to their feet, all talking at the same time. A touch on Therrold's arm attracted his attention.

Before he could turn a slip of paper was thrust into his hand. He looked down.

"Walk round the room to the other side of the hall. Look at the man in the third seat from end of row, three rows behind this row."

Therrold glanced at his neighbour. The man had twisted on his seat, staring back at the men at the back of the hall. Therrold strolled to the back of the hall, behind the questioning enthusiasts, to the opposite side of the hall. One glance at the man indicated and he recognised Carl Rohmer. The hotel manager was leaning forward, intent on the lecturer.

Illustration:

The hotel manager was leaning forward, intent on the lecturer.

For a few minutes Therrold watched him. He dared not remain where he was for long. At any moment the flow of questions might cease and the proceedings terminate. Then Rohmer would go towards the entrance; if he passed him he certainly would recognise him.

As he was about to move away two men seated beside Rohmer got up and went towards the stairs. A man, who had been leaning against the wall close to where Therrold was standing, moved into the row, taking the seat next to the hotel manager. For a moment he leaned forward, as if interested in the proceedings. He passed his hand across his mouth in a peculiar manner. Rohmer turned and spoke in an undertone. The reply caused him to rise abruptly and move into the aisle, followed by the man.

Therrold bent his head, pulling his soft cap well over his eyes. Rohmer passed the Englishman without a glance and went to the stairs, followed by the man who had accosted him. Therrold followed them. About the head of the stairs there was a crowd. The audience had become tired of the proceedings and were leaving, almost in a body.

Keeping well behind Rohmer and his companion, the Secret Service agent allowed himself to be carried forward. Rohmer's coat was dragged back in the crush, something in the pocket hitting against Therrold's hand. The Englishman let the pocket sag forward again, but followed it with his hand. He slipped his hand into the man's pocket and withdrew a packet. Bending, he pushed back at the crowd behind him.

For a moment there was confusion, then a press of people closed between him and the hotel manager. He glanced quickly at his spoil; it was a small box wrapped in soft paper. A cry came from the midst of the crowd; the Englishman thought he recognised the tones of the hotel manager.

Someone shouted orders for the doors to be shut. A voice questioned from the foot of the stairs. Someone shouted that the hall was on fire. A tumult grew; word

flew through the crowd that a robbery had been committed and that the door-keepers were insisting on searching everyone who wanted to leave the building.

Men shouted loud protests; a woman shrieked and fainted. The chairman, on the platform, clapped his hands, stamped and shouted. He shouted that a pickpocket was in the crowd. Someone called for the police—and the call was received with derisive cheers.

"What's been taken?" shouted a voice. "An article of rare value has been stolen from a member of the audience here," explained the chairman. "It must be recovered."

"Where's the blinking Communist?"

The retort was received with shouts of laughter. "All property in common," shouted a man.

"Now then, be good Communists. Get what you can. There's no thieves in the new state."

Therrold thought quickly. He was in a tight corner. There was only one way out of the hall—and that exit was guarded by the door-keepers. The crowd at the head of the stairs was quickly thinning as the people passed down into the street. He looked at the windows. They were high on the wall. Even if he could get through one unobserved he would have a drop of thirty or more feet to the pavement.

There must be a way of escape; luck had held with him so far. He was certain that he had recovered the Green Pearl. Another slice of luck and he would get from that hall leaving Rohmer and his friends lamenting. He would not give up the pearl without a fight; but what fight could he put up in that open hall? He remembered that, although his automatic was in his pocket, he had forgotten to bring with him any spare cartridges.

For a moment he thought of appealing to the people around him. They looked to be honest. He put the idea from him with a shrug. Many of them would be indifferent—the majority certainly hostile. Most of them would consider him a thief, in spite of what explanations he could make. He glanced towards the head of the stairs; the crowd had thinned considerably.

Stewards were already herding the lingerers towards the head of the stairs. He felt hopeless; a few minutes and he would be trapped. Again he had failed. Not yet! He would make a bold bid for freedom before they overpowered him. Under cover of the crowd he withdrew his automatic from his packet and shot back the safety catch. It was in his mind to go down the stairs and at the doors make a sudden bid for freedom. It was the only way.

The lights in the hall were suddenly extinguished! Hysterical shrieks, shouts of laughter and coarse jokes came from the crowd. Someone shouted that the involution had commenced. A thin, voice rose in the strains of *The Red Flag*; a man shouted 'Solidarity'; from the other end of the hall came *The Marseillaise*. Someone caught Therrold by the arm, pushing him towards the head of the stairs, thrusting rudely through the fast thinning crowd.

"Hurry up!" growled Therrold's guide. In the dim light of the candles the door-keepers were holding, he recognised the man who had sat beside him in the hall. "We want to get out."

"Arf a mo'!" One of the door-keepers was trying to make a candle burn in the heavy draught. "I'll have this right in a moment and then we'll search you."

"Search—nothing!" The man laughed harshly. He leaned forward suddenly and struck the door-keeper on the point of the jaw. At the same time Therrold crashed the butt of his automatic on the other man's head!

The third door-keeper stood undecided, then opened his mouth to give the alarm.

The Englishman thrust the muzzle of his gun under his nose.

"Open that door!"

Still the man hesitated. Therrold struck him with the gun muzzle. As he collapsed his companion wrenched open the door.

The Englishman sprang into the street. Quickly, his companion seized him by the arm and rushed him up the street. A couple of turnings and they entered George Street. There the unknown stopped.

"Good night, Therrold." The man spoke quietly. "If you're wise you'll take a taxi back to your hotel. My work is finished."

Chapter XII

When Therrold tripped Rohmer at the head of the stairs the hotel manager caught, frantically, at his companion. Again on his balance, his hand went to his hip; pocket. For a moment he stood agape, then clutching his companion's arm, he whispered rapidly.

"What say?" The man shopped. "What's gone?"

"The box, it has disappeared. The Green Pearl, it has vanished!" Rohmer's face was white and glistening with perspiration. "There! I place it in the pocket of my jacket, made into a parcel. Of that, there is no doubt. Now, behold, it has taken itself away—"

"Shut your mouth!" The man whispered roughly. "D'yer want to tell the whole world?"

With a despairing gesture, Rohmer indicated the empty pocket.

Tony Miller, a trusted member of the 'Seven,' thrust in his hand, without ceremony. The pocket was empty.

"There'll be hell over this," he muttered. For a moment he stood undecided, then, seizing his companion by the arm, he dragged him down the stairs, thrusting him through the crowd without ceremony.

"Who took it?" Rohmer shrugged. In the excitement of the meeting he had forgotten the Green Pearl. His whole attention had been given to the lecturer. He remembered the sudden trip at the head of the stairs. The packet might have been taken from him then.

At the foot of the stairs a crowd of men and women were wedged tight into the little space before the doors. Three stewards were making frantic efforts to clear sufficient space to allow of the doors being opened. Halfway down the stairs Miller shouted to one of the men, by name. The man looked up.

"What's the matter? Who called?"

"Shut that door." Miller answered.

"Shut the door? Likely, with this crowd about. What's bitin' you?"

"Theft! Robbery!" Miller thrust Rohmer before him through the press of people. "Rohmer's been robbed! In the name of the *Seven* shut that door."

Illustration:

Miller thrust violently through the press...

Violently, Miller thrust Rohmer before him down the remaining stairs.

At length they reached the narrow space before the doors. Some muttered words from the Communist and the doors were opened, sufficient to permit Miller and Rohmer to pass out into the street. On the pavement, Miller turned to the right and led down Sussex Street to George Street. Crossing Central Square he skirted the railway to Redfern Bridge, Rohmer trailing beside him, dejectedly.

At the bridge they had to wait for a break in the traffic. "What will they say?" gasped the little hotel-manager, tugging timidly at his companion's sleeve. "Will they blame me?"

"Who else will they blame?" Miller laughed scornfully. "What made you wait there, after I gave you the office?"

"The gentleman—the lecturer—who talked. He was very interesting. He spoke of the country of Freedom—of Holy Russia!"

"Bunk!" The man spat viciously. "Haven't you got over that? Why that is all eyewash for the crowd."

"My friend!" Rohmer stopped in the middle of the crowded street to face his companion. "It is the cause! Our Holy Cause!"

"The Cause yes!" Miller sneered. He dragged the little hotel manager almost from under the wheels of a speeding taxi. "Well the 'Seven' will give you 'Cause' enough, not minding their business. How you came to lose it—"

Rohmer looked surprised and distressed. He seized his companion's arm, forcing a halt. "They will remember," the Frenchman spoke with emotion. "My friend, they will; remember that I alone accomplished. The pearl—I did acquire it, even at the risk of my life and liberty. I took it from the Englishman, that I, Carl Rohmer, might have liberty and equality to millions groaning under the iron heel of capitalism. They, will not forget that I, alone and unarmed, withstood the savage Englishman and his gun; that I was bound and searched by the police of the bourgeoisie. Will they forget that I served them faithfully, risking my life and liberty for the Sacred Cause?"

"They won't forget that you lost the bloomin' pearl." Miller shook off the Frenchman's hold. "Come on! You can do all the sprouting inside—if they let you."

At the front door of a small, dark, two-storeyed house, the agent of the 'Seven' knocked quickly three times.

He waited while he counted seven seconds, then knocked, slowly and distinctly, seven times. Immediately the door sprung open, revealing the hall in total darkness. Miller remained on the doorstep, as if awaiting some signal.

"Enter, friends." The words were spoken in a deep, bass voice, from out of the darkness.

Miller stepped over the threshold. As his foot touched the door mat, powerful lights blazed over the doorway.

"Comrades Miller and Rohmer," the deep voice boomed. A stout, tall man with a ruddy, good-humoured face, stepped from behind the door.

"Welcome! The Seven await you."

Without replying, Miller ascended the stairs, closely followed by Rohmer. When they reached the first landing the lights in the hall were extinguished. Immediately the 'Seven' agent halted. He tapped seven times on the wall. Lights on the floor above glowed out. A door on the upper floor opened and a slight, dark man with curly black hair, growing slightly grey, appeared.

"Comrade Miller." The man advanced holding out his hand. "Welcome. We have long expected you."

"Here is Comrade Rohmer." Miller barely touched the outstretched hand. "He was too much taken with that sprouter, Atkins, to attend to business—"

"Comrade Atkins spoke well?" The man held out his hand to Rohmer. "I have to bid you welcome to our headquarters, Comrade Rohmer. Comrade Miller belongs to the army of workers. He has little sympathy with the teachers of the Cause. Yet he is a most useful fellow—yes, a most useful fellow. But, I am keeping the *Seven* waiting. Will you follow me?"

Miller shrugged. The man turned to the door he had come, out of. He allowed Miller to pass into the room, but barred Rohmer's path.

"Comrade." he said, impressively, "this is the first time you have been honoured by being allowed to meet those delegated by Holy Russia to save this poor country. It is not necessary for me to tell you that they are in an alien land—in the land of the enemy—under the cruel lash of capitalism; liable to be treated as spies—and murdered by processes they call legal. The safety of the 'Cause' depends on the 'Seven.' What would happen to the sheep if the shepherds were driven away, or killed. Alas! They would be scattered before the fierce breaths of the capitalists. In bringing you to them—in allowing you to see their faces—I am placing their lives in your hands. Enter, but be secret!"

Turning abruptly after this startling address, the man walked up the room and took his seat at the table.

Hesitatingly, Rohmer followed him. For a moment the hotel-keeper, paused, just past the threshold. At the far end of the room was a long table at which were seated seven men lounging negligently. Before the table was a wide free space and, near the door, rows of forms. For the moment the Frenchman was depressed. His Gallic blood demanded the glitter of uniforms, the tall, lithe figures of soldiers, the pomp surrounding men who claimed to hold the dignity of empires in their hand. But, he saw a group of ill-dressed men, overfed, blotchy and gross men who looked what they really were, talkers and self-seekers, eager for anything that would pander to their vanity and selfishness.

A 'hist' from behind him caused Rohmer to turn. Miller was seated on a form close to the wall and was beckoning for him to go to him. For a few moments there was silence. At the middle of the long table sat Wills, the chairman, pink-faced and almost bald. On his right was a tall, big-made man with a mop of thick, black hair and a wide-spreading black moustache. On the chairman's left was the man who had welcomed Miller and Rohmer.

"The ordinary business of the meeting is suspended," announced the chairman. "It is now necessary to deal with a matter which has been referred to us from

Moscow. From information I have received it appears that an Englishman, named Therrold, stole from the Soviet Government a Green Pearl of enormous value. The thief has come to Sydney and is staying at the Hotel Splendide. We, the 'Three' who act in the name of the 'Seven, instructed Carl Rohmer, manager of the hotel, to obtain immediate possession of the pearl and bring it to us. Our Secretary, Parkes, was informed yesterday that Comrade Rohmer had succeeded in his mission.

"It was arranged, for the pearl to be brought, here to-night and handed to us who act on behalf of Holy Russia."

"Comrade Rohmer is in attendance," interjected Parkes. "I see him."

The chairman nodded. "Will Comrade Rohmer come to the table?"

Mechanically Rohmer moved to the table, facing the chairman. The seven men stared at him expectantly.

"Comrade Rohmer—" The chairman wagged an impressive forefinger. "A trust was given to you. I have learned with pleasure that you have been faithful and diligent. We await you handing over the Green Pearl."

The little hotel-keeper strove to speak, but the words would not come. He shifted from one foot to the other, like a schoolboy caught in a misdeed. Wills smiled benevolently. He thought the Frenchman was overawed at being in the presence of the all-powerful 'Seven'.

"Do not fear." Wills leaned forward, his fat body bulging over the table. "You are among friends. We know that you have well served the *Seven* and you will not find them ungrateful. When the day arrives for this country to take her proper place in the Councils of the Free Nations under the protection of Holy Russia, you will be richly rewarded for the important service you have performed. Where is the pearl?"

"I obtained the pearl." Rohmer spoke in a soft whisper. "I took it from the man who stole it from Holy Russia. It—it has been stolen from me."

"What?" The chairman sprang to his feet his face blazing with passion. "You say it was stolen from you! Do you mean that you have failed in the trust that we gave you? Am I to tell our comrades in Holy Russia that we have only fools and children in Australia. Man, do you realise what you are saying? Do you know that you have betrayed our sacred Cause?"

"The pearl has been stolen from me." Rohmer hung his head, dejectedly. "I will try to recover it again."

For a full minute Wills sat silent, then he leaned back in his chair, his lips curling in an ugly smile.

"I am afraid there will be no *again* for you. Carl Rohmer," he said, at length. "While the *Seven* reward greatly they punish severely. You have failed, Comrade Rohmer. Miller, I shall place the punishment of this man in your hands. You know what is to be done with him. Take him away."

"I think not."

A soft note spoke from the door. The men in the room started and turned. Before the door stood a slight, grey figure the features almost Asian in character, yet reminiscent of the Eastern European nations. He looked oddly grey and on his head was a strangely shaped skull cap. His eyebrows were well defined and from under their grey heaviness peered out piercingly black eyes, holding in their fathomless depths a weird vivid light.

A strangled gasp came from the men in the room. Miller was the first to recover from his amazement. In a hoarse whisper he spoke two words: "Dr. Night."

For some seconds the man stood before the door, his hands concealed under the sleeves of his coat. With an effort Wills rose to his feet, leaning across the table.

"Who are you?" he stuttered. "How dare you enter this room uninvited?"

"Tut tut!" Dr. Night moved a few paces into the room, halting before the table at which the 'Seven' sat. "I have come here to-night because it is my will to come. I am Dr. Night."

"What do you want?" The question came involuntary from the chairman's lips.

"I have come for the Green Pearl—the Sacred Symbol of my House."

Chapter XIII

The slight figure of the Asian appeared to dominate the room. The men, seated at the table, claiming to represent one of the most powerful nations of the world, shifted uneasily on their seats. Miller, after one long searching look at the slight, grey figure, had settled back on the bench, sliding along it quietly towards the door, as if seeking to take the man from behind, at an opportune moment.

Jack Parkes, secretary of the 'Seven,' was the first to recover his self-possession. Wrenching his eyes from the grey man, he turned to the chairman, dramatically.

"Mr. Chairman, may I ask how this man obtained admission to this house?"

Wills looked uncomfortable, shifting uneasily in his seat. He made as if to reply, then laughed uneasily. The laugh, slight as it was, broke the tension that had grown since Wills had issued judgment on Carl Rohmer. Mabblerley, the man on his right, laughed aloud. Parkes flushed angrily. He flashed on his companions an angry glance, then subsided into his seat.

"Ah!" Dr. Night took a lozenge from a small, enamelled box. "Comrade Parkes forgets that he is not in Sydney Domain."

"You say you are Dr. Night." Wills spoke hesitatingly. "How did you get here? The door is locked and there is a man on guard in the hall below."

"The door is locked?" The Asian stepped back and pulled open the door. "Comrade Parkes sometimes forgets. He was eager to sit in judgment on the man, Carl Rohmer. I followed the man into this room."

"Then Rohmer brought you here?" exclaimed Mabblerley. He looked at the hapless hotel-keeper with eyes full of venom.

"I said I followed him into the room." Dr. Night turned his impassive gaze on the man. "Carl Rohmer is not acquainted with me; in spite of the fact that of late I have made use of his hotel freely."

"But, the man in the hall?" Wills leaned forward. "Is he a traitor?"

"The man is tired—and irritable." The Asian smiled mockingly. "When I entered the house he was irritable. I soothed him—and now he sleeps—to an early recovery, I hope."

"What do you want?" A short, heavily built man seated rear the end of the table boomed the question in a loud voice.

"The Green Pearl!" The reply came in a matter of fact voice. Again Dr. Night took the enamelled box from his pocket and extracted a lozenge.

"The enamelled box!" Rohmer sprang to his feet, pointing to the box in the Asian's hands. "The enamelled box in which Captain Therrold carried the Green Pearl. I took it from him, leaving the box Mr Parkes gave me in its place. He stole it while I was in the lecture hall."

"Is that true?" Wills asked the question, a frown on his red face.

"The enamelled box?" Dr. Night looked down at the article in his hand. "There are three enamelled boxes, of which this is one. Captain Therrold has one. The second lies in the Kremlin at Moscow; the third is here." He turned and bent a peculiar look at the hotel-keeper. "You say you took an enamelled box from Captain Therrold?"

"Enough of this foolery." Parkes was on his feet again. "I admit that I may have forgotten to lock the door. But—what of Smith, in the hall below. This man has murdered him. I demand that a search be made."

A murmur of assent went round the table. Dr. Night smiled quietly, replacing the enamelled box in his pocket.

Wills turned angrily on Parkes. "If you're so concerned about Smith, suppose you go and have a look at him."

Parkes dropped back suddenly into his chair. Milson, the ex-pugilist, sprang to his feet.

"I'm not frightened of any bloomin' Chink," he shouted. "Keep this man here and if he's done anything to Smith I'll wring his bloomin' neck."

"We'll both go." Parkes left his seat, brave when supported by the muscles of the ex-pugilist. "You fellows keep this man here. We won't be long."

The slight, grey figure on the other side of the table did not stir. Quietly at ease, Dr. Night stood with downcast eyes, as if ignoring the decision of the men. Parkes moved down the table to Milson's chair and there hesitated as if waiting for his comrade to take the lead. Milson rose from his chair, apparently undecided how to act. At length he moved slowly forward, in a crouching attitude, his hands raised on guard.

Dr. Night made no sign. Emboldened by the Asian's disregard, Milson stepped forward and stretched out his hand. The next instant the ex-pugilist was lying across the table, a look of intense surprise on his face. Parkes retreated hastily to his chair, trying to look as if he had never left it.

Illustration:

The next instant the ex-pugilist was lying across the table.

Dr. Night had not moved. Only when Milson's hand had rested on his shoulder had he turned his head and looked the man full in the eyes.

"Go on, bully." Maberley laughed uproariously. "You're not afraid of an old man like him?"

"Lor!" Milson levered himself to his feet. "Why, he's got a punch like the kick of a mule. We'll see who laughs now. 'E got me off me guard."

Crouching low, the ex-pugilist approached the Asian with great caution, his guard held high and alert for every movement of his opponent. Stepping slowly,

the man swerved suddenly to one side, hoping to make Dr. Night change his lethargic position and betray some intention. The Asian did not move. With a quick jerk the man swung for the jaw. More than one man in the room was prepared to swear that the blow was struck—but it never landed.

A bare foot from the mystery man's face Milson's fist hung in the air. The man's body, tensed and held. A look of surprise came over his face. He made a violent effort to step back, but found himself immovable. Slowly a paralysis crept over his body. The limbs grew rigid; the body poised in the act of striking. Only the eyes appeared free from the atrophy. In them came a look of terror—little beast-like cries came from the partly-opened lips.

With mild eyes Dr. Night looked from one to the other of the seated men. Their eyes were bowed to the table; they were afraid to look in the face of the man who had met violence with what appeared to be a living death. A smile of supreme contempt came on the Asian's lips. For a long moment he held them with his eyes.

"I have come for the Green Pearl." The words fell sonorously and sweetly from the thin lips of the mysterious Asian. "It is written: The secrets of the ages are the tools of the wise men. Deliver to me the pearl that is the treasure of my ancestors. It is not meet that it should rest in the hands of an alien race."

"We haven't it." The words came reluctantly from the lips of the man who sat at the head of the table.

"The man, Carl Rohmer, stole the Green Pearl from the man who stole it from Russian robbers. In the Hall of Talk he sat with it in his pocket. What has he done with it? It is my will that I know."

"You know a lot! Find out!" Parkes snapped the words, half under his breath.

"Peace!" The placid glance of the Asian rested on the man's face; a look of pain came into Parkes eyes. "Let the keeper of the inn stand forward."

Almost against his will, Rohmer rose from his seat. He tried to keep his eyes straight ahead, but they were drawn by a power stronger than his own. He had to turn and look at Dr. Night.

"The Pearl was stolen from me." Unwillingly the words came from his lips.

"So?" Dr. Night bent nearer Rohmer. "Where was Captain Therrold seated in the Hall of Talk?"

"I did not see him. He was not there."

"You lie! My knowledge tells me that he was there and that he took the pearl from you. Tell me! I will that you tell me that which I wish to know."

For a moment there was silence.

Every eye in the room turned to the hotel-keeper. In a queer, low monotonous voice the man commenced to speak, and all the time he stared directly into the fathomless eyes of the Asian. He spoke of how he had taken the pearl from Therrold, and his movements between when he had left the hotel on that Sunday night until he sat in the hall listening to the lecture. Then, without a change of voice, he spoke of Therrold's actions as if he had been with the Englishman. Accurately he described the stealing of the pearl from Ms pocket. Then he abandoned his account of Therrold's actions and spoke of his walk to the headquarters of the "Seven."

"You have spoken." Dr. Night meditated a few seconds, then motioned the hotel-keeper back to his seat. He turned to the stricken pugilist, still lying across the table, and muttered a few words.

Slowly the atrophy left the man's limbs. A look of terrified awe came into his eyes. Cowed and shamed, he slunk back to his seat.

"I have erred." The Asian raised his hands above his head, almost as if in benediction. "For a time there is peace between you and me, O Children of Outer Darkness. This much I say to you: Touch not the Green Pearl nor seek the place where it lies. Beware, I say! Seek not the pearl lest I call the Spirits of the night to blast you with a greater sleep than I gave to this man—the Sleep of Death."

Illustration:

"Beware, I say! Seek not the pearl lest I call the Spirits of the night..."

For more than a minute he stood with upraised hands, his keen eyes seeking those of each man at the table. On his face grew a look of mighty power and majesty—a power that burned in their eyes, paralysing their brains. In their ears beat the vibrations of mighty wings, soaring up through the low ceiling into the darkened vaults of the heavens. With obvious efforts the men drew their eyes from the slight, grey figure that appeared to be endowed with unearthly powers.

When they looked again he had disappeared and the door was closed.

Chapter XIV

Tony Miller was the first to recover from the paralysis with which the mysterious Asian had confined them. He sprang to the door and wrenched it open. The landing and stairway were in darkness. Shouting to Parkes to switch on the lights, he stumbled down the stairs and felt for the switch behind the hall door. A few minutes and the house was brilliantly illuminated.

A glance round the hall showed Miller the form of the door guide, Smith, stretched fast asleep in his chair. Miller shook him roughly. The man stared up, sleepily, then sprang to his feet.

"What are you sleeping for?" Miller shouted. "Who was the bloke you let in?"

"Bloke?" The man rubbed his eyes, lazily.

"You have betrayed your trust." Parkes was leaning over the banisters, pointing an accusatory finger at the man. "Smith, what excuse have you to offer. Miller, you will attend to this man."

"Shut up, you damned fool!" Milson vaulted the banisters into the hall below. "Of all the blithering half-baked sheep's tongues, you're the worst. D'yer think yer preachin' to that slimy collection of bench-polishers in yer barn in Sussex Street, or ion the 'igh street, Randwick? You're all bloomin' talk! You're a leader of revolution? Bah! You? Why, at the first shot you'd be down in Lindemann's cellars forgetting you'd ever signed the pledge. Go on, you paralysing word-buster! No, thought not; yer ain't got the guts ter do anythin' but talk."

Wills loomed large at the top of the stairs, gazing down on the man below.

"What's the row," he asked in his queerly low voice. "Come up here, all of you. Do you want the neighbours to send for the police. Yes, you too, Smith." He turned and went back to the meeting room. Half-sheepishly the men trooped after him.

When they had gathered and the door was locked he spoke again:

"It's not a bit of use you carrying on like a lot of kids," he said slowly. "We know how the man got in, and Milson can tell us what sort of a chap he is; oh, Bully. What we'd like to know is what Smith went through. I ain't blaming him. He was up against something real hard."

"I didn't know there was a stranger here at all," Smith protested. "Miller came in with the hotel man and—"

"Mr. Chairman, I protest!" Parkes was on his feet, gesticulating wildly. "How could the man have got in—"

Wills turned his head and glared at Parkes with cold, pig-like eyes. Under the menacing glance the man subsided into his chair, muttering.

Smith waited a moment, then continued:

"Miller came in with Rohmer. After I had passed them upstairs, I switched off the lights and sat down. I remember hearing a knock at the door and then—then I think I must have fallen asleep. I remember nothing more—until I woke up to find Miller shaking me by the shoulder."

Wills nodded his head gravely. He had expected a story similar to this. Dr. Night had won his way into the house by means of his wonderful mesmeric force. Yet, could he have mesmerised a man through a stout oaken door?

"We know what we're up against now." Wills spoke reflectively. "Now we've got to decide what we're going to do. This Dr. Night has told us not to go after the Green Pearl. On the other hand, we have orders from—from those we know—that we must obtain the pearl at any cost and forward it to Moscow. Well, we've got to make our choice now. If we go after the pearl—and it appears that Therrold has it again—then we are up against Dr. Night; and from what he's shown us to-night, he can handle the lot of us, single-handed."

He paused a few moments, then continued: 'If we don't go after the pearl—we might as well go back to work. There will be no more money coming from—you know where. What we get now isn't such a lot—but it isn't to be sneezed at. Still, we have hopes that things will improve soon. Moscow's offered £60,000 for that pearl. That's something to take into account. What's on the other side. Why, Dr. Night—and he only offers hard knocks. Don't know how you chap's feel about it, but There's plenty of fools to do the rough work and—'

"That's all talk." Milson stirred uneasily. "Nice talk about this Moscow money and your personal expenses. What d'yer want? You've gotta cushy job as brings yer a thousand a year, sides expenses here. As for this Moscow money—"

"It wasn't until I got in touch with a certain union that I learned that it was possible for a union president to keep a fine house and have lashings of money to spend—on a salary of thirty bob a week. How do you do it, Milson?"

The man sat back, growling under his breath at the laugh that went round the table.

"As I was saying," continued the leader of the 'Seven' amiably. "We've got to choose between Dr. Night and our friends in Russia. Dr. Night's not a paying proposition, at present. Of course, it's possible our worthy secretary may be able

to get in touch with him and arrange—something. He's good at that. Just to get a move on things, I'm going to propose that our good friend Rohmer be given a fresh chance. He didn't do so badly before. Dr. Night showed us that. And he says he can get the pearl again."

"When the day comes—" Parkes sprang to his feet, waving his arms, wildly.

"—We'll give you a brace of automatics and let you bring Dr. Night to visit us." Wills turned a baneful eye upon the man. "That's a promise, Parkes, and don't forget it. Now, Rohmer, it's up to you. You said you can bring in the pearl. Well, you've got a week to do it in. You'll get all the help you want—but—we—must—have—that—pearl."

With a nod, to indicate that the meeting was closed Wills rose from his chair.

In twos and threes, the man left the room and the house, talking in subdued tones. Miller caught up to Rohmer on the pavement before the house and walked down the street with him. For some distance neither man spoke.

At Redfern Bridge, the agent of the 'Seven' halted. "You've had a lucky escape," he said, shortly. "Your luck was that Dr. Night thought to pay us a visit. He took all the spunk out of that gang. Lucky for you, I say; but I'd make a point of getting that pearl—I would, if I were you."

He turned abruptly and disappeared into the darkness.

Rohmer waited a few minutes then walked down to Railway Square and hailed a taxi. Whirling down Castlereagh Street he heaved a sigh of relief at the narrow escape he had experienced.

It was a sorely puzzled hotel manager who walked into the Hotel Splendide. The lounge was almost deserted and he cast a quick glance around, in search of Captain Therrold. A young lady sitting close to the inquiry desk caught his eyes. The girl was a stranger to him, yet had the air of being a guest at the hotel. Rohmer prided himself that he knew every one of the hotel guests by sight and name. He went to the desk and rapped for the clerk.

"The lady in the dress of green and gold, who is she?" he asked impatiently. "See! By the column, a few yards away. I do not remember her."

The clerk nodded after a quick glance at the girl. He opened a ledger and swung it to face the manager.

"Miss Betty Carlington, room 531."

Rohmer half spoke the words. The clerk smiled. "No, sir, you wouldn't remember her. Came here just before dinner this evening—just after you went out."

"From where comes she?" Rohmer asked impatiently. There was something strangely familiar about the girl; yet he could not place her.

"Melbourne, sir."

"And the train, she comes to Sydney at midday." Rohmer glanced sharply at the clerk. "From the station to the Hotel—nearly six miles. How has the lady employed the interval?"

The clerk shook his head. The manager turned slightly, resting his arm on the ledge of the desk. A furtive examination of the girl did not satisfy. She was reading a book and her eyes were down. Shrugging, Rohmer went to his private office. He was perplexed. The girl was a stranger—yet somehow strangely familiar. It was strange—but how?

Hotel guests are birds of passage! He turned to a cabinet and took out a decanter and siphon. He wanted a stiff peg to steady his nerves, badly shaken by the events of the past hours. Emptying the first glass at a gulp, Rohmer mixed another peg and carried it to a seat by the window.

What a fool he had been to allow himself to be mixed up with Wills and his gang. He tried to puzzle out how he had become involved.

Ennui, first—of course. Sunday nights were slack, always, and then—there was curiosity. It had happened months before—many months, almost a year, Rohmer remembered.

The newspapers had been full of the conditions in Russia—and he had been curious. Someone had said that the newspapers were not printing the truth. Then—he had seen that advertisement. A man was to lecture on the real conditions in Russia—and it was a Sunday night. He had gone to the lecture.

There he had heard the revolution explained, on a parallel with the revolution of years before in his own country—France. The revolution had been the driving out of tyrants. It had been reasonable. He desired to know more of it. Leaving the hall he had purchased some of the pamphlets recommended by the attendant. A man had spoken to him, claiming that he had been in Russia and knew the conditions from personal observation. He had been interested and had asked the man to come to the hotel—to tell him more—and partake of his hospitality. The man had come again and again. He had talked well; he had explained much in a reasonable manner. But, how had he been drawn into the intrigues of the 'Seven'—the Soviet agents in Australia.

With a frown, he remembered. His friends had come to him and told him that certain men, antagonistic to the aims of Russian freedom, were to stay at his hotel. He had asked that Rohmer obtain certain information they possessed. It had meant entering their rooms—searching their papers. He had hesitated, yet under the persuasion of his friends had done this.

When Captain Therrold arrived at the hotel, Rohmer had felt the noose that he had placed round his own neck tighten. The man had come to him and demanded that he obtain the pearl from Therrold. He had refused—to be faced with irrefutable evidence that he had robbed a guest of certain papers. He had been shown how he could comply without risk—and had acceded to the demands. Now he was fully in the toils. He had taken the pearl and lost it. Now he was required to obtain it again—and he knew that over his head hung an awful penalty if he failed.

Fortifying himself with another stiff peg, Rohmer went up to the fifth floor. The corridor was deserted and lay, barely cold, under the brilliant lights. He went down to Therrold's room and paused at the door.

He was about to bend to the peep-hole he had bored in the door when he heard the elevator stop at the floor. The strange girl he had seen in the lounge was coming down the corridor. He waited until she entered her room; then went again to Therrold's door, and hesitated.

Turning again, he went down the corridor in the direction of the lifts. A few yards from the bend in the corridor were the floor switches. He opened the case and swung one of the handles. The lights in the corridor were immediately extinguished. Half running on tip-toe, Rohmer went to the Englishman's door.

Therrold was seated at the table beneath the window. At his elbow was a half-filled tumbler and the enamelled box. He was examining something he held in his hand.

A moment, and Rohmer saw the object.
It was the Green Pearl!

Chapter XV

MARK THERROLD had regained possession of the Green Pearl. When he had reached his rooms, on returning from the lecture hall, he had untied the packet, he had taken from Rohmer's pocket. As he had anticipated, the packet contained the enamelled box and within it nestling on its bed of velvet, was the Green Pearl.

For some time Therrold sat staring at the jewel. The thing fascinated him. He could hardly withdraw his eyes from its soft, cool lustre. He had regained the pearl! Now he had to plan how to keep it. Until he could carry it on board ship, en route for England and the Russian Prince. It was no easy task—to convey this pearl out of Australia and guard it on the long sea voyage against the cunning Dr. Night and the Soviet agents.

The problem was a hundred times more difficult than when he had landed in Sydney from the Japanese mail boat. Then his enemies had only suspected him of having the pearl. Now they knew! They had forced him into the open—to acknowledge possession of the Green Pearl. They were now able to concentrate their forces, hampered only by their mutual antagonism.

Now he was surrounded—and by foes he did not know. Could he win through first to the deck of a steamer, and then to England. Therrold knew that his greatest opponent was the mysterious Asian, Dr. Night.

Detective Browne had told him of the wonderful powers this man was said to control. Superintendent Dixon had added to his knowledge. Now he was able to identify the man, connecting him with legends he had learned while on his long trek across Asia.

Why had not Dr. Night tried to deprive him of the pearl while he was wandering across the plains of Asia. Why had he waited until he had landed in Australia before making an attempt to regain the jewel he claimed to be a sacred heirloom of his race? The question was unsolvable. For hours Therrold sat, pondering the problem. He must find a vessel sailing to England as soon as possible. He must arrange to get on board unwatched and unchallenged. There Thorne could help him. He must arrange some safeguard for the pearl while on board the ship, and before he sailed.

It would be wise to move to another hotel the next day. For the present? He took the jewel from the enamelled box and slipped it into the belt secured around his waist. For the time that was the safest place for it.

Suddenly Therrold looked up. Someone was tapping very quietly. He listened intently. The sound was very faint. It puzzled him, for he thought he heard it before that evening. With a shrug, he tried to put it from his imagination, but it persisted.

Suddenly in his brain it assumed a meaning: SOS SOS

The signal of distress!

But, who would be tapping out the signal of distress to him at that hour of the night? Immediately the Australian, agent came to his mind. Somewhere Thomas was hidden. But, was he hiding or was he confined? Surely the latter or he would not be signalling for help. The Englishman looked around. So far as he could judge the sounds came from the bathroom. He went to the door and with a key tapped a reply: "WHERE."

"DONT KNOW" came the rapid answer. Therrold now knew he was in communication with the Australian agent. But, where was he? Tapping an order to the concealed man to keep up a succession of signals, the Englishman circled the apartment. He found the signals were most distinct when he was in the bathroom. He circled that room, continually pressing his ear against the wall. He found the best results came when he was at the wall dividing the bathroom from the next apartment.

Returning to the bedroom, Therrold found the master key he had used to enter Thomas' bedroom earlier that day. He went to the door of the corridor. The corridor was in darkness and, in his anxiety over the Australian he forgot to wonder over that strangeness. Returning to his bedroom he found a pocket torch and again went to the corridor. A quick flash up and down the passage showed that no one was in sight. A few minutes search and he found the switch and threw it on. The door of the next apartment gave under the master key. Therrold stepped in and closed the door. He threw his light around the room, then switched on the room lights. The apartment was similar to the one he occupied, except that the bedroom lay on the opposite side of the bathroom.

A few strides and the Englishman entered the bathroom. On the floor, in a corner lay what looked like a bundle of rags. Flinging them aside, Therrold looked down on Thomas, bound and, gagged.

Illustration:

On the floor lay what looked like a bundle of rags.

It was only the work of a moment to cut the throngs, yet it was some minutes before the Australian could stand up and allow Therrold to help him from the place.

"Thanks, old man." Thomas leaned back in his chair and sipped a drink appreciatively.

"How long have I been trussed up in that hole?"

"All day," the Secret Service agent replied briefly. He was rummaging in a suitcase. "Fraid there's no chance of getting a meal for you at this hour of the night. Besides, I don't want friend Rohmer to know that you are free just yet."

He produced a packet of biscuits and placed them on the table, at Thomas' elbow.

"Lord, I thought I'd been there a week. Under those rugs I could scarcely breathe and I couldn't shift the beastly things off my head. Found a pipe against where I was lying and managed to get the door key out of my waistcoat pocket. Then I started to tap tap. Wondered if someone would hear and answer. Then I

became concerned about my binge. Thought they intended to starve me to death, and, of course, wasted valuable time cursing the brutes."

"Of course, it was Rohmer?"

"He and a couple of hefties." Thomas spoke between mouthfuls of biscuits. "They got me immediately after you left the room with that girl. I'd just come out of the bathroom and was going to the table to retrieve the enamelled box. They were on me before I realised that they were in the room. Hadn't a chance to put up anything of a scrap, y'know."

"Wonder how long Rohmer intended to keep you there?" Therrold asked thoughtfully. "Don't like to suggest you going back, but it would be interesting to know."

"Thanks!" The Australian answered drily. He paused to attack the last of the biscuits. "Don't feel like experimenting to-night. Ugh! Feel better now. What's the programme, Therrold? Am I to have a shot at that Frenchie? Lord, I'd love to get my hands on him!"

"Fraid you'll have to restrain your exuberance," the Secret Service agent laughed. He took the enamelled box from his pocket and tapped it significantly. "I managed to get the pearl back."

"Good-oh!" The Australian sat up quickly. "What's the tale, man?"

In a few words the Englishman recounted the adventures of the evening. Thomas was interested and asked a number of questions, particularly as to Rohmer's interest in the lecture.

"Thought the blighter was up to something of the sort," he said, musingly. "Now, how are you going to guard that bit of sea foam? After what you've said, the pack will be on your track, full cry."

"Can't do anything, until tomorrow." Therrold frowned. "Then I clear out of here. First possible boat and I'm off to England."

"Humph!" Thomas stretched, luxuriously. "Jove, it's good to be free again. What about the registered post?"

"Not on your life. They'd know of that and the next move would be on the mails. No, I've a liking to carry the thing back in my pocket. That way, if they get at me again, I'm right on the job from the jump-off. That's a big advantage."

"Then we'll guard it together from now on." Thomas rose, stifling a yawn, "'Fraid I won't be much good to you, for the present. I'm as stiff as a swaggie!"

"Turn in there, old man!" Therrold indicated his bed. "I'll watch until five o'clock and then you can take up guard until eight."

"Right!" The Australian went to the bed. He turned with an exclamation. "Say, old chap! Leave me here and take the pearl into my room. They'll never think to look for you there."

Therrold nodded. The idea was good. Opening the door and making sure that he was unobserved, he crossed to Thomas' room.

Chapter XVI

WHEN Therrold entered his bedroom the next morning, shortly after six o'clock, the Australian was sound asleep. He awoke immediately the Englishman shook him. "Jove, I've had a real sleep, old man. What's the time? Half-past six! Feel as fit as a fiddle, and as stiff. What time's breakfast. Lord, I'm hungry!"

"No biscuits," Therrold laughed. "You scoffed the lot last night, 'Fraid you'll have to wait for an hour or more. Don't think you'll be able to wangle breakfast before eight."

Thomas tumbled out of bed and started to dress. When he had pulled on a few garments he bundled the rest of his belongings in his arms and started to the door. "You want a shave old bean," he said, judicially.

"I want a clean collar, at the least. See you later. The decencies of life will occupy some portion of the inevitable wait, but it will not decrease the natural vacuum. S'long!"

He turned in the doorway and looked back at the Englishman.

"Say, old chap. Is it still 'strangers ever,' or am I to have the inestimable honour of your society, in public?"

"Society, certainly." Therrold hesitated a moment. "Rohmer knows we're at least acquainted, so there's no good in keeping up that 'strangers' fiction for ever. By the way, you don't let out to your friend that you were ever a bondsman of his. When you're dressed, come over here and we'll go down together. I want to see the old scoundrel's face when he sees us walking into the dining room, arm in arm."

Shortly before eight o'clock Thomas looked into Therrold's room to find the Secret Service Agent seated before the window. A nod, and the Englishman joined the Australian in the corridor.

The lift attendant betrayed no astonishment at seeing the two men together, apparently on intimate terms. He was accustomed to sudden hotel friendships.

For some time the two men loitered about the lounge. Rohmer was not about and Thomas continually urged that he was in sore need of one of the meals he had missed. In the restaurant, Therrold led Thomas to the table he was accustomed to occupy, motioning for him to take the seat opposite.

During the meal the two men talked on indifferent subjects; yet watching keenly for the hotel manager's appearance. At length they came to the conclusion that Rohmer would not come to the restaurant for breakfast, and went down to the lounge. For some time they occupied a seat in full view of the office door.

Rohmer did not appear and Therrold began to grow impatient. He went to the desk and asked for the manager, to be informed that Mr. Rohmer was confined to his room, indisposed. A short conversation between the two men and Thomas left the hotel for Thorne's office. It was necessary for the Secret Service to be informed of Therrold's plans. Again, Thorne could more easily, and without attracting suspicion, make the official arrangements regarding passport and berth, for Therrold to sail by the next mail boat. It was unlikely that either Dr. Night or the Soviet agents had learned of the connection between the Englishman and the Australian Secret Service.

Therrold loitered about the lounge for some time. He was waiting for Thomas' return. If there was any delay in finding a boat then Therrold had determined to move to another hotel. Again, the Englishman was most anxious to come face to

face with the hotel manager and discover from his attitude if he had any suspicion that Therrold had robbed him of the Green Pearl in the Sussex Street lecture hall.

Thomas did not return to the hotel at the time appointed and Rohmer did not appear in the public portions of the hotel. Therrold began to get restive. He wanted action—something to do.

Then he remembered the little enamelled box in the Oxford Street antique shop. It would do no harm to saunter up to the shop and see if the box was still in the window. If it was, he would go into the shop and try to buy it. Then he would transfer the pearl to the new box and keep the old one he had carried from Asia as a souvenir of what he hoped would be his last journey through the wild spaces of the world.

When he returned to London—and if successful in his task—he would be a comparatively rich man. His record would be sufficient to gain him a good Job where a knowledge of the unfrequented places of the world would be of value.

Sending a page for his hat and stick, Therrold left the hotel and walked down to Queen's Square. Here he turned into College Street and along the length of Hyde Park, to Oxford Street. At the antique shop he found the enamelled box in the window. He looked in at the door. An old woman was applying a languid whisk to the few articles of antique furniture. Therrold entered and asked to be shown some specimens of black opal. The woman went to the rear of the shop and presently a young Chinese boy came forward, bowing low to the customer.

Illustration:

An old woman was applying a languid whisk-broom to
the few articles of antique furniture.

Therrold was about to address the youth in Cantonese, but refrained. It might not be wise to display a knowledge of Chinese dialect. He asked for some black opal and the youth went to the window and brought out some trays. Placing on one side the two or three specimens he intended to purchase, Therrold asked to see the enamelled box. The Chinese immediately produced it. The Englishman examined it carefully. It was certainly genuine, an exact replica of the one he had carried from Central Asia. He asked the price.

The boy took the box and examined it carefully; then shook his head, negatively.

"What do you mean?" Therrold asked impatiently.

"No mark. No cash. No can sell."

"Don't you want to sell?" The Englishman was puzzled. "I'll give you a pound for it."

The youth shook his head, putting the hand holding the box behind him. Therrold increased his bid, but the Chinese reiterated, impassively:

"No can sell."

"Therrold became impatient.

"You call again. Me tell boss. Him makee plice."

Therrold left the shop reluctantly. He wanted the box and was prepared to pay a good price for it. But the youth was adamant. He would only sell articles that had the price marked on them.

Dr. Night was the owner of the antique shop. He had placed the enamelled box in the window of the shop for some reason, possibly as a bait. For whom? The only answer could be that the Asian was aware that Therrold had traced the girl to the shop. Yet the box had been on show when he crossed to the shop, after the girl had left and had looked in at the window. But it was quite possible that he had not been the only person following the girl. It was possible that she had seen Therrold in the tea shop and had later followed him to Bathurst Street.

In that case, Dr. Night know of his connection with the Secret Service chief. The girl might have loitered about to attract Therrold's attention and when he followed her she might, have made some secret sign to a confederate that had caused him to run off to the antique shop. Dr. Night might then have placed the enamelled box in the window.

With an impatient shrug, Therrold hailed a taxi and drove back to the hotel. He had not been in the lounge many minutes before one of the boys paged his name. Therrold nodded and the boy came to him.

"Gentleman to see you, sir."

"What name?"

"Didn't give one, sir. Said you wouldn't know it."

Therrold thought a moment. Was this some new trap? But what had he to fear in a crowded hotel lounge, in the middle of the day?

"Send him here, boy," he directed briefly. In a few minutes the boy returned, preceding a slight, grey man. Therrold stared in astonishment. This man had peered over the girl's shoulder into his room when Detective Browne sat with him. He was the man he had seen in the antique shop in Oxford Street when he had traced the girl there; the man Detective Browne had declared to be Dr. Night.

The Asian bowed formally to the Englishman and waited. A moment's hesitation and Therrold indicated the lounge. With another profound bow, Dr. Night seated himself.

"Mr. Therrold is surprised that I make a visit to him." The Asian leaned back in his corner, looking quizzically at the Secret Service man.

"I am surprised that Dr. Night should show himself in the streets of Sydney," Therrold retorted. "Surely he is—careless."

"You refer to—" The doctor waved a long, thin hand. "Of course, you know of that affair. I should have remembered. I am not afraid, Mr. Therrold. The police in this country are not very alert."

"No?"

"Mr. Therrold is wondering why I have come to see him. May I say that had I known of his interest in the little enamelled box in the corner of the window of my antique shop in Oxford Street, I would have given myself the pleasure of bringing it here and asking his acceptance of so insignificant a trifle."

"How the—" Therrold stared at the man in astonishment. "Oh, of course. Your Chinese boy informed you of my visit."

"I have not attended the shop in Oxford Street this day." Again the doctor smiled. "Will Mr. Therrold condescend to accept the box from one who will be honoured to be named his friend?"

"Thank you, no." Therrold stared at the man coldly. "I have not forgotten my friend, Detective Browne."

"Mr. Therrold blames me for the death of that man?" A slight flush showed under the grey skin.

"I cannot see my way to do otherwise." Therrold was angry. "I must tell you, Dr. Night, that immediately you leave me I shall inform the police of your visit and of your connection with the Oxford Street shop. They will want an explanation of Detective Browne's death; as well as of certain matters that occurred two years ago."

"I have a war with the white people." Dr. Night spoke the fantastic words with quiet dignity. "I fight with the weapons my fathers' gods have given me. If your police are to take me, that is the will of those I serve. But I do not think they will take me."

"That is a matter with which I have nothing to do." Therrold spoke coolly. "I have been remiss in not informing the police of my knowledge. May I ask the purpose of this visit?"

"I have come for the Green Pearl." The Asian spoke quietly, yet Therrold thought there was a tenseness of excitement in the man's voice.

"You think I have the pearl?"

"I know it. Mr. Therrold, the pearl is the Sacred Symbol of my race, and power, descending to me from a long line of monarchs. It was stolen from my fathers by the Russians. There is a curse on the pearl when it lies in the hands of men who do not own it. The Russian Empire crumbled and fell. The Soviet Government staggered, until you saved it by stealing the Green Pearl from it. Had the Grand Duke Paul judged wisely he would not have sent you for the pearl. It was accomplishing its destiny—and the destiny of the men who held it. Now all is changed."

"I know nothing of that, Dr. Night. My duty is to convey the pearl to my employer."

"The Grand Duke Paul?"

"I see no reason to conceal the fact. Yes."

Dr. Night sat for moments in thought. At length he looked up.

"Mr. Therrold, will you give me the pearl?"

"No."

"Mr. Therrold, you went a dangerous journey to recover the pearl for your employer. You are a brave man. I am the rightful owner of the pearl. Will you give it to me?"

"I must carry out my instructions. I shall carry the pearl back to England and place it in the hands of the Grand Duke."

"Yet I am the rightful owner of the pearl."

"That is a matter without my discretion. I have to carry out my instructions."

Again the Asian was silent for some minutes. He turned to the Secret Service agent.

"Mr. Therrold, I offered the Soviet Government a large treasure for the Green Pearl. To you I make the same offer. Place the pearl in my hands and the money shall be paid to you how and when you will."

Therrold rose to his feet. "I am afraid we are wasting time, Dr. Night, if I like I shall take the pearl to the man who sent me to find it. I must ask you to excuse me."

The Secret Service man was turning away when Dr. Night caught him by the arm.

"Mr. Therrold, you have in your waistcoat pocket a small enamelled box in which you carry the Green Pearl. Will you give it to me? Nay, I command you to give it to me."

A queer, dazed look came in the Englishman's eyes. He turned and stared vacantly at the doctor.

"Give me the box, Mark Therrold." There was quiet insistence in the man's voice. Mechanically Therrold put his fingers into his pocket and brought out the enamelled box.

The Asian took the box gently from Therrold's fingers, triumph gleaming in his dark eyes. For a moment he looked deeply into Therrold's eyes, muttering words in a strange tongue. The Englishman stood quiescent, watching whilst Dr. Night turned and walked out of the hotel; then sat down on the lounge, staring vacantly before him.

Chapter XVII

Captain Thomas entered the hotel lounge about half an hour after Dr. Night had left Therrold. He glanced around the space and noticed the Englishman at the far end, and went to him. Therrold did not reply to the Australian's greeting. For a moment Thomas was puzzled, then bent and stared into the Secret Service man's face a look of questioning doubt in his eyes. He called Therrold again, and when the man did not answer caught him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

Illustration:

The Australian bent, staring into the immobile face,
a look of questioning doubt in his eyes.

Gradually a change came over the Englishman. The air of strained watchfulness left him; his eyes blinked as if the light hurt them. Suddenly he turned and faced the Australian.

"Been dreaming, man?" The Australian laughed uncertainly. "Anything happened?"

"Queer!" Therrold laughed nervously. "I thought Dr. Night was here; talking to me. He—he was asking me to give him the Green Pearl."

"Of course, you immediately did so?" Thomas looked puzzled, although he laughed. "Pity to disappoint the old scoundrel when he came and asked for it so prettily."

Therrold joined in his companions laughter.

The dream was coming to him, and with greater reality. He remembered the Asian coming across the lounge to him, following the page. He remembered vividly every word of the conversation leading up to the movement when Dr. Night had

caught him by the arm and demanded the Green Pearl. From that point all was blank.

Therrold wondered; did he give the man the Green Pearl? Irritably, he rose from the lounge walked up and down. He must have been dreaming, yet he believed that Dr. Night's visit had been real. He could remember every inflection in the man's voice; the strange manner in which the Asian's tone had changed when he demanded the Green Pearl.

Shaking his shoulders roughly, Therrold felt in his pocket for his cigarette case. It was not there. Then he remembered that he had not been able to find it when dressing. He had not made much of a search for Thomas had been worrying to get down to breakfast. He had taken a few cigarettes and thrust them into the imitation enamelled box—the one he had found rolled up in the blind. He felt in his waistcoat pocket for the box. It was not there.

"Got a cigarette, Thomas?" he asked, walking to where the Australian sat, watching him. "Lost my case last night. Now I've lost the enamelled box with a few cigarettes I put into it."

"Sure you didn't give it to Dr. Night?" chaffed Thomas.

Therrold started. Now he could fill the blank. He sat down suddenly, on the divan, and laughed. "Dr. Night has been here," he said, after an Interval. "He came here: and asked me to give him the Green Pearl. I refused and told him that I would tell the police where to find him—that they would want him in connection with. Browne's death, as well as for the affair of two years ago. Then—then I believe I gave him the fake enamelled box—with the cigarettes. Still, I'd like it proved if possible. Certainly, the box has disappeared."

Without a word Thomas walked across to the Inquiry Desk.

He returned a few minutes later, followed by one of the pages. "There's something in your dream, old man." The Australian was obviously worried. "The lad says that about an hour ago a slight grey man with stooping shoulders came to the Inquiry Desk and asked for you. The boy brought him here. He says that you and the man had quite a long conversation; that the man left and you continued to sit here until I came in."

"That seems to coincide with my dream—" commenced Therrold.

"Not much of a dream," interrupted the Australian. "Dr. Night was here." He turned to the boy and dismissed him with a tip.

"Now, about that enamelled box. You're certain you used it for the cigarettes this morning?"

"Quite sure." Therrold was worried.

"Dr. Night asked you for the Green Pearl?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"Yes." A light came into the Englishman's eyes. "Then he asked me to give him the enamelled box from my pocket."

"You are certain that the box did not contain the Green Pearl?"

"Absolutely certain!" Therrold spoke confidently. "Say, old man, you must remember. When we finished breakfast I offered you a cigarette. Did I offer you my case or the enamelled box?"

Thomas sat thinking for some seconds. At length he turned to his companion, grinning broadly. "Now I recollect. You offered me a cigarette from the enamelled box."

He leaned back on the seat, laughing heartily. "Jove, old fellow! What a Joke! You gave Dr. Night half a dozen fine Virginia Cigarettes."

Therrold did not echo the Australian's laughter. He was staring straight before him. Again he heard the low, insistent voice—a voice that held a command he could not resist. He had obeyed the compelling will and had given the man the enamelled box. Then he had returned to his seat—waiting until Thomas had shaken him out of his lethargy.

"Best think I've heard of for some time!" laughed the Australian'.

"Dr. Night over-reached himself that time. Somehow he guessed you had the box in your pocket. Probably felt it while he was sitting beside you here and thought you had the pearl in it. Made a shot in the dark—and won a packet of cigarettes, it's great!"

Therrold could not join in the Australian's merriment. At the back of his mind lay a great, unexplainable worry. He rose from the divan.

"Come upstairs, Thomas," he suggested. "I don't feel right."

The two men strolled across to the elevators, Thomas still chuckling over the joke on Dr. Night. Therrold was silent, trying to banish the weight that had fastened on his mind. He was certain that he had given Dr. Night the enamelled box, but he wanted to get to his room and discover if the Green Pearl was safe. The elevator came down to the ground floor and the gate swung open.

Carl Rohmer stepped out of the cage, almost into the arms of the Secret Service man. At the sight of them he stepped quickly to one side, as if trying to avoid recognition. Therrold barred his way.

"Sorry to hear you were, indisposed, Mr. Rohmer." He spoke genially. "We were inquiring for you after breakfast. Wanted to know why the lights on the fifth floor went out during the night. S'pose a fuse blew out—or was it tied up, eh?"

"Is that so, m'sieu. I will inquiries make. The attendants have not reported the matter to me."

The hotel manager made as if to pass on, but Therrold caught his arm. "In fact, old dear," he chatted. "Bit of luck for me, though. If the lights hadn't failed I wouldn't have known that my old friend, Mark Therrold, was living just across the corridor from me. We bumped in the dark, what? Ships that pass in the dark and all that, old bean!"

"M'sieu is happy. I am delighted. If m'sieu will excuse me, there are—"

"Just a moment, old dear." Thomas held the man firmly. "I want to say how much I appreciate the apartments of this hotel. They're great! Specially the bathrooms. Spent hours in one, yesterday—couldn't tear myself from it. Absolutely enthralling!"

Tired of his play, the Australian released Rohmer, who darted to the door of his office. Thomas looked after him, a broad grin on his face, until the man disappeared. Then he joined Therrold in the lift. On the fifth floor he caught his companion by the arm.

"Score one to me, old chap. Did you see his face. Fairly sweating with terror, poor devil. Seems as if those Russian devils have him fairly in the bag."

At the corner of the corridor they stood aside to allow a young lady to pass. At sight of her face Therrold gave a low gasp. It was the girl of the night—Dr. Night's accomplice.

Illustration:

At sight of her face Therrold gave a low gasp.

Therrold had forgotten the mystery girl in the stress of recent happenings. What was she doing in that corridor? He had traced her to the antique shop; from where she had boarded a Bondi-bound tram. He had assumed that she lived somewhere in the eastern suburbs. Now, from her manner, he must assume that she was living in the hotel. Was she watching him? Catching Therrold by the arm Therrold pointed after the girl.

"See that girl, Thomas? Notice her face?"

"Charming!" The Australian stroked his small, military moustache. "Just the type I admire."

"Then, follow her, man. She's the girl who looked into my room just before Detective Browne was murdered. Find out where she goes and how long she has been staying at this hotel. I'll be in my room when you get back."

Without replying, the Australian turned and strode to the elevators. The girl was standing waiting. In a moment the lift came to the floor and she entered, followed by Thomas. Therrold waited until the lift had started on its downward journey, and then went to his room. In the lounge, the girl went to the desk and received a number of letters. She strolled to one of the vacant seats and sat down to peruse her mail. Thomas followed her to the desk and to his surprise received a letter in response to his casual inquiry. He turned it over thoughtfully. He had not expected letters at the hotel. In fact, only Martin Thorne knew that he was staying there.

Seating himself so that he could keep the girl in sight, Thomas slit open his letter and drew out a blank sheet of notepaper. At one of the corners was a small red-ink cross. For a moment the Australian hesitated, studying the paper carefully. Then he turned to the envelope. It was stamped, but the stamp was not postmarked. Then the letter had not been through the mail. He smiled.

Taking the cigarette out of his case, he lit it, thoughtfully. The match still alight, he applied the flame to the notepaper, holding the sheet by the little cross. A few moments and a line of writing appeared on the blank surface. When the paper was consumed he dropped it into one of the ashtrays and ground the ashes to powder.

The girl was still engaged in her correspondence and seemed likely to remain in the lounge for some time. Thomas rose languidly and strolled to the elevators. At Therrold's door he knocked in a peculiar manner, and entered. "Miss Betty Carlington; room 531, this corridor. Came yesterday afternoon." He paused, staring at his companion in astonishment.

"What's the matter, old chap?" Therrold was standing in the centre of the room, his face white and drawn with anxiety. At Thomas' question he turned and looked at him, blankly.

"The Green Pearl!" he muttered hoarsely.

"The Green Pearl has gone! I can't remember where I hid it!"

Chapter XVIII

"The Green Pearl gone! Nonsense, man." Thomas took the Secret Service man by the shoulders and shook him. "What did you do with it last night?"

Therrold slumped into a chair. His nerve had given way at last, after 5 years of superhuman effort. Since the visit of Dr. Night that afternoon he had not been able to think. He felt as if the mysterious man had cast some spell over him.

"Look here, old man." For a time the Australian had paced the room, deep in thought. Now he paused. "Toil didn't make a bally mistake and hand the thing to Dr. Night?"

Therrold shook his head. He knew he had not handed the pearl to the Asian. He remembered the incidents of the day quite clearly now—but he could not remember the Green Pearl. Even the shape, size and weight were now indefinite to him. He could not remember that he had brought it back to the hotel. He could remember everything plainly—but not where he had hidden the pearl.

He remembered finding Thomas in the next apartment and the talk they had had before he went to Thomas's room, to bed. He remembered coming into his room that morning and seeing the Australian in his bed, asleep. He remembered taking the fake enamelled box from where he had hidden it and placing there the genuine box. He could remember filling the imitation box with cigarettes before going down to breakfast with Thomas. That was all.

He had carefully hidden the pearl; of that he had no doubt. He had not wavered, in the belief that he still had the pearl until Thomas had suggested that perhaps she had handed it to Dr. Night. Then he had come to Ms room to make certain that the pearl was safe.

He had found the enamelled box where he had placed it. The imitation box was missing. He had sought for the pearl but even the memory of where he had hidden it had disappeared.

"Keep an eye on that girl." The Englishman spoke wearily. "Scrape an acquaintance with her, if possible. I'm going to lie down for a time. Perhaps when I've had a sleep this fog in my brain will wear off and I'll remember where I put the cursed thing."

Thomas protested. He wanted to stay with Therrold. Dr. Night by this time must have discovered that he had not obtained the pearl. He must have discovered that he had not the genuine box. He might come back—and Therrold was not in a condition to cope with the wily Asian.

"Let me rest. If Dr. Night can get me to remember where I placed the pearl, he can have it. I'll risk getting it from him."

Therrold rolled restlessly on the bed. "I want to forget for a time—and can't, with you pacing the room. I haven't a chance!"

The Australian left the room, promising to return at frequent intervals.

Almost immediately Therrold fell asleep. It was dark when he awoke—to find Thomas standing by the bed, looking down on him. He smiled at the worried look on the man's face.

"Haven't been doing any sleep walking, have I?" he asked lazily.

"Quiet as a baby."

Thomas looked the question he dared not ask.

"Not a line on the pearl." Therrold swung from the bed. "The hiding place of the damned thing has completely gone from my memory. Funny! If it were not for you I'd doubt if I ever had it."

"Dr. Night!" announced Thomas solemnly.

"Eh?"

"The man's a mesmerist, one of those fakir johnnies." said the Australian. "One of those fakirs who hare tricks far ahead of those the johnnies on the stage have. Mesmerised you with your eyes only, and all that. Deuced clever, y'know. Just wiped out that part of your memory about the Green Pearl. Didn't think such a thing could be done."

Although quaintly phrased, there was truth in Thomas' statement. Therrold had, while in Asia, seen fakirs perform tricks unexplainable by European philosophy. He had witnessed thought transference far ahead of that exhibited in so-called civilised countries. He had watched men pass from life to death—and then retrace their steps. He believed that this man, Dr. Night, was the descendant of a long race of priest-kings, passing to their heirs secrets of science unknown to moderns.

He went to the bathroom anti dressed leisurely. Thomas, seated on the bed, kept up a running commentary on the situation.

They went down to dinner together. Then Thomas suggested the Theatre, but Therrold was loathe to leave the hotel. He feared that at any moment he might remember where he had hidden the pearl—and might then be out of reach of it. Dr. Night did not return to the hotel, in spite of Thomas' anticipations. Possibly he had come to doubt his own powers—perhaps he believed that Therrold knew that the pearl was not in the box when he meekly handed it over.

Betty Carlington remained in the lounge most of the evening. Her presence was significant. If she was an accomplice of the strange Asian, then possibly she was watching the two men. Yet she did not show signs of interest in them. Again and again the two men placed themselves in positions where, if the girl was secretly watching them, she must have betrayed herself.

Late in the evening Thomas remembered the message he had received in his letter that afternoon.

Thorne had instructed him to obtain Therrold's passport and post it to him.

In a few words, Thomas informed the Englishman of the message and they went up to the latter's room. Thomas enclosed the passport in an envelope and addressed it to one of the Australian agents, who would convey it to his chief. The two men took their hats' and strolled down to the General Post Office.

"Thorne is booking passages for you on the next two ships out," explained the Australian. "If you do not use either of these ships, then the passage will be transferred on to other ships. Your passport will be returned to you tomorrow. All you have to do is to find the pearl and slip on board ship. If we become separated, go ahead. We'll know if you have sailed."

"So will the others, probably," the Englishman laughed. "The adventures of the Green Pearl are not over, by any chance."

The passport despatched the men returned to the hotel. It was late, and in spite of his sleep that afternoon, the Englishman was drowsy. Thomas asserted that he was wakeful and arranged to keep watch from his own room, at least for a time.

Therrold awoke suddenly before daybreak next morning with the impression on his mind that there was someone in his room. He lay still, listening intently. He could hear no sound. Yet he was certain that he was not alone. Had Dr. Night returned in search of the pearl? The large windows were lit by the glow from the street lamps. Therrold turned so that he could watch them. For so long he lay watching that lie became convinced that he was mistaken. Then a shadow passed between him and the window. Someone had crossed his room, going in the direction of the bathroom.

The Englishman lay still, listening intently. There came a sound, as if someone had bumped against a chair. He turned on his pillows as if restless. Over his head was the switch of the reading lamp. He reached up, but he had slipped down in bed and the cord was out of reach. Very cautiously he shifted, straining up until his fingers caught the small knob. Then he waited, listening. Evidently the intruder was waiting for him to settle to sleep again.

This time he must not be taken unawares. When he switched on the light he must be prepared to attack or defend. Very slowly he drew up his legs, freeing them from the bedclothes; listening intently for some sound from his opponent. At length, tired of waiting, he switched on the light and sprang to the floor. Immediately the door of the bathroom shut with a faint click. Therrold raced across the room, automatic in hand. Someone had been in his room and was now in the bathroom—and from there he blocked escape.

The intruder was trapped this time! Cautiously the Englishman moved across the floor, until he stood against the wall beside the bathroom door. There he hesitated, uncertain as to his next move. It was one thing to trap a wild animal and another to open the trap and capture it! Therrold knew that the men he was opposed to were dangerous—more dangerous than any wild beasts; hesitating at nothing to gain their ends. A touch on the bathroom door might be the signal for fast and furious shooting. As matters stood, he and his opponent were at a stalemate. Whoever made the first move might expose himself to a fatal shot.

For some minutes Therrold retained his position against the wall, thinking hard. He had an impulse to steal from the room and awaken Thomas. Yet that might give his enemy a chance to obtain a more advantageous position. There must be a way to bring the man into the open, without exposing himself. Keeping out of the line of fire from the bathroom door, Therrold went to his suitcase and found a pocket torch. Then he returned to the bed. Sitting on the edge he yawned loudly; then rolled on to the mattress, making the bed creak as much as possible. He reached up and switched off the reading light.

Almost immediately he slipped out of bed again and stole to the bathroom door, and waited, automatic in hand, his finger on the trigger of his torch. Minutes passed and the intruder showed no signs of leaving his refuge. Stepping cautiously, Therrold pressed on the door. It swung inward. Steadily he pressed until the door was half open—and waited. There was no sound from within the bathroom. Pressing the button of his torch, the Englishman cast the light through the door. So far as he could see the room was empty. Then, the intruder must be

hiding behind the door, or in the long space between the door and the window. Changing his ground so that he covered the major portion of the bathroom with his automatic, Therrold determined to force the issue.

"Come out of there," he called quietly. "Remember, I have you covered and will shoot at the first suspicious movement."

There was no reply. Therrold waited a moment, then reached into the bathroom and switched on the light. He swung the door back close against the wall and stepped in. There was no one in the room!

Chapter XIX

Inside the bathroom, and convinced that the place was empty, Therrold swung the door shut and looked around him with amazement. He was convinced that there had been someone in his room and that he had driven that person into the bathroom.

But where had the intruder escaped to? He had watched the shadow pass the window, going in the direction of the bathroom. He was certain that the person had not had the opportunity to return to the bedroom. From the moment the bathroom door had shut with that significant click he had had it under observation—under the muzzle of his automatic. The intruder had had no chance to escape. Yet he was not there.

Only for a few seconds after he had switched off the reading light and before he had pressed the trigger of his torch had the room been in darkness, and then he stood before the bathroom door. The man could not have escaped then. Yet the bathroom was empty!

Therrold was decidedly puzzled. He went across to the main switch of the bedroom and threw on the lights. There was no doubt that someone had been in the room. His things were in disorder. The searcher had made no attempt at concealment; going about his work thoroughly. He must have worked by the light of a hooded torch, and have taken his time in the search. But, how had the man gained entrance to his room. Therrold remembered having locked the door before he went to bed. He tested the lock now. The bolt was shot and the chair he had tilted against the door was still in position. No one could have opened the door from the corridor without bringing the chair with a crash to the ground.

It was still more impossible for anyone to have left the room by that door and replaced the chair in that position. How had the intruder entered and left the room? There was only one answer: Through the bathroom. Yet the only door from the bathroom led through the bedroom. The only other exit was by the window. Therrold went into the bathroom. It was a long, narrow apartment about six feet wide and extending the length of the bedroom. At one end was the bath, with the usual conveniences of clothes hangers and toilet-shelf. At the other end was a lavatory, and beside it a vacant space about three feet wide and four feet long. The window was in the middle of the wall. It opened outward on hinges controlled by two brackets. When open there was barely room for a full-grown man to squeeze through. Therrold opened the window and looked out. The walls of the hotel fell

sheer to a passageway beside the hotel. The passage was about twelve feet wide and on the other side of it was a low building of two stories high. It would be impossible for anyone to climb from the roof of that building to Therrold's room—or to descend to it. Therrold turned to the bathroom again. Had the shadow been a dream? But against that supposition was the evident search of the room. That was material enough. It was impossible to suggest anything other than that someone had entered the room and conducted a search. In that case, where had the searcher disappeared to? The bathroom was lined with tiles with a band of collared tiles surrounding the room, about four feet from the floor. Beyond the usual fittings stood in the space beside the lavatory a frame of wood attached to the wall, about seven feet high and filling the space. Except for the canopy at the head and the baseboard there was only the frame fixed on the wall, and three feet down from the canopy a cross-bar fitted with pegs. The affair looked like part of the clothes-closet, with only the top, bottom and back remaining. It looked strangely out of place.

A piece of cloth lay on the ground, close to the base of the strange framework. It caught the Englishman's eyes. He stooped and picked it up. It was a queerly-shaped piece of thin cloth with tapes at either end. For a moment he turned it on his hand, inquisitively; then sudden realisation came. The thing was a mask.

What was it doing in his bathroom. Where had the mask come from? Therrold was certain that it had not been there when he had retired that night. He had come into the bathroom. Some of his clothing still hung on the pegs. He was certain that if the mask had been on the floor then he would have seen it. Then, the mask must have been dropped by the intruder who had searched his rooms. Now he had definite proof of the man's presence.

Again he searched the room's, covering the space minutely. He could find nothing. It was impossible to get out of the rooms unobserved, through the bedroom door. There must be some other way. Therrold believed that in some magazines he had read that modern hotels had secret doors into apartments; that these doors were for the convenience of the management, providing access to locked rooms.

Hotel directors are not fond of scandals in their establishments. Secret doors into apartments provided means for glossing over happenings which might harm the hotel's reputation. If there was such a secret door in his apartment then, Therrold decided, the intruder to his room must be connected with the hotel, or in the confidence of the management. Immediately his thoughts turned to Carl Rohmer. He would have knowledge of the secret door. He had previously searched for the Green Pearl in that apartment.

The Englishman's face darkened. Carl Rohmer again! Had the man not learned that he was more than suspected—that the theft of the pearl in the first place was provable against him. He promised himself that the next morning Rohmer should pass through a very uncomfortable half-hour. If only he could trace the pearl! He dropped into a chair, trying to think. If he could only remember where he had hidden it he would not stay another hour in that infernal hotel. He could not remember. Continually his thoughts returned to the intruder. He must find the means whereby the man had obtained entrance. He went back to the bathroom, and the strange framework. He had found the mask at the foot of the pedestal.

There he would commence his search. Mounting the base, Therrold tried to pull down the canopy. He tried to move it sideways, and up and down, but it was firmly fixed. In striving to push it, he had to stand on tip-toe, and nearly overbalanced. To save himself he caught at one of the pegs. It gave way slightly. Abandoning the canopy, he tested the pegs. One of them gave, moving to the right—but it did not release the spring of any secret door. Therrold tried the centre peg. That seemed firmly fixed; but the peg on the left moved—towards the centre peg. That was strange. The two other pegs moved towards the centre peg, yet producing no result. He was now certain that the pegs held the key to the mystery. Again he tested them. He caught the two outer pegs and drew them together without result. He found, however, that when he brought the two pegs together that he could touch the centre peg. He pulled them together again and tried to thrust down the centre peg. It only gave slightly. Then he tried to thrust it up. The peg slid upwards easily, with the grate of a bolt released. The whole of the wall within the frame moved, on well-oiled hinges. For a moment Therrold: looked into a darkened space then, as he released the pegs, the door swung shut again. A few seconds experimenting and he found the secret. When the door was open he had only to release the outside pegs, keeping the centre peg up, and the door remained fixed. Looking through the aperture, Therrold found that he was in the bathroom of the next apartment. He stepped through the door and flashed his light around. There was no one there. He went into the bedroom. The apartment was as he had left it when he went there in search of Thomas.

Now Therrold understood. The intruder had entered room 521 and had passed through the secret door into his apartment. He wondered if there was a secret door opening into apartment 523. He searched, but could not find one. Satisfied that he had solved his problem, although the intruder had escaped, the Englishman returned to his own apartment and threw, himself on his bed, determining to watch through the remainder of the night. Time passed slowly. The lights in the corridor were still burning, filtering into Therrold's room beneath the door. He lay and watched the light for some time; then suddenly it disappeared. Therrold was on his feet in an instant. He crept to the door and listened. From the corridor came the soft pad-pad of feet, passing down the corridor. He opened his door and looked out. The corridor was in darkness, but he could hear the sounds of feet receding in the distance. Suddenly they ceased and he saw a beam of an electric torch shine on the wall. The light moved slowly on. The Secret Service Agent stepped into the corridor and watched. The light passed from door to door. At length it paused on a door for some seconds, then the direct rays were hidden by a dark form that interposed between them and the watcher. Suddenly the light went out. Therrold waited a few seconds then went to the switch and threw it on, illuminating the corridor. Stepping warily, Therrold went down to the door on which the light had rested.

As he suspected, it was number 51. So Miss Betty Carlington, as well as himself, had aroused the interest of the hotel authorities. Going to the switch-case, he plunged the corridor into darkness again then, using his torch-light sparingly, returned to the girl's door.

To his surprise it was ajar. For a moment he hesitated. He believed the girl to be in league with Dr. Night. If his suppositions were correct, then the Soviet agents had determined that the girl had the pearl and were now trying to get it from her.

He shrugged; even if the girl was allied to one of his enemies he could not leave her to the tender mercies of those Russian-trained brutes. He pushed open the door and entered. A quick glance round the room, by the light of his torch showed Therrold the girl in bed and asleep. He could see nothing outward in the room and was retreating to the door when something struck him on the back of the head and he fell, unconscious.

Chapter XX

Therrold came back out of the distant darkness to the lights of the girl's room. He opened his eyes—to close them again quickly. The lights hurt and his head was filled with the noise of tumbling waters. Someone was bending over him now and again something soothing passed over his aching temples. He was not curious; he wanted his head to cease aching; he wanted to rest.

At length he opened his eyes and looked up. A girl was kneeling beside him bathing his head. Again came the wonderful sense of coolness on his forehead. He moved restlessly, turning to face the girl. It was the girl of the night; the girl who had looked into his room with Dr. Night; the girl of the tea rooms and the antique shop in Oxford Street. Yet, somehow, she was different. She appeared older, more definite, more distinct in form and colouring. He tried to think of her name.

Ah, yes! Betty Carlington. The name suited her. She was a real 'Betty' girl; good-looking, well dressed and capable. Strange that such a girl should be mixed up with Dr. Night. But, was she? There might be some simple explanation of the matter. She might not be the girl.

Therrold had a doubt. There was a likeness; a remarkable likeness—but there were differences. Confound his head. It ached infernally! He tried to rise, and with a little assistance from the girl, sat up.

"Better?" The girl continued on her knees beside him.

"Where's that man?"

He turned over, with a struggle, and rose to his feet. He would have fallen again but for the girl's hand.

"Better?" The girl continued on her knees beside him.

"Where's that man?" He turned over and, with a struggle, rose to his feet. He would have fallen again but for the girl's hand.

"He went into the bathroom directly he had struck you down." She glanced fearfully in the direction of the bathroom. "I can't understand why he didn't come out while you were unconscious."

"He won't come out." Therrold laughed weakly. "There's a way out of these rooms. I found it out accidentally only an hour or so ago. It was while I was—was looking for a man that I saw him enter your room, and followed. Seems he must have known that I was after him for he slipped behind the door and hit me just—What I can't understand is why didn't he go through that door?"

"You were in the way." The girl laughed slightly. "It was you falling that awoke me. You fell on the door and slammed it shut."

She hesitated. "I pulled you into the room."

She dragged a chair to where he stood, weaving, dizzily. "Sit down and let me bind up your head." She went to a drawer and brought out some linen. In spite of his doubts which constantly recurred, Therrold found it pleasant to sit and let her cool fingers move over his aching head.

At length, she stood back, her task completed.

"That is better." She tucked in a few ends. "You are Mr. Therrold, are you not. I heard your name mentioned in the lounge yesterday. I am Betty Carlington. There! With that head-dress you will cause quite a sensation at breakfast—this morning."

"May I take this as an introduction Miss Carlington?" Therrold held out his hand and, after a moment's hesitation the girl placed her fingers on his palm for a moment.

"The big sensation tomorrow morning will be in Mr. Rohmer's office. That French scoundrel has a lot to explain."

"Quite an unconventional meeting." The girl laughed lightly. "But—if you wish to continue the—Now your head is more comfortable—"

"You mean that our acquaintanceship should mature in more formal parts of the hotel." Therrold laughed. "By the way, Miss Carlington, do you know anything of the man who entered your rooms?"

"Nothing whatever." The girl spoke honestly. "I awoke there was a light shining—a torch. I saw a man coming into the room. As he entered another man sprang from behind the door and struck him down. Then—but I have told you that. You said someone had searched your rooms to-night?"

"The same man who came to search yours, I believe." Therrold spoke grimly. "Miss Carlington, have you anything of value—anything anyone wants to deprive you of?"

Betty looked perplexed. "You say the man searched your room and then come to mine. What on earth could he be after that would be in either your or my possession. Until a few minutes ago I only knew your name, Mr. Therrold."

The girl was obviously sincere, and Therrold was reassured. He turned to the door.

"Shouldn't have kept you standing about in the cold, Miss Carlington." He stumbled awkwardly. "Hope I may have the pleasure of a talk with you, later in the day—after I have interviewed Rohmer. Perhaps then I may be able to explain a lot that is incomprehensible to you now. Hope so."

He opened the door, to start back with an exclamation of astonishment. A man was standing in the corridor, as if on guard. As Therrold hesitated he pushed him back and followed him into the room. At the same time half a dozen men entered the room from the bathroom.

"Up with your hands, Therrold," the man commanded softly. "Face the windows. You, miss, put your hands behind you. One move from either of you and—" He waved his automatic threateningly.

Taken unawares and unarmed, there was no choice for the Secret Service agent. He faced the windows and immediately the muzzle of the weapon was thrust into his back. Hands passed over him, searching for weapons. Then he was ordered to

place his hands behind his back. A cord was slipped over his wrists and knotted. Someone thrust a gag in his mouth. Another man bound and gagged the girl.

The men who had entered from the bathroom stood with levelled automatics while Therrold and the girl were bound. The Englishman stole a glance at the girl. He wondered if she had any part in this surprise attack, but her white, startled face dispelled all doubts.

The man who had driven Therrold into the room appeared to be the leader of the gang. Forcing the Secret Service man to where the girl stood, he ordered one of his men to bring chairs. He thrust Therrold into a chair and one of the men tied him firmly to the seat. The girl was treated in a similar manner. Then the gangster went to a man stationed before the bathroom door and spoke a few words in an undertone. The man nodded and left the room.

"Afraid you people won't get any breakfast this morning."

The gangster came across the room and stood before his prisoners. "Well, you both look well fed, so it won't do you any harm to starve for a few hours. There's plenty in this town as starves all day long. Now, Therrold, I'll deal with you as lightly as you'll let me; but I've come for the goods. Understand?"

Therrold nodded. The man went to the door and looked out. The corridor was deserted. Returning to his prisoners he loosened the cords binding them to the chairs and told them to stand up. At the point of the man's guns they were herded into the corridor and into the next apartment.

"This'll do for us." The man closed and locked the door. "I may as well tell you, Therrold, that Rohmer told his people that the couple occupying this room are down with an infectious disease. They're to be taken to the hospital to-day. Get me? Of course, the doctor might change his mind—that is, if I get what I want. Now, Therrold, if I have the gag removed, will you keep quiet?"

The Secret Service man nodded. The gangster went to the girl and repeated the question. She nodded assent.

"Good!"

One of the men came forward and removed the gags. "You know what we're after, Therrold. To save delay, if you tell me where to find the Green Pearl I'll release the girl and she can let you free when we've made our getaway. What's your answer?"

Therrold thought quickly. From the first he knew that the men were after the Green Pearl. Well, they would have to find it. True, he had hidden it the previous night; but the memory of its hiding place had completely vanished from his mind.

"You want the Green Pearl," he said, slowly. "Have you asked Dr. Night for it?" He watched the girl as he spoke.

The girl's face was immobile. She did not betray the slightest surprise at the sudden mention of the mysterious Asian. Now Therrold was certain that he had been mistaken in linking her with the girl he had seen with Dr. Night.

"Never mind Dr. Night." The gangster spoke gruffly. "We'll attend to him if he comes any of his tricks here. We know you took the pearl from Carl Rohmer on Sunday night, and we want it. Now, are you going to give it up peacefully, or have we got to make you?"

"You can have the Green Pearl when you find it," the Secret Service man answered drily.

"We'll find it all right." The man bent close to Therrold. "We'll find it—and we'll make you tell us where to find it. Make no mistake about that. And if you won't speak, and speak quickly, there'll be hell to pay—get that?"

Illustration:

"And—if you won't speak, and speak quick,
there'll be hell to pay—get that?"

A man entered the room and spoke a few words in an undertone to the gangster. His brow clouded and he glanced angrily at his prisoners. He gave a brief order in a whisper, glancing at his watch.

"Seven o'clock. The ambulance will call here at eight. Make up your mind, Therrold. There's still time to save yourself, and the girl, a lot of unpleasantness. Now, where's the pearl?"

"I wish I knew." Therrold could not help smiling.

"Getting funny, eh? Perhaps we can refresh your memory. You've got half an hour to think it over, if you want that time. Remember, we are here on business, not pleasure."

"You're searched my rooms, haven't you?" The Englishman smiled sarcastically. "Woke me up doing it. Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing." The man grinned comically. "You're no slouch at hiding things, Therrold. So far as we know, it's not in your rooms, and it's not on you. Now, where is it? No answer? Well, take your time. There's plenty of it at present; If you won't tell me where the pearl is here we'll take you to a place where we'll make you tell us mighty quick. Now, I'll ask the girl a few questions. May pay you to listen, Therrold."

He turned to the girl. "Now, miss, where's the Green Pearl?"

"What Green Pearl?" Betty looked surprised. "Is there such a thing?"

Illustration:

Betty Carlington.

"S'pose that's where I laugh?" The man frowned angrily. "Yes, my dear, there is such a thing and you know it. No use trying that kid stuff with me; and your Chink friend can't help you now."

"Try and not be offensive, Miller. Therrold spoke quietly. The man started, surprised. He went to Therrold and peered into his face.

"Where did you get that stuff?" he asked in a changed voice.

"A wise man studies his enemies." Therrold stared blankly at the man. "With your gang after the pearl, I found out who was likely to do the dirty work."

"Well, that won't help you." The man hesitated a moment, then turned to the girl. "Now, my dear, get this straight. One of you knows where the pearl is. It's not in his room and it ain't in yours. It's not on him. I don't believe it's on you. It's hidden somewhere. Now, where is it?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about a Green Pearl." The girl spoke gravely.

"You've got a nerve, all right." The man gave grudging admiration. "I'd like to let you go, but I daren't. Where's the real pearl, girl. You've got to tell; sooner or later, so get it over. I don't want to use any rough staff."

The girl shook her head.

Therrold writhed in his chair. If he could get free for only a few minutes he might be able to give the girl a chance for freedom. He tugged at his bonds, but the knots held.

"Come, girl, be sensible." Tony Miller's voice was almost pleading. "I've got to get that pearl. You don't know what you're up against by being obstinate. I've got to do what I'm told—and that's to get the pearl. Where is it?"

"I've told you. I know nothing about a Green Pearl." A frightened look crept into the girl's eye. "Really I'm not deceiving you. I never heard of a Green Pearl until you mentioned it."

"Can that." The man spoke brutally. He turned to Therrold. "You, now. Come clean, or it'll be the worse for the girl. You might stand up to a bit of an argument, if we decided to handle you, but I doubt if you'll keep silence and let us handle the girl. I'll give you one more chance. Where is the Pearl?"

"Listen." The sweat poured down Therrold's face. If these men proposed to torture the girl, then he would have to give way, so far as he was able. But what had he to offer? He could not remember where he had hidden the pearl. Again he racked his brains. He remembered leaving Thomas in his rooms and crossing the corridor to the Australian's room. But from that point his memory was a blank.

"Listen, Miller. Dr. Night came to me yesterday. He asked for the pearl. He told me I was carrying it in an enamelled box in my pocket. He commanded me to give him the box and I had to."

"A fine tale!" The gangster jeered. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth." The Englishman threw all the conviction he could into his tone. "The man's a fiend. He only has to touch you and you have to obey his will."

Miller was shaken. He remembered the scene in the Redfern House. There the Asian had shown mysterious and terrible powers. There, surrounded by enemies, he had forced from them the truth and walked out of the place, unscathed. The Soviet agent was not ignorant of what had happened at the hotel. He knew that Dr. Night had visited Therrold and had been with him for some time in the lounge. It was possible that the Asian had forced the Secret Service agent to give up the pearl, but—

He had little option in the matter. The 'Seven' would demand from him the pearl or his prisoners. He could not act as he wished. The Englishman might have told the truth—in Miller's mind there was little doubt—almost he was inclined to believe the man. But he dared not act on his beliefs. The 'Seven' would demand the pearl, or definite proof of where it was. With almost a snarl, the Soviet agent turned to the girl.

"He may be telling the truth." Miller jerked his head towards Therrold. "But I can't take risks. You know this Dr. Night. I've seen you about with him. Has he told the truth. Has Dr. Night the pearl?"

"I don't know." The girl held her head proudly; but an awful terror was dawning in her eyes.

Therrold groaned. Why had not the girl dissembled. She could have stated that she believed Dr. Night had the pearl. It was to that end Therrold had framed his answers—that she should have the facts and be able to state an opinion, instead of a definite answer.

A look of devilish cunning came on the gangster's face. He beckoned to one of his men, who came and stood immediately behind the prisoners.

"I'm asking you both, now." Miller gave a gesture, as if shifting the responsibility from his shoulders. "Where is the Green Pearl? No answer! Gag 'em!"

In a moment the two prisoners were gagged and Therrold tied again to his chair. Miller motioned the man towards Betty. "Listen, both of you. I've tried to make you reasonable and show you that you've got to hand over the Green Pearl. Well, neither of you seem inclined to obey. I'm asking you again.—where is the Green Pearl? If neither of you nod, to show that you'll either hand it over or tell me where it is, then?"

He paused grinning devilishly. "Then, Tom, here, takes the girl back to her room and searches her for it—and I promise you that he won't be too particular. Now I'll count three and—"

For a moment he stood, watching the fury in Therrold's face; then raised his hand and brought it down with a jerk—

"One!" He waited a moment, then motioned to the man, who picked Betty up in his arms.

"Two!" He turned to Therrold: "Now, then! I'll ask you again. You see what your obstinacy has brought that girl to. Where is the pearl. Still don't know? Then—"

"Three!"

"Beg pardon! Hope I'm not intruding! Hullo, Therrold. What's up? Musical chairs, eh?"

The door from the corridor had opened silently and Thomas stood on the threshold, automatic steadily levelled at the gangster.

Chapter XXI

THERROLD choked with hysterical laughter—relief from the terrible tension of the past hour. Miller had swung round, his mouth open with astonishment. Close to the bathroom door stood the man with Betty in his arms, motionless, afraid to drop the girl. Behind Therrold were gathered the remaining men of Miller's gang. The man carrying the girl was first to move. With a quick motion he dropped the girl to her feet and bent down behind her.

The Australian frowned.

"Damned bad drill, the lot of you! Never seen a squad in such a huddle. Got to straighten you out. Well, then—you chaps; line up there! Quick! Now you—Miller's your name, Isn't it. Well, get in the centre of that line. Now, Miss Carlington, I suggest a chair. Ah, would you?"

The man who held Betty had drawn his automatic and fired. Thomas laughed. As the man's hand went up he had shifted slightly. The bullet had impinged just above where his head had been.

"Good shot!" The Australian approved heartily. "Silencer, too! Didn't want to disturb the other guests, eh? Think you're safe behind that girl? Well, guess again!"

Carelessly he started to advance.

"What are you going to do?" Miller spoke savagely. "What do you suggest?" Thomas spoke carelessly. "You seem to have been very busy this morning. Don't be afraid to speak, Miller. Nothing to say? Well, what about untying Mr. Therrold's hands. Come on, get a move on you!"

The man did not move. He stood in the centre of the line, glowering savagely. Therrold managed to turn his head and look at him. Miller was muttering in an undertone to the man next to him. He was planning something. A puzzled frown came on Thomas' face. If he could not overawe these men and get Therrold free—

A new thought came into his mind. "Miss Carlington, can you manage to get over to me? Awfully obliged if you would try. Keep close against the wall, please. I don't want to lose sight of these gentlemen for a single second."

The girl moved forward obediently, but the man behind her held back. Thomas' face darkened. He took a step forward. At the same moment Betty threw herself to the ground. Immediately the Australian had the man covered.

"Thanks, Miss Carlington," he laughed. "Quite clever of you. Now, my friend, to your pals. I want you in line-up. Quick march! That's the boy. Drop that gun. I'll stand no nonsense from you!"

Miller was muttering something. With an effort, Therrold tried to twist his chair so that he could look back.

He managed to get a glance at the man's face and then the chair overbalanced and he fell heavily to the ground. But, before he fell, he saw a vindictive light of triumph in the man's eyes. He tried to call out to Thomas and warn him, but the gag was too well fixed. He struggled fiercely and suddenly the chair rolled—towards the Australian. Thomas took a step forward, but at a movement in the line of gangsters he hesitated.

Therrold found that he was within a few feet of the Australian. Another roll and he would be at his feet. Thomas would then be able to give him the slight help necessary to free him. Then he caught sight of the girl. She was moving towards the Australian along the wall. If she gained Thomas and he freed her, then they had the gang at their mercy.

Again, with a violent effort, Therrold rolled over. He was now facing Thomas. A sudden horror seized him. Behind the Australian stood a man with arm upraised. Before Therrold could give any warning the man struck. Thomas tumbled forward almost on top of the Englishman.

Illustration:

Behind Thomas a man was standing with arm uplifted.

"Just in time." Miller sprang forward to Rohmer, who had just entered the room. "That fool butted in and almost queered the works. Ambulance here, Carl? Good! We'll get them away as quickly as possible."

He reached under the bed and pulled out a bundle of linen coats. In a few minutes the men were transformed into passing resemblances of ambulance attendants.

They lifted Therrold and Betty on to the bed, side by side. Again Miller reached under the bed and pulled out a bag. From it he took a small bottle. He held it for a moment, undecided, then replaced it in the bag. He took out a tube of tablets and held them up to the light. He went to Therrold and, pulling the gag aside, thrust one of the tablets into his mouth. Then he went to the girl and put a tablet in her mouth.

"That'll keep you both quiet," he grumbled.

Therrold tried to expel the tablet from his mouth, but the gag was too tight for him to work his tongue. He managed to get it almost to his lips when it broke and dissolved. Almost immediately a numbness came over his limbs, followed by an intense dizziness that he could not fight against.

Ten minutes later Miller returned to the bed. He bent and examined man and girl.

"All set!" He turned to his men.

"Now you boys, fade away. You know how to get out. Do it quietly and go in and out the back entrance so that you confuse the servants. Then fade out entirely. Tom, you and Bill clean up these rooms. Don't leave a clue to our presence here. I want the place left as if the hospital people had taken these people away. Then go to Rohmer. He'll give you hotel uniforms. Get into them and then search Therrold's and this girl's rooms. The pearl's somewhere about and we've got to find it. Savee?"

The men hastened to obey. In a few moments only Rohmer and Miller were left in the room. Rohmer went to the bed and bent over the two forms thereon.

"Mon Dieu! They are dead!" he exclaimed.

"Not a chance." Miller laughed. "They'll have a comfortable sleep and wake up when we want them. Perhaps they'll be more sensible then."

"What do you intend to do with them?"

"Take them to our country cottage." The gangster smiled grimly. "Wills and Parkes will deal with them there. They've been saying enough about how I've handled things. Now they can take a hand. Perhaps they'll not be so cocksure of how things should be done when they've had a talk with Mr. Therrold. He's got guts. I'll say that. So's the girl. Why, even when I handed her over to Tom she didn't even bleat."

A knock came at the door and Miller opened it. Two men entered, carrying an ambulance stretcher between them. Therrold was placed on it and covered with blankets. Then the men carried him out into the corridor—to the service lift.

In ten minutes they re-entered and carried Betty away. Miller turned to the hotel manager.

"Going to stay here, Carl?" He waited a moment, then: "Oh, come along! No good mooning here. Lock the door and get back to your office. Come on. Remember, I'm the doctor. Call me 'doctor' as we go down the lift, and talk about the patients. Come on!"

Rohmer walked out of the room, followed by Miller. As the hotel manager turned to lock the door, he hesitated:

"What of the man—the man I struck?"

"Good lor'!" Miller thrust the door open and charged into the room. "I'd forgotten about him. What are we going to do with him? Why—Where's he got to?"

The men searched the room anxiously. Thomas had disappeared. Rohmer broke down, walking about the room, wringing his hands and moaning. Miller sat down on the bed worried and perplexed.

"He lay there." The gangster muttered to himself. "Carl couldn't have struck as hard as I thought. He was out when I dragged him off Therrold, but—but how did he get out!"

His eyes followed a line of retreat from where Thomas had lain. A smile came on his lips. "That's it! While we weren't looking he rolled under the bed. Waited his chance then got away through the secret door." He grinned. "He play hell with our Carl when we've gone, but that's not my funeral."

He raised his voice. "Who was he, Carl?"

"I don't know." The hotel man wailed. "I saw not his face when he lay—I could not bear to look."

"No," the gangster spat scornfully. "You wouldn't. You haven't the pluck of a louse."

"No. I have not the courage." Rohmer turned agonised eyes on his master. "Leave me here. I will continue for a time."

Miller hesitated, shrugged and then walked out of the room, closing the door behind him. For a time Rohmer walked up and down, in complete distraction, then calming, turned towards setting the room in order. He had obeyed the 'Seven.' He had delivered Therrold and the girl into their hands. Now he knew that he would be left to bear the brunt of any disclosures. He lost all faith in the men whom once he believed to be destined to give freedom to the world. He knew that they would use him for their ends—as they had done—and would then cast him aside. What was he to do?

For a moment he thought of sending for the police and making a full confession. But did he know enough to ensure the capture of all the gang. If but one of them escaped? He shivered. Bracing himself, Rohmer left the room and went down the corridor to the lift. At Therrold's door he paused and tried the handle. The door was unlocked. Taking out his pass key, he locked the door.

In a short time the news would be brought to him that a man and a girl were missing. He would have to have a story ready—a story that would deceive the police and start them on a false scent. He turned towards the elevators, conning a story of sudden love and elopement around Therrold and Betty. Yes, that would serve. He—

A hand fell heavily on his shoulder. He turned abruptly to gaze into a pair of blazing blue eyes, beneath a shock of disordered hair. A heavy hand clamped down on his lips; he was forced round and thrust into a room.

Illustration:

He turned abruptly to gaze into a pair of blazing blue eyes
beneath a shock of disordered hair.

"So, my friend of the Cause of Freedom! I've been puzzling how to get hold of you."

Thomas flung the terrified man into a chair and seated himself opposite. "Quite a nice peaceful gentleman from France, aren't you. Fond of hitting people over the head. Insists that all visitors to your hotel shall have a gay and jolly time, eh? Well, how would you like to be shanghaied, friend?"

Rohmer sat silent. Thomas pulled out his pouch and rolled a cigarette. He leaned back in his chair, surveying his prisoner quizzically. "You don't seem chatty, dear boy." He pulled on his cigarette until it drew well. "I really thought you would like to talk over our busy little morning. I was going to collar friend Miller, but decided to keep him until I knew more. Lucky for him I remembered that you were still in the room. Quite comfortable, dear fellow? Wouldn't like a cushion at your back—or a few cords to support you in your chair."

"M'sieu has the humour," the hotel man stuttered.

"Sure he has." Thomas laughed. "There's a proverb about the man who laughs last. Know it, Rohmer? Yes, thought so. Now, a few questions before I call the police."

"The police, m'sieu?"

"The police; the jolly, old, efficient police, dear old pal! The common or garden police! S'pose you've forgotten biffing me over the head? By the way, what did you do it with? Excuse me! Thanks! An automatic! I say, naughty! Little boys shouldn't play with firearms. Now, I'd have thought a bottle more in your line. Comfortable? Good! Now we'll have a nice little chat—at least you'll do most of the chatting. You're going to tell me where that crowd took Therrold and the girl. No? Won't talk? Tut tut! Sorry, but there are means, y'know!"

The Australian's ideas of means were primitive, but very effectual. At the end of the first quarter of an hour Rohmer broke down and declared, with tears in his eyes, that he was willing to tell all he knew. Half-an-hour later Thomas booted him from the room, with the promise of dire injury before handing him and the confession he had just signed over to the police, if he talked to others.

Chapter XXII

THE ROUGH jolting over country roads aroused Therrold from his sleep. He opened his eyes to a white opaqueness that pressed down on him. His mouth tasted vilely. For some minutes he lay, trying to gather his thoughts together. He could understand the jolting of the vehicle, but he could not understand his surroundings. Then memory came, in a rush.

Where was Betty Carlington? He managed to roll to one side and feel about with his bound hands. He could feel blankets, but not the girl. The sheet over his face hindered his breathing. Moving his head up and down in jerks, he found that he could draw the sheet from above his face. It was slow work. At last the sheet slipped down and he could see the interior of the vehicle. He was lying on a stretcher in an ambulance wagon—a real one and beautifully clean.

Rolling over, he saw that there was another stretcher on the opposite side of the car. On it was a long bundle covered with blankets. For a moment his heart stood

still. Had the fiends killed the girl? Then he realised that he must have looked something similar, a few minutes before. That bundle of blankets was Betty.

For some time he lay wondering how he was to get the girl and himself out of the fix they were in. The doors of the van were shut, but he could hear voices—apparently from the driver's seat. Probably Miller was there. He believed he could distinguish the man's voice. Of course, the van was being driven by one of the gang. There was no chance of help from that direction.

They had been captured by agents of the 'Seven.' Miller, the active head, was carrying them to some place where they could be held until the gang obtained possession of the Green Pearl—and he had hidden the pearl and could not remember where. The 'Seven' would not believe him. They would torture him and the girl.

Therrold groaned. If only he could remember where he had placed the pearl. He would gladly surrender it, even if that meant he would have to retrace his steps over the past five years. He would do anything to get the girl out of the damned mess they were in. The cold sweat broke out on his forehead when he thought of Betty in the hands of these damned fiends.

He would feel safer if he knew that Thomas was free. The Australian would not rest until he had traced them down. That should not be difficult. Martin Thorne would take an active part in the affair now. But where was Thomas? All Therrold could remember was seeing him struck down from behind. Was he, also, a prisoner?

If Thomas was free he could go to Thorne—and there would be hopes of a quick rescue. But he could not rely on that. More than likely the Australian was also a prisoner—or dead. Miller would not leave the man in the hotel, and alive. That would mean the quick tracking down of the gang. And, with Thomas dead, or a prisoner, it might be days before Martin Thorne knew that they were missing.

Suddenly the double doors swung open, as the van drew to a stop. Miller mounted into the van and bent over the Englishman.

"Manager to wriggle the sheet off your head."

The man made as if to replace the sheet, then hesitated. "What does it matter! Suppose it's damned hot with that over you. Let it be. There's nothing you can see with the doors shut."

He was about to back out of the van when something in the Englishman's eyes caught Ms attention, and he went to him again, feeling at the cords that bound him. Therrold turned his eyes in the direction of the bundle he believed to be Betty.

"Thinking of the girl, eh. Oh, she's there, all right." Therrold turned his head again, lifting it slightly. "Fraid she'll stifle, eh?" He paused a moment. "Well, why not?" He turned to the other stretcher and pulled the sheet down from the girl's face. Again he bent over Therrold.

"A man who can think of a girl who's no pal of his at a time like this has pluck," he said quietly. "I'll do the best I can for you, but you're a damned fool, all the same. What's the pearl to you. It ain't yours. Give it up. You've done your best to carry out your part of the bargain; done more than most men could have done. Think it over, mate. You're at the end of your string. Another ten minutes will see us at the end of our journey and then I'll have a talk with you before that blasted

fool, Parkes, comes on the job. Tell me where the pearl is and I'll see you get cast loose whatever the bunch has to say. Understand."

He left the car, closed the doors, and rejoined his companions on the driver's seat. The car jogged on, and the voices of the two men in front rose above the rattle of the engine.

Therrold turned his head and looked to where the girl lay. Her face was just visible to him. He lifted his head and tried to discover if she was conscious, but could not see if her eyes were open or not. He noticed how pale her cheeks were. Poor girl, to be drawn into this maelstrom of human passions. With some wriggling, he managed to get the blankets shrugged under his shoulder, so that he could lay and watch the girl.

For a long time she was without movement; then he saw her breast heave. A space of time during which he thought that she had again become unconscious and she turned and looked at him. For some time the man and girl lay looking at each other. Then the absurdity of their positions came to the Englishman—and he wanted to laugh. The gag choked his laughter back, leaving him red in the face.

The van turned sharply and ran over some very rough ground. It stopped and Therrold could hear men's voices. The doors opened and Miller entered the van. He stripped the blankets from the Secret Service man and untied the cords confining his feet.

"It ain't no use trying to get away, mate," he stated genially. "There's a crowd of us at this place, and no neighbours. Be sensible, and do as I tell you, and you'll get out. If not—" He shrugged.

Therrold tried to rise to his feet, but could not stand. Miller caught at him and dragged him upright. Holding him firmly, the gangster pushed him towards the door and let him fall into the arms of the men gathered before it.

"Weak on his pins." Miller laughed. "Let him stamp about a bit. Can't get away and you don't want to carry a man of his size into the house."

Miller returned to the van and presently emerged, carrying Betty. The girl was now conscious and tried to convey some message to Therrold with her eyes, as she passed. The men caught at the Englishman and pushed him after Miller and the girl. The van stood in the yard of a small, whitewashed house, surrounded by wide verandas. It was an old house, amid a number of oriental trees.

Therrold looked up at the sky. So far as he could judge they had been carried south-west. If he knew the time he might be able to guess how far they were from Sydney. The sun was fairly high; he believed it to be about ten o'clock.

Miller led to the house at a fast walk, carrying the girl. The Englishman followed and the two men brought up the rear. The gangster led into a small hall. At the end of the hall was a ladder leading up to a trap door. At the foot of the ladder the gangster set the girl on her feet.

"Go up first, Matt," he ordered. "I'll untie the little lady's hands and feet and then she can go up to you. Tie her hands directly she reaches you. Then I'll send the man up. Tie him up again and then come down."

The man mounted the ladder, but it was some time before Betty could essay the climb. At length, she struggled to the loft and turning waited for her hands to be tied. Miller motioned for Therrold to follow, and mounted himself behind the Secret Service man. Therrold found himself facing a heavy wooden door. To the

right and left were similar doors. Miller went to the door facing the head of the ladder and unlocked it, motioning to his prisoners to enter.

"You'll be together for a time—until the 'Seven' want you," he stated briefly. "Give me your word that you won't try to escape and I'll untie the girl. She can release you if she wants to. That so?"

Therrold nodded. The gangster twisted Betty round and released her wrists, then without speaking again went out of the room and locked the door.

The Englishman watched the gangster leave the room, feeling very puzzled. What game was the man playing? True, he had been asked for his word not to escape, but he had not promised to refrain from using freedom now to provide for means of escape at a later time, when his parole had expired. Therrold was aroused from his thoughts by the touch of soft fingers on his wrists. His arms fell to his side and he essayed to lift his hands to his face, but his arms were numbed. Then the gag fell from his mouth and he gulped large draughts of clean fresh air.

"Thanks." He turned to the girl. "Was wondering if you'd take that fellow's hint and keep me tied. No; sorry! I didn't mean that. What the devil are we to do."

He looked at the girl. She was holding a thin kimono over her nightdress and shivering with the cold. He sprang to the door and hammered on it with his fists. In a few minutes steps ascended the ladder and the door opened. Miller strode into the room.

"What's the game?" he asked roughly.

"I'll ask you that!" Therrold faced the gangster angrily. "You bring a lady out motoring in her night attire, and then ask *What's the matter?*"

For a minute Miller stood undecided. There was a quaint grin on his face.

"Of course, if you object!" The situation seemed cause for mirth. "There ain't a lady on the premises; still, if a blanket or two will be of use—there's plenty in the van."

"Are you going to force a decent girl to go before that beastly crowd at men you call your 'Seven' clad only in a blanket?" Therrold demanded wrathfully. "Rohmer's one of your gang, isn't he. Well, telephone him to pack some of the ladies things and send them on. In the meantime you can send up some of the blankets you talk about."

Miller hesitated, then backed to the door. Therrold took a step forward, then flung up his arm, on guard.

"Oh, I'm not going to attack you, yet," Therrold laughed. "What I want at present is the blankets, and—well, you can send up some breakfast. You've kept us waiting for it long enough. Why, it must be after eleven."

"Half-past ten." The man spoke promptly. "You're free with your orders, mister. All right. The lady and you shall be fed and I'll get some glad rags for her."

Therrold turned with a nod. His bluff had succeeded. He had discovered the time and could estimate the distance from Sydney. He had also gained food, and, what was more important, had found that the gangster could easily be browbeaten.

Therrold paced the floor, lost in thought. He was free from bonds. That was something. He knew that unless he rebelled against orders he would continue free until he had faced the 'Seven.' Surely in the meantime he could discover some way of getting the girl into safety—or remember where he had secreted the Green Pearl!

The door opened and Miller entered, carrying a large bundle of rags. A man followed and placed a well filled tray on the floor. Then, without a word they left the room and the door was locked.

Therrold carried the rugs to one of the corners.

"Come, Miss Carlington. Huddle down in a couple of these rugs and sit on the others. I'm butler this morning, and serve."

The girl came to where Therrold had arranged the rugs and wound a couple of them round her. Then she sat down, looking expectantly at the breakfast tray.

"Mr. Therrold." She looked up suddenly. "I think you—you're wonderful! How could you talk to that man in that fashion? I thought he would strike you—and, oh, please don't say you haven't a pin!"

Chapter XXIII

Twice during the day Miller came to the loft and brought trays of food. The second time he was followed by a man who bore a heavy suitcase. He was leaving the room when Therrold spoke.

"Do you expect Miss Carlington to dress with me in the room?"

"What more do you want?" The man turned with a frown. "There's no necessity to dress that I know of. You stay here. I'm taking no chances."

The Englishman was about to retort angrily when he caught Betty's eyes. She shook her head and pointed to the pile of rugs. Miller waited a moment, then, looking as if he had scored over the Englishman, went to the door. Then he turned.

"The Council of 'Seven' sits at eleven to-night," he announced. "You will both be ready, dressed or undressed."

The door closed and Therrold walked over to the rugs. Betty was intent on the contents of the suitcase.

"Mr. Therrold," she called. "They have sent your things as well as mine."

The Secret Service man was examining the room—a rug in his hand. There was not an article of furniture in it—not a table or chair—not even a nail in the walls. He looked so helpless standing in the middle of the room that Betty giggled.

"Not a nail, not a hook, not a thing in the room 'besides our two selves," he exclaimed miserably. "Why the devil couldn't that beast have taken me downstairs for an hour or two?"

"Never mind." The girl coloured slightly. "I think it will be sufficient if you sit by the door with your face to it, until I call. Bother it! Whoever packed this bag forgot a comb!"

Dropping the useless rug, Therrold collected his belongings and went to the door. Seated on the ground, he managed to dress—and continued facing the door until the girl spoke.

"Thank you, Mr. Therrold." He rose to his feet to find the girl fully dressed. She put up her hands to her head. "I cannot think what my hair must look like!"

"Prisoners cannot expect luxuries." The Secret Service Agent laughed. "Jove, it's dark in here!"

Throughout the day the Secret Service agent had tried to plan an escape for the girl. He had schemed every way, testing walls and roof—without success. Now he realised that they would have to go before the 'Seven.' What would happen to the girl then? It he could only remember where he had put the pearl! He would gladly hand it over to secure her safety. But he had not the pearl nor had he any knowledge of it.

He would do the best he could—take any means of clearing the girl from any complicity in the charge of the jewel. He would declare she was not the girl he had seen with Dr. Night—but Miller had declared that he knew her to be an associate of the Asian. For some time he paced the little room, lost in thought; the girl sitting on the rugs watching him.

At length he went to her and squatted on the floor. Without preface he plunged into the history of the Green Pearl. When he came to the incident of seeing the girl and Dr. Night peering into his room while he was talking with detective Browne he was most minute in his description of the girl.

"Now I understand." Betty spoke gravely. "I understand what that man meant when he accused me of being an accomplice of Dr. Night. Mr. Therrold, I hope you will believe me. I have no knowledge of this man. I do not believe I have ever seen him. I have never been at the Hotel Splendide until I arrived there on Sunday night."

"Of course, I believe you, Miss Carlington." Therrold spoke impulsively, almost against his convictions, for in the gloom the girl bore a remarkable resemblance to the girl he had seen with the Asian. "The thing we have to do is to convince these men that you are not the girl. At present Miller is certain that he has seen you with Dr. Night. Can you produce any evidence to convince him that at the time you were in Melbourne."

"Only in Melbourne, I'm afraid. No! I have a cousin in Liverpool. He wrote to me in Melbourne a week ago. It is because of his letter that I came to Sydney."

"He cannot swear that you were in Melbourne at the time he wrote the letter?" asked Therrold. He knew that if he could not advance some proof that the girl was in Melbourne at the time she was supposed to be with Dr. Night in Sydney he would have trouble in persuading the "Seven" to thoroughly probe her story.

"No," Betty answered slowly. She was silent for some minutes, then laid her hand on Therrold's arm. "Tell me again what you know of the girl who is so like me?"

Again the Englishman went over the description of the girl, emphasising every point he could remember.

"I am afraid I know that girl." Betty was silent a moment. "Mr Therrold, I have a cousin who is extremely like me—so alike that when we were children people took us for twins. I have not seen her for years and until you spoke I did not think she was in Sydney. My aunt, her mother, lived in Melbourne until Mary was fifteen. Then they moved to Perth. I wonder—is this girl Mary?"

Martin Thorne's story of Dr. Night's activities in Sydney two years ago flashed through the Secret Service man's brain. Dr. Night had been head of a dope gang. Had the girl come under his influence that way? If so, would that account for the differences he now knew existed between the two girls in appearance.

"I believe you have solved the puzzle," he said, after a pause. "When I first saw you I thought you were the girl I had seen with Dr. Night. This morning, in the room at the hotel, I was not so certain. The day I have spent with you has banished all doubt from my mind. But I'll have a devil of a job convincing these beasts that you are not the girl they think you are."

For long hours the man and girl sat, discussing the problems facing them. Therrold made a couch of the rugs and insisted that Betty took some rest. He could not sleep, or rest, himself; contenting himself by sitting beside her, watching.

At last footsteps sounded on the ladder and the door swung open. Miller entered, swinging a hurricane lamp. Therrold touched Betty on the shoulder and she sat up quickly. The man beckoned them to follow him and led down the ladder. On the ground floor a number of men were gathered. They looked curiously at the prisoners as they passed through their midst to the room where the 'Seven' sat.

Illustration:

Miller entered, swinging a hurricane lamp.

Miller opened the door of a room and beckoned the prisoners to enter. Therrold looked about him curiously. The room was large and bare. At the far end was a long table set across the room, and behind it were seated the 'Seven'. On the door side of the table were placed two chairs Miller escorted his prisoners to the table, pushing aside the chairs and forcing Betty and Therrold to stand before the men who had assumed the right to try and judge them.

"Your name is Mark Therrold?" The man seated at the centre of the table spoke. Therrold knew him to be Wills, the chief of the 'Seven.'

He nodded assent.

"Who is the woman?"

"Excuse me." Therrold spoke icily. "This lady is Miss Betty Carlington."

"We'll leave her out of the matter for the time and deal with you. We went the Green Pearl."

"So I understand."

"We believe you have it in your possession."

"I think not." Therrold was fighting for delay. "Your men have already searched me and the room I occupied at the hotel. They have not found it."

"You are aware that one of our agents obtained the Green Pearl and was bringing it to us when it was stolen from him?"

Therrold smiled at the twist in the sentence. He, the legitimate custodian of the pearl had 'stolen' it from a thief.

"There's nothing to laugh at, Therrold." Wills spoke angrily. "Are you prepared to admit that you stole the Green Pearl?"

"I took from a man certain property he had stolen from me."

"You acknowledge! that you took the Green Pearl from Carl Rohmer some time on Sunday night last?"

"If you choose to put the question that way—yes."

"You took the pearl back to your room at the hotel?"

"I took the packet I obtained from Carl Rohmer back to the hotel. On opening it I found that I had the enamelled box Rohmer had taken from my room."

"The pearl was in that box?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with the box?"

"I hid it."

"With the pearl in it?"

"No."

"You hid the pearl separately?"

Therrold nodded and looked at Betty. He noticed that the girl was bearing up well under the strain.

"There is no need for you to communicate with your accomplice." Wills spoke rapidly. "We will deal with her later."

"In the meantime I suggest that you have the courtesy to offer Miss, Carlington a seat." Wills flushed angrily; yet he beckoned to one of the men, who brought a chair forward.

"Now that we have satisfied you in that respect perhaps you will tell us where you hid the Green Pearl."

"I cannot."

"You mean, you will not."

"I mean what I say." Therrold spoke firmly. "The day after I hid the box and the pearl I received a call from a man named Dr. Night. He insisted that I give him the Green Pearl."

"You did so?"

"I handed him a box I had in my pocket—a box similar to the one in which I carried the Green Pearl." Therrold hesitated and smiled. "The box contained cigarettes."

"You are fooling with us," Wills exclaimed.

"I am relating what actually occurred." Therrold spoke calmly. "Dr. Night asked me to return to him the Green Pearl. I refused. He then asked me to hand him the enamelled box from my waistcoat pocket. I—I was unable to refuse him, for he has rather peculiar ways. I gave him the box. I believe he thought the Green Pearl was inside it."

"That is a lie!" Parkes was on his feet, shouting at the top of his voice. "You needn't have given it to him if you didn't want to."

Mabberley laughed loudly. Parkes swung on him furiously. "Comrade Mabberley seems to be amused?"

"I am." The man continued to laugh. "I'm remembering the time when Comrade Parkes wanted to put Dr. Night out of the room and was *persuaded* not to do so. That was enough to make a cow laugh."

"If you did not give the pearl to Dr. Night then you must still have it." Wills silenced the men with a glance. "Will you give the Green Pearl to me?"

"I cannot. When Dr. Night left me I was quite dazed. It was not until a friend aroused me that I could think or act again. Then I found that my memory regarding the pearl had disappeared. I had even forgotten what it was like."

"Mr. Chairman!" Parkes was on his feet again. "That's too thin. The man should be made to state where the pearl is."

"Well?" Maberley interjected before Wills could speak. "I, for one, believe him. I saw this Dr. Night freeze one man and chase another to his seat—that was Comrade Parkes. More than that, he stopped our secretary talking for quite a while—and that takes some doing."

Miller came forward to the side of the Secret Service man. "Mr. Chairman, I want to say that I have been in charge of the prisoners. I was given the job of capturing them and I have talked with both of them, especially Therrold. I believe what he says. I was at headquarters when Dr. Night came amongst us, and saw what he did to Comrade Milson. If he could do that in front of us and get away with it, then what the prisoner describes is quite possible."

"What do you suggest?" Wills asked grudgingly.

"Let the prisoner go back to the hotel and search for the pearl. We'll see that he stays there until he remembers."

"Good!" Maberley struck the table heavily. "'T'aint often we get such a sensible suggestion."

"I oppose!" Parkes jumped to his feet, waving his arms wildly. "We've had enough trouble to get them and—and—"

"I had." Miller spoke contemptuously. "I've never known Comrade Parkes to do anything else but talk. Mr. Chairman, so far matters have been in my hands. If Comrade Parkes wants to give orders, let him do some of the dirty work."

"You call work on behalf of Holy Russia dirty?" The man shrieked the question at the top of his voice. "I denounce you as a traitor."

"Shut up!" Wills turned roughly on the man. "What do you propose to do with the girl, Miller?"

"Keep her here."

"I will not agree to search for the pearl while Miss Carlington is a prisoner." The Englishman spoke quickly.

"And if we make you?"

"You cannot."

"So." Wills leaned across the table until his grossness overlapped. "Do you know that I can do what I like with you—and the girl."

There was an evilness in the man's tone that made Therrold wince. He clenched his fists; if he only had himself to think of nothing would give him greater pleasure than to smack his fist into that ugly, gross, leering face. But he must remember the girl.

"I think you are mistaken." His voice was cold and even. "I am a member of the British Secret Service. Already the head of that organisation in Sydney is aware that I am missing. In a few hours he will be here and with sufficient force to put the lot of you behind bars. But I will search for the pearl and hand it to you when I find it; if you let Miss Carlington go to her friends."

"You are in love with the girl?" Wills spoke coarsely.

"I am talking common decency." Therrold coloured.

Had the Soviet Chief discovered a secret he had hardly guessed himself? Had he fallen in love with the girl he but a short time previously believed to be acting for one of his opponents. He turned defiantly at the head of the 'Seven.'

"Unless Miss Carlington is released I will enter into no compact."

There was a note of finality in Therrold's voice that impressed Wills. He turned and whispered to Mabberley, who nodded.

"You two." Wills spoke briefly. "Sit over there against the wall. There are others I have to question? You can take it, Therrold, that your proposal to search for the pearl on our behalf will receive careful consideration."

"No!" Betty spoke flatly. "I will not consent to my freedom on those terms. Mr. Therrold shall not give up the Green Pearl."

Illustration:

"I will not consent to my freedom on those terms."

Chapter XXIV

The chief of the 'Seven' waved his hand and Betty and Therrold were taken to a form at the side of the room. At another signal the door opened and Carl Rohmer was brought into the room by a couple of men. The one-time dapper hotel-manager was dishevelled and frightened. His face had an unearthly pallor. He looked about him on entering the room, as a wild animal would in captivity.

The men forced him to the edge of the table and there left him. For a moment he stood staring at the men who were to judge him; clinging with tensed fingers to the table. Then, with a deep sigh he collapsed to the ground. Wills made a sign and one of the men came forward and lifted Rohmer to a seat. For a few seconds the man sat in a heap, breathing heavily; then straightening himself with an effort he faced the 'Seven,' his face working queerly.

"Carl Rohmer, we want the Green Pearl." Wills spoke significantly.

"I have not the pearl." Rohmer gulped before he spoke.

"You were instructed to get the pearl from Therrold. You told us that you did so and that it was stolen from you before you could hand it to us. Again you were told to get the pearl and bring it to us. You did not do so."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have not the opportunity had."

"Yet Therrold is staying at your hotel. You have opportunities to get into his room and search for the jewel. We know that you have been in his room. Why have you not brought the pearl to us?"

"I could not find it."

"Therrold states that he hid the pearl and could not find it when he searched for it."

"I did not find the pearl."

"You lie." Wills' fist crashed on the table. "You found the pearl and you did not bring it to us. You have broken your oath."

"No." The man's lips quivered. He spoke the denial in a whisper. "You took Dr. Night to the room occupied by Therrold on the night you say you lost the pearl. With that man you searched the room, while Therrold lay under that man's hypnotic power. Do you deny that. You were watched."

"I deny." Rohmer spoke angrily. "It is untrue—most untrue."

"You were watched. The men who watched you are here now. Know that the 'Seven' never wholly trusted you. You were given the task of obtaining the Green Pearl from Therrold. To another was given the task of seeing that you kept your oath. He states that you betrayed your trust."

Wills beckoned to one of the men who had brought Rohmer into the room. The man advanced to the table. Therrold recognised him as one of the hotel servants.

"Make your report." The Chief spoke briefly.

"I was instructed to watch Rohmer and see that he carried out the search for the Green Pearl in a proper manner." The man spoke quietly. "On Sunday night Rohmer went to the fifth floor of the hotel and, through a hole in the door of Therrold's room, watched him for some time. Just before Rohmer went upstairs the woman seated beside Therrold now came up to the floor. She went to her room. Rohmer waited until the door closed and then went to Therrold's door again. After a time he went down to his office. Before I followed him I peeped through a hole in Therrold's door and saw him holding the Green Pearl."

"Why did you not go into the room and take the pearl from Therrold?" he asked eagerly. "That was not my duty. I was appointed to watch that Rohmer did not betray the trust that was reposed in him."

"Good!" Wills nodded his head approvingly. "Go on."

"I followed Rohmer to the ground floor. I did not think that he would do anything more than night, but he stayed in his office until early in the morning. About two o'clock a man in a very large overcoat and with his hat pulled down over his eyes came to the hotel and asked for Rohmer. He went into the office and they were together for a long time. My orders were to watch Rohmer all the time he was out of his rooms. I hid where I could watch the office door. After a time Rohmer and the man came out of the office and went up to Therrold's room. They entered the next room and passed into Therrold's room through the secret door. They were in there for some time and came out through the secret door. The man left the hotel and Rohmer went up to his rooms."

Illustration:

A man with his hat pulled down over his eyes asked for Rohmer.

Therrold smiled. The story was very probable. That was the night he had changed apartments with Thomas—the night that he had taken the Green Pearl into the Australian's room. Almost a light dawned in his mind.

"Do you think that Rohmer and the man found the Green Pearl?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because Dr. Night came to the hotel the next day. I saw him talking to Therrold. I concealed myself where I could overhear their conversation. I heard Dr. Night ask Therrold for the pearl. Therrold refused. Then Dr. Night asked Therrold for the enamelled box. Therrold gave it to him."

"Willingly?"

"No." The man hesitated. "I saw Dr. Night at our headquarters last Sunday. I believed he played some trick on Therrold to make him give up the box."

"Do you think the box contained the pearl?"

"No."

"What happened after Dr. Night left Therrold. He states that the man left the hotel immediately."

"He did not." The man replied quietly. "Therrold sat where Dr. Night had left him, looking dazed and ill. Dr. Night went to the door of the hotel and stood there for a full minute. Then, when a group of people entered, he came in again and went to Rohmer's office. He was there for some time. Rohmer left the office and went up to Therrold's room. When he came back to the office Dr. Night left the hotel."

"Do you think that Rohmer found the pearl and gave it to Dr. Night?"

"Yes. I don't think Dr. Night would have left Rohmer unless he had the pearl. I believe Dr. Night obtained the secret of the hiding-place of the pearl from Therrold and sent Rohmer to fetch it."

"Do you recognise the girl seated by Therrold?"

"I have seen her with Dr. Night."

"That is untrue," Therrold exclaimed. "Miss Carlington only came to Sydney on Sunday evening. To connect her with that man is absurd."

"Did she?" Wills looked doubtfully at the Englishman. "We have only your statement for that. Still—"

"What?" asked Maberley as the Chief paused.

"If the girl is connected with Dr. Night why is Therrold so anxious that we should let her go free? If Dr. Night has the pearl, even Therrold is as anxious to get it from him as we are—and the girl's the best bet to that. But we'll go into that later. Carl Rohmer, what have you to answer?"

"For what?"

"You are accused of stealing the Green Pearl from Therrold and giving it to Dr. Night instead of bringing it to us."

"It is a lie!" Rohmer sprang to his feet. "It is true that I did search the room for the pearl, but I did not find it."

"Did you search Therrold?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I was alone and I feared that I might awaken him."

Therrold repressed a laugh. If Rohmer had gone to the bed he would have found Thomas there. Slowly memory was coming back to him. If he could only delay any decision of the 'Seven' for a time—to give his dormant memory a chance.

"I consider the case against Carl Rohmer proved." Wills spoke sombrely. "Carl Rohmer has betrayed us."

"I believe Carl Rohmer gave the pearl to Dr. Night." Maberley spoke hesitatingly.

"It's true." Parkes was again on his feet, his arms waving wildly. "We have a traitor with us. What shall be done with him? Let us follow the example set by our comrades in the Land of Freedom, Holy Russia. There is but one penalty—death."

"Pigs! Dogs! I spit on you! I spit on you all." Rohmer sprang to his feet, mad with excitement and fear. "What is your Cause? Nothing! It is yourself! What want you the Green Pearl for? It is for money—the money you will spend on yourself—for

your pies sure. Bah! I spit on you! I denounce you! Will a Frenchman betray the sacred cause of Freedom? Non, non! But with you there is no freedom! You are capitalists—bourgeoisie! You with the money you gather for freedom—and spend on yourself! You—"

Parkes was on his feet, shouting excitedly, trying to drown the voice of the Frenchman. His eyes blazed with passion and fear. Cold drops of sweat stood on his forehead, damping the tousled black hair that straggled over his brows.

For some minutes there was pandemonium. Wills beat on the table with his fists in a vain endeavour to control his followers. At length, one of the men caught Rohmer, forcing him into a chair and stifling his shouts with his hand.

Wills sprang at Parkes, deliberately choking him silent.

"Carl Rohmer." Wills returned to his chair and addressed the wretched man cowering before him. "You have heard the accusation brought against you—and the judgment of the 'Seven.' Have you anything, to say?"

For some time Rohmer sat with his head in his hands, silent. Then slowly and with apparent difficulty he rose to his feet.

"It is not true what has been said. I know what you intend to do and I cannot stop you. This I have to say. You say that the man, Dr. Night, came to me in my office. That is true. He came to me because he was sent by that man—" He pointed to Parkes. "He told me that Parkes sent him to me. I did not believe him and I spoke to Parkes on the telephone. He told me to—"

"He accuses me! Me, who has been to Russia to learn the freedom which will one day rule the world!"

Pale as death, the secretary faced the hotel manager. "Me, who brought to this country the great knowledge of the Soviet. I know; know what you cannot know! I should be sitting in your seat, judging this man. Comrade Wills. I shall sit there one day and you shall stand before me. You say you were elected. Bah, what of that? Before the slaves of this world can throw off their chains the men who have learned freedom in Russia must lead. What do you know of freedom? You do not even know how to deal with traitors. But I, John Parkes, will show—"

With a dramatic flourish the secretary produced a large automatic and fired at the hotel-keeper. For a moment Rohmer clung to the edge of the table, a great surprise on his face. His left hand went up and clutched it his breast. From beneath his fingers great clots of crimson blood welled and dripped to the table. He staggered, dizzily. With a supreme effort he braced himself. Slowly his right hand passed behind him and came forward clutching a small revolver.

Illustration:

Slowly his right hand came forward clutching a small revolver.

Gradually the weapon steadied, pointing at the breast of the secretary of the 'Seven.' The two men stood staring into each other's eyes. In Rohmer's face showed the shadows of approaching death, whitening his lips and draining the colour from his face. He smiled, almost contemptuously.

Parkes was clutching at Wills, shrieking in terror. The Chief strove to throw him off. A sharp crack, as of a whip, sounded through the room and Parkes collapsed across the table, dragging Wills down with him.

"Peace." The solemn word broke the silence that followed the firing of the shot. "The life that the gods give shall not be taken in violence!"

Therrold swung round. In the doorway stood a slender, grey-faced man whose brilliant, piercing eyes surveyed the scene with sadness and wonder.

Chapter XXV

DR. NIGHT'S entrance into the room was followed by a long silence. Wills had subsided into his chair, staring bleakly at the intruder. Parkes lay across the table, still clutching at his automatic. Almost at the feet of the Asian lay the body of Carl Rohmer, a peaceful smile on his half-parted lips.

Betty had turned at the first shot and buried her face on Therrold's shoulder. The Englishman had thrown his arm around the girl, tensing himself for the struggle he foresaw would arise from this bloodshed. What did the entry of Dr. Night portend. It seemed incredible that the Asian should walk into the Soviet gathering if he really had obtained the pearl from Rohmer; and the evidence of the man who had watched the hotel-manager could not be set aside as wholly untrue.

Dr. Night never acted on impulse. Every move was carefully considered; the definite and reasoned thought of a mastermind. Had Dr. Night obtained the jewel? The report of the watcher indicated that Rohmer had obtained the pearl and had handed it to the Asian. But the presence of Dr. Night in that room could only indicate that he was still in pursuit of the jewel.

In that case the pearl remained where Therrold had hidden it. Little glimmers of memory were chasing themselves through the Secret Service man's brain. He felt that at any moment the memory of the hiding place of the pearl would return to him. Would that serve him now. Both Wills and the members of the 'Seven' he would have been able to barter for the liberty of the girl in exchange for the jewel. He could not do that with the Asian. Dr. Night would force his secret from him, by the marvellous hypnotic powers he possessed. He wanted to remember, yet he feared for memory, to return.

Bending over the girl, Therrold whispered rapidly. She was sobbing softly and did not at first attend to what he was saying. He repeated his instructions and gradually she understood. She sat up, shivering at the sight of Rohmer's body, almost at her feet. She turned to Therrold and nodded, patting her hair into place.

For a brief period the Asian stood a few steps within the door, surveying the blood-stained room. He advanced deliberately towards the table, motioning to some of the men to remove the bodies of Parkes and Rohmer. They hesitated, but a flashing glance from his eyes compelled their obedience. At length, the Asian advanced the few remaining paces to the table and stood facing the Chief of the Seven.

Only when the room was again silent did he speak.

"They who would command events avoid the shedding of blood." The Asian spoke in cold level tones. "Death casts the shadows of his wings. Who can foretell where those shadows fall."

Wills looked up, his eyes bloodshot, his hand, resting on the table beside a small pool of Parkes' blood, trembled. For a space he gazed steadily at the Asian.

"What do you want?" he asked bluntly.

"I require from you the Green Pearl, the sacred jewel of my ancestors."

"Then take the damned thing." Wills spoke almost hysterically. "Find it and take it, if you can."

"It shall be found." Dr. Night's voice was emotionless. "There are those in this room who know where it is. I demand that they speak."

"Then make them speak." Mabblerley spoke bitterly. "I agree with Comrade Wills—the thing is accursed."

"Tell me what you know."

There was quiet demand in the low voice.

"We know that Rohmer searched Therrold's rooms immediately after he saw the pearl in his hand. We know that you called and demanded the jewel from Therrold and obtained from him the imitation enamelled box. We know that you went to Rohmer's office after he had searched Therrold's room. We thought that you had obtained the jewel from him. Who has the pearl now I, personally, don't know and don't care. I've finished with it."

"Peace." Dr. Night lifted his hand and the Soviet Chief sank back in his chair as if stricken. "What has Mark Therrold to say regarding the pearl?"

The Asian turned and looked at the Englishman.

Therrold thought rapidly. If he refused to speak and told the Asian to do his worst, he must sacrifice Betty. In some manner he must temporise.

If he spoke at Dr. Night's command that would be tantamount to telling the 'Seven' what, he knew—and he had tried to bargain with them for the girl's freedom. He was in their hands. So far as he could judge, Dr. Night was also their prisoner, in spite of the fact that he had walked unhampered into the room.

For the moment the 'Seven' were bewildered and surprised by the fatal duel between Parkes and Rohmer; but they would soon recover their nerves. They would believe that their great enemy—their rival for the Green Pearl—was in their power. He must hold his tongue, biding the time when he could decide whether Dr. Night or the Soviet 'Seven' were the stronger.

"I remember the pearl." Therrold tried to keep all inflexion out of his voice. "I remember you coming and asking for the pearl and the enamelled box. I know that before you came to me I had hidden the pearl. Now I have forgotten."

A ghost of a smile flecked the lips of the Asian. For a moment he stood in meditation, then raised his eyes and stared directly at the Englishman.

"The powers that are mine took from you the memory of where you had hidden the jewel. Those powers shall, in due time, show you where you hid the Green Pearl. Again I ask of you, Mark Therrold. Will you give me the Green Pearl, the sacred jewel of my house?"

"These men have asked the same thing of me," retorted Therrold, boldly. "They have promised that if I give the Green Pearl to them they will give Miss Carlington her freedom. I am in their hands. If I give it to you I have no guarantee or freedom or protection from either you or them. No, Dr. Night. I will carry out the trust I assumed and carry the Green Pearl to the Grand Duke Paul—the man who sent me for it."

"Mark Therrold." Dr. Night came to where the Englishman stood. "You are a brave man and I honour you. But I shall obtain the Green Pearl. You shall never take it to England and the Grand Duke."

"This lady, Miss Carlington." Therrold spoke quickly. He feared those keen, penetrating eyes. "She was captured by these men and brought here with me. They claim that she is your agent. Will you tell them that you have no knowledge of her?"

"You are very like her, child; very like her; but you are not the girl these men take you to be. She is safe where these men cannot touch her. Had they taken her prisoner, I would have known it on the instant and she would have been freed, or grave torments would have struck them. Yes, Mark Therrold, I will do as you ask. I declare that this girl has no knowledge or part with me."

Dr. Night released Betty's hand and moved to the table. Facing the Soviet Chief, he spoke in clear, ringing tones.

"Anthony Wills, you have stated that you relinquish all claims to the Green Pearl. Will you deliver this man and this woman to me?"

"No." Maberley was on his feet, his eyes blazing with avarice. "No, we have Therrold and the girl, and we have you. You say that you can bring back Therrold's memory. Well, we will force you to do that. We'll force him to speak and then we'll get the pearl while we hold you and the girl prisoners here."

A strange flickering smile came to the Asian's lips. For a moment he stared at the man with vivid, penetrating eyes that seemed to pierce down into the soul. Then he turned away with a contemptuous shrug.

Therrold could not take his eyes from the scene. Here was a man, a foreigner, elderly, slight, dominating a crowd of men whose lusts and passions flamed in their animal-like faces. Parkes had gone down the long road; Wills sat back shrunken and baffled, his nerves shattered. Now this silent, uncouth man, who had formerly appeared of little account, had stepped forward to carry on the long drawn-out contest.

Carefully, Dr. Night drew one of the chairs to the table and sat down. For a time he leaned forward, his hands clasped on the table before him. At length he looked up.

"Again I ask that I be given the man Therrold, and the girl." He spoke firmly, yet softly.

"You can ask, but you won't get." Maberley stood defiant. He was staring over the Asian's head at the back of the room. Therrold followed the direction of the man's eyes. He was looking at Miller. The gangster was standing some yards behind the Asian, his hands fumbling at his belt. He appeared undecided and distraught. Therrold thought that Maberley was trying to convey some message to the man, and that he was wilfully trying to evade knowledge.

Dr. Night made as if to rise from his seat. At that moment Miller acted. With a single bound he was on the Asian's back, forcing a cloth over his head, calling to the other men to aid him. For a moment there was a slight turmoil round the mystery man. Then the crowd parted and Therrold saw Dr. Night seated in his chair, bound and blindfolded. Maberley stood on the opposite side of the table, triumphant.

"Trouble with you fellows is that you get scared at things," he crowed boastfully. "Because that fellow put it all over Milson you took him to be infallible. I thought it out. I reckoned that he mesmerised Milson and that if he was caught from behind he would be helpless. He's just a fakir. I got him first jump. Now Wills, do you want to give up the pearl?"

Wills sat up straight and chuckled. With a jerky motion he turned to his companion and shook hands warmly. Then he turned to the prisoner.

"Want us to give up the pearl, eh?" he chortled. "Think again, old fellow. We've got you and we've got Therrold. Between the two of you we'll get the pearl. Oh, no. You Chinks are mighty clever, but we white men beat you every time. Now, are you prepared to save your precious skin. If you're reasonable, we won't be unkind; but you've got to give Therrold his memory back or we'll—deal with you. Now you're going to talk sense."

The Asian made no move. For long seconds the 'Seven' sat staring at the blindfolded man. Suddenly Wills jerked his head away.

"Queer!" He spoke in a half whisper. "Do you know, I thought I could see the man's eyes staring at me through that cloth. Why, they seemed to hold mine so I couldn't look away. Well, it seems that he doesn't intend to be reasonable, so we'll have to use force. Miller, get the poker. A few touches with that and he'll find it'll pay to talk sense."

The man left the room, to return with a white-hot poker. He went to the side of the Asian and looked at his chief for directions.

"Had it ready for you, Therrold." Wills grinned across at the Secret Service man. "You were reasonable, so we didn't want it. Now then, Dr. Night. Will you help Therrold to regain his memory? You won't talk. All right! Between the shoulders, I think, Miller."

The man raised the poker and stepped behind the Asian. There he hesitated, a strange look coming into his eyes. Every muscle appeared to tense and strain under the enormous effort of will the man was making to carry out his orders. But he could not move hand or foot. For minutes he stood beside his intended victim, casting agonised glances at his leaders.

The arrogance had disappeared from Maberley's face. With almost a sob he fell back in his chair, covering his eyes with his hands. Wills leaned forward, a look of supreme unbelief on his heavy features. Dr. Night was motionless, the central figure in the room. From the moment Miller had attacked him he was motionless. Blinded and bound, he appeared a helpless, pathetic figure—an old man who had tried to dominate and failed. Yet there was a quiet tenseness about the Asian that held attention. Physically helpless he might be, but from his person emanated an aura that held the men surrounding him spellbound. His slender figure had the majesty of one who rules, not by right but by a mentality superior by far to mere muscular strength.

Therrold became conscious that some vital power was flowing from the bound man. The atmosphere of the room was becoming close. Around the Asian grew a tangible mist. The lights were dimming—not by the failure of the lamps—but because the light waves within the room refused to vibrate. A visible darkness was creeping from the walls towards the centre of the room.

The Englishman looked down at the girl beside him. She was gazing at the Asian, her lips half-open in wonder and awe. He noticed that he could hardly see her features, and as he gazed at her the mist seemed to grow thicker; to withdraw her from him. He passed his arm around her and drew her close. She nestled to him, content with his physical proximity and protection.

Slowly the darkness spread and the light contracted. Soon only the light above the table bit through the denser atmosphere. It cast a brilliant beam of light directly down on the Asian's seated figure. Around the bound form a weird blue light commenced to play, throwing every line of Dr. Night's body into strong relief. The darkness was now almost complete and from the men lining the walls came little gasps, as if they were stifling in the dense air. The light over Dr. Night's head grew more brilliant and concentrated. It formed a well of light, about three feet in diameter, from the lamp to the floor, and at the base of the cone played the strange, weird blue light.

Illustration:

Around the bound form a weird blue light commenced to play.

A slight movement by the bound man and the enveloping cloth slipped from his head to the floor. A long pause and the knots that bound the ropes about his hands came untied and slipped down. Still he sat, silent and motionless; an intense concentration in his glowing eyes. The cords binding him to the chair shivered and shook. They curled and twisted; writhing as if in torments. Then the knots slipped free and the ropes fell to the ground.

Still Dr. Night sat, facing the 'Seven', free and untrammelled. Slowly the darkness receded until the faces of the men against the wall appeared wavering and indistinct, as if seen through a mist. The lights glowed and once again threw their rays down on the room. The strange blue aura flickered and faded away, blending with the pale yellow light of the lamps. A long minute and the figure in the chair moved slowly.

Dr. Night raised his head and looked around him. He leaned forward, clasping his hands on the table. Unsmiling and intent, he gazed at the men seated before him, in his eyes scorn immeasurable and wordless.

"Children of the new race who have not yet learned the mysteries of nature; who have forgotten and neglected the lore your fathers revered; listen and learn." The voice, deep and sonorous, appeared to echo through a vast distance. "You cannot bind that which I will to be free. You bound with ropes; beware, lest I bind with powers no man can resist!"

And still the slight grey figure sat, staring at the men before him. Therold felt that in another minute he must scream. He half-rose from his seat, withdrawing his arms from around the girl. She looked up at him, pleadingly, catching at his hand. Immediately the tension binding him relaxed and he fell back on his seat with a sigh of relief.

Slowly the Asian turned and looked at the Englishman. There was no anger in those calm eyes; only a mighty, benign sadness; as if they had looked upon aeons of sin and passion since creation; as if they shadowed a soul world-weary. For a

full minute those eyes rested on him, as if searching the inner secrets of his heart. Then the eyes passed on, scanning the long line of faces wining the walls.

Therrold gasped. In that long minute while the soul of the Asian sought his, he remembered. As on a silver screen he saw himself during those few missing minutes of that Sunday night—when he held the Green Pearl in his hand and sought round for a secure hiding-place.

Chapter XXVI

Dr. Night rose from his seat and turned towards the door. As if in answer to his silent summons it opened and a file of Chinese came into the room. Without leader or instruction, yet apparently obeying some command, they drove the men into the centre of the room. The big table, at which the 'Seven' had sat, was thrust to one side and as each man was searched he was thrust into a far corner of the room.

Illustration:

A file of Chinese came into the room.

Therrold had sprung to his feet at the entrance of the Chinese. Now, drawing Betty with him, he moved unobtrusively towards the door. He found it guarded by two stalwart Chinese. Finding escape impossible, he again sat down on a bench. For the time he must be content to watch.

Dr. Night was standing before the group of prisoners. With hardly a word, without shot or struggle, he had captured the entire organisation of the Soviets in Sydney. For long minutes he stared at them, grimly; then with a slight motion of his hand drew their attention to himself.

"Fools!" The word was spoken without trace of emotion. "Fools, who neither know nor fear the wisdom that has come down through the aeons of time. You would bind me with cords and blind my eyes? You would pit your feeble powers against my powers, and the powers of those I serve? Fools! I was your prisoner and am now free! You are my prisoners and I shall deal with you according to my pleasures."

He made a slight motion and a Chinaman approached bearing a bundle of cords. One by one the men were taken and secured. A big Chinaman approached Betty and tied her hands behind her back; then motioned to Therrold. When their hands were secure, the man led them through the door, out into the coolness of the early morning. For some distance he walked down the path towards the roadway, driving his prisoners before him. About a hundred yards from the house he bade them halt—and released them.

"Great business, old man!" The Chinese laughed exultingly. "Lucky I was able to get hold of one of Dr. Night's boys and borrow his costume."

"Thomas!" Therrold was thunderstruck. "How the deuce did you get here?"

"Thanks to friend Rohmer." The Australian grinned broadly. "Captured him soon after you and Miss Carlington were taken from the hotel. A little—er—persuasion and he split all he knew. Then I came out here and watched. Wondered how I was

to get into the place. Just scheming a little fancy shooting match when these Chinks came up. One of them wandered far from the herd, and became my meat. In his dress, I fell in at the end of the procession and waited for a chance to get to you."

Therrold was about to question the Australian when he heard sounds of disturbance in the house. A couple of men dashed into the open, running towards the gate. Thomas drew his companions into the shelter of the trees, pressing an automatic into the Englishman's hand. For a time they stood hidden; then Thomas led the way to a wire fence. Scrambling through, he helped his companions to cross, then led them over a ploughed field.

"Can't take the road just yet," he whispered. "Those Chinks are sure to make a big search for you. Dr. Night will be fit to eat his hat at your escape. Thought he had you and the Green Pearl in his grasp for sure. Still, we're not out of the wood by a long way yet."

For some distance they proceeded along the edge of a small thicket. Behind and around them they could hear high voices calling. At length, The Australian halted. Betty was nearly exhausted by the fast pace he had set.

"We have to wait a time, old man. No good flogging on through the dark. Don't think they'll track us here, but if they do we'll put up the best fight we can, eh?"

"Where are we?" exclaimed Betty.

"About two miles outside Liverpool," the Australian answered.

"Liverpool." Therrold was astonished. "I thought we were closer to the coast than that."

"Hist!" Thomas warned. Listening intently, they could hear someone stumbling over the rough ground. Therrold raised his automatic, but the Australian pressed it down. Crouching in the shadows of the trees they waited. In a few minutes a dark form loomed up beside them. Thomas touched Therrold's arm and they sprang together. A short, sharp struggle and they crouched down again, a struggling form between them.

Therrold tore hastily at the man's clothing and in a few minutes had him bound and gagged. Then, after a short search, he found the automatic the man was carrying and handed it to Betty.

"Where's the road?" Therrold asked suddenly, "This waiting's no good. That man, Night, is uncanny. If we stop here he's bound to discover us."

Thomas pointed to the left. As if in confirmation of his gesture, the dull roar of a motor came to their ears and the glare of headlights shone along the road.

"Going into Liverpool," announced the Australian. "Think they'll overtake us."

Therrold touched his companions on the arms and led to the road.

Thomas protested.

"Look out, old man," he whispered. "There's another car at the farm—the one Dr. Night came in."

"Came in a car, did he?" growled the-Englishman. "Thought he'd been wafted here on the wings of that power he talks about. Well, we've got to risk it. No good loitering here to be recaptured. Come on!"

They were only a hundred yards from the road. There it was better walking and Betty was able to get along at a fair pace. The two men kept ears and eyes well

open. Where had the car gone? It would certainly not go into the town. Perhaps not finding them on the road it would return to the farm.

At length they heard the sounds of the motor roaring back towards them. Just ahead of where they were the lightening sky showed the tops of trees. Hurrying forward, they just managed to reach concealment before the lights of the car appeared on the road. It went past them at a furious pace, heading for the farm. The trees they had sheltered amid stood at the beginning of a lane, narrow and rough. They turned down it and for half a mile stumbled along its rough surface. The lane opened into a smoother and broader road. Away in the distance they could see lights.

"Liverpool," announced the Australian. "We've had luck!"

As he spoke a gun cracked, the bullet whizzing past his ear. He ducked and ran forward. Therrold drew the girl into the shelter of the hedge, whispering to her to kneel down. Again came the sound of a shot and they ran forward. They found Thomas standing over the insensible form of a Chinaman.

"Dead," queried Therrold.

"Not a chance!" Thomas was nursing his wrist. "Hit him with the butt. Nearly fractured my wrist. He's got a bean like a brick!"

Therrold rolled the man over. So far as he could see, he was not seriously injured.

"Come on," he said, rising to his feet. "Miss Carlington, I'm afraid we'll have to run for it now. Those shots will bring the pack on our trail."

As he spoke, shouts came from the lane. Therrold looked around. Up the lane, in the direction of the town, stood a big barn. Pointing to it, he caught Betty's arm, urging her forward.

"Fraid we're caught, old man," gasped Thomas, as they reached the shelter of the building. "Still, we've got three guns and we're both good shots. Perhaps we can stand them off until some of the country people get curious."

They crouched in the deep shadows of the barn, peering out on the road. In the half lights they could see a group of Chinese, chattering and pointing up at the barn. Thomas raised his automatic, but the Englishman restrained him.

"You'll only scatter them if you shoot, old man. Better let them pack until we've made our minds what to do."

The Australian hesitated, then drew back into the building. He struck a match and looked around. Some farm implements, a sulky and a carpenter's bench and tools occupied the space. At one side was a door. Thomas pressed it and it swung open. The interior was in darkness and he struck another match.

In the room stood a small motor car.

Returning to where Therrold watched, the Australian reported his find. The car provided a way out, but Therrold was loath to leave the barn until he knew how they were to get the car on to the road.

Dawn was just breaking but the ground was still covered with a fine mist. It was dangerous to move, yet it was more dangerous to remain. The Chinese were on guard on the road. It was certain that they had sent a messenger back to report to Dr. Night that they had the prisoners cornered.

Therrold sent the Australian to the car with instructions to make it ready for a quick getaway. Then, warning the girl to keep under shelter, he went out into the

open. His appearance was greeted with a shout and a couple of shots, both of which went wide.

To the left, Therrold found a fair farm road, running from the barn doors to the road. It was evident that this was the road used by the owner of the car. But, was that road barred by a locked gate? From the loose manner in which the barn was secured this was probable. If so, then they had no chance of escape in that direction.

The Englishman returned to the barn, puzzling over the problem. He believed there was a house near, possibly over the slight ridge across which the farm led. They might make a dash for the house. But the Chinese would follow and he doubted if there were sufficient arms at the house to stave off an attack. Thomas met him at the door and reported the car ready. He said that he had secured the door with a piece of thin string in place of the bolt.

A strong pressure on the string would snap it and allow the doors to swing open. The problem of the gate remained.

Therrold thought for a few moments and then told Thomas and Betty to get into the car and drive out when he gave the word. He looked at his gun to see that the magazine was fully charged, then went out of the barn and walked to where the Chinese were gathered. Some fifty yards from the men he opened fire, purposely shooting high. The men scattered abruptly, dodging from the Englishman's bullets.

Therrold whistled shrilly. The barn doors burst open and the car came out. The Englishman saw that Betty was at the wheel; Thomas was standing up in the car, automatic in hand. Therrold started to run down to the gates, covered by Thomas, who fired occasional shots to keep the Chinese at a distance.

Arriving at the top of the rise, Therrold saw that his guess had been correct. There was a house a little distance down the further slope. A man was standing a few yards from the door, evidently attracted by the sounds of the shots. Therrold ran down the slope towards the man, Betty keeping the car close beside him.

To his relief he saw that the gate to the road was wide open. The farmer commenced to run towards them. The Chinese, following closely, appeared on the crest of the ridge, to be driven back by a couple of shots from Thomas. Flourishing his gun, Therrold ran towards the man. As he expected, the farmer turned and bolted to the house.

"Quick, Betty!" Therrold sprang to one side and, as the car passed him, sprang on the running board, "Make her move!"

The girl swung the car on to the road and stepped heavily on to the accelerator. Therrold faced round towards the rise. A group of Chinese were running down towards them. The farmer reappeared at the door carrying a shot-gun, alternately threatening the Chinese with the gun and staring after his car.

"Fine, old man!" Thomas leaned across the car and patted Therrold on the shoulder. "Got clean away, by Jove!"

"Listen!" He could hear the sounds of a powerful car travelling at a great speed. In a moment it appeared on the crest of a hill. The farmer ran towards it, waving his gun to signal for the car to stop.

"That'll keep them for a time," shouted Thomas.

The pursuing car swerved heavily, to avoid running over the man and came to a halt. The man was talking, rapidly, gesticulating after the fugitives. Presently he climbed into the car and it; started again.

The delay had given them a fair start. Betty was driving beautifully and the rough surface of the road was in favour of the lighter car. Still, their pursuers gained fast.

"Look!" Thomas pointed ahead. The town had opened a bare mile ahead of them. Therrold looked back.

The pursuing car was a bare hundred yards away and gaining fast. He leaned over the back of the car and waited. Now it was only fifty yards away. He aimed at the front wheels and fired every shot in his magazine. He thought that he had failed and held out his hand for Thomas' gun. Again he sent a stream of bullets at the tyres of the following car.

There was a loud report and the big car swerved suddenly, tilting over into the ditch. Thomas cheered loudly. A few minutes later they drove into the centre of the town. Betty pulled up before the doors of a garage.

"What's the matter?" asked Thomas jumping to the ground. "Stalled?"

"Unsafe to go on in this car." Betty slipped on to the sidewalk and knocked at the doors of the garage. "Mr. Frampton will have the telephone at work all over the district in a few minutes. We can get a car here and take you into Sydney." A man opened the door, greeting Betty with some surprise.

"Get out the big car quickly, Bob," ordered the girl. "Mr. Eric at home?"

"Yes, Miss Betty. We've been expecting you for days."

"Good. Hurry, Bob. These men have to get into Sydney at once." She turned to the two men. "The garage belongs to my cousin, Eric Carlington. Bob will drive you into town and then we'll see that Mr. Frampton's car is returned to him. Mr. Therrold, an English boat sails from Sydney today. Get the pearl and catch that boat. It is your only chance."

"But what of you?" Therrold felt unhappy.

"I am at home here." Betty smiled slightly. "I was only stopping in Sydney for a couple of days to do some shopping, then I was coming here. When you are safe out of Australia I will see Mr. Frampton and explain matters to him. He will understand, I am sure."

The big car rolled out of the garage and Thomas jumped in. Therrold lingered beside the girl for a few moments, holding her hand. He had realised, now that the time of parting had come, that he would miss her badly. They had only met a few hours ago, yet a lifetime of knowledge had come to them.

"Hurry!" The girl urged him gently towards the car. "They will be here any minute now, even if they have to walk into town." Bending over the girl's hand, Therrold pressed his lips to her fingers; then turned and entered the car. His mission accomplished, he determined to return to Australia with all haste and search out the girl who had come to mean so much to him.

As the car sped citywards he looked back with a heavy heart. The two men were silent as the car sped on. Once Thomas muttered something about the time being short. Therrold did not reply. He sat with his arms folded, his thoughts on the girl who had been his companion during that night of horror.

The car came to a halt before the Hotel Splendide, and the two men alighted. Immediately the driver turned and sped away in the direction of Liverpool.

Therrold stood on the hotel steps watching it out of sight, a dull aching at his heart, then turned and followed Thomas into the hotel.

"We're not out of the wood yet, old man," observed the Australian, as they went up to their rooms. "Dr. Night won't acknowledge defeat until you hand that pearl to the Grand Duke."

"That won't be long now." Therrold led down the corridor. "I'm sailing this morning."

"And the pearl?"

"Thanks to Dr. Night I have my memory back," Therrold laughed. "When he turned and looked at me in that farmhouse I suddenly remembered where I had hidden the pearl."

"Good!" Thomas stopped before the Englishman's door. "I'm coming in with you while you pack. You don't get out of my sight until you are on the boat."

Therrold went into his room and hastily collected his belongings, he and the Australian carrying them to the latter's room. When the room was cleared, Therrold turned the key in the lock and pocketed it.

"I don't know how far Dr. Night suspects you of association with me," he said, as they entered Thomas' room. "If he comes here, he'll certainly go straight to my room. That will be a point for us, for we'll know he's here before he locates us."

The Englishman packed quickly. "I'll leave these here with you, Thomas," he decided. "I haven't time to stop and pay the hotel bill. You do that for me and get these bags on the Melbourne train. I'll pick them up there. By that time the pearl will be safe, in the ship's strong room, and I'll see that Dr. Night doesn't get on board. Now for the pearl!"

He carried a chair to the bathroom door and mounted on it. For a few seconds he felt along the top edge of the door, then took out his knife. Another moment and the pearl rested on his hand. Taking the enamelled box from his pocket he restored the gem to its bed of velvet.

Illustration:

Another moment and the pearl lay on his hand.

"I'm ready," he announced to his companion, who, with the door ajar, was peering out on to the corridor. "Got your gun?" asked the Australian. Therrold nodded. The two men went out on the corridor and Thomas locked the door. They went down to the elevators. One of the lifts was mounting to the floor. As the cage came to the level Thomas drew his automatic, drawing Therrold back hastily.

"Ware, Therrold! They've caught up to us!"

Automatic in hand, Therrold raced for the bend in the corridor, Thomas following closely. Peering round the corner, Therrold saw half a dozen Chinese, headed by Dr. Night, tumble out of the lift. Another Chinaman followed, dragging with him the lift attendant.

Dr. Night walked down the corridor in the direction of Therrold's room, followed by his men. Thomas fired a shot into the floor before them. The shot sent the men scurrying back, but Dr. Night continued to advance, unperturbed.

"Pity." Therrold spoke with regret. He had conceived a strange admiration for the Asian. He raised his automatic and deliberately fired. Dr. Night staggered and stopped. Then, with deadly earnestness, he resumed his advance. Again Therrold fired and he sank to the ground. The Chinese, sheltered in the lift, charged down the corridor. Thomas opened fire, hitting three of them. They retreated, sullenly, to shelter, taking Dr. Night with them.

Illustration:

The Asian staggered and stopped.

"What are we to do now?"

The Australian turned a face, comic in its despair, towards Therrold. "There'll be the devil to pay for this shooting—and you'll miss your boat!"

Chapter XXVII

FOR SOME minutes the two men stood sheltered by the angle of the corridor. From the doors of the elevator peered out the faces of the Chinese, awaiting a favourable opportunity to charge down and avenge their leader. The position was a stalemate. The Chinese controlled the elevators barring the roads to the streets. On the other hand, the Chinese could not get to the two Secret Service men while their ammunition lasted.

Therrold thought quickly. They must get out of this tangle as soon as possible. Behind them lay the long corridor. They might retreat down its length, maintaining a running fight with the Chinese—but to what purpose? Except for the rooms they had occupied the ground behind them was unknown territory. Yet, there must be some means of escape. But, if means of escape, then another source of danger!

Whispering to Thomas to remain on guard, Therrold went down the corridor and tried the first door. It was locked. Using his master-key, he opened the door. The room was unoccupied; though there were signs that it had been occupied during the night. Opening the window, Therrold looked out. The sheer wall of the hotel gave no promise of escape that way.

A shot from the corner sent the Englishman hurrying back to his companion's side. A Chinese had tried to make a dash for the corner. He lay on the corridor with a broken leg.

Therrold turned and looked down the corridor. There was no means of escape from the trap they were in. The hotel was modern. Surely there were fire escapes—if he could only find them! Warning the Australian of his intentions, Therrold ran down the corridor to the far end. In the end wall was a large window. Perhaps from there he could locate the fire escapes.

When he was half way down the corridor the window was suddenly pushed open and a man jumped into the corridor. For a moment the Englishman hesitated. The man swung round. Seeing Therrold, he wrenched a revolver from his pocket. There was no time for hesitation. Therrold fired, smashing the man's arm.

Running forward, Therrold bent over the man. He was a European. A couple of shots sounded from the other end of the corridor, and he looked round. Thomas waved to him then turned to watch the elevators. Therrold pulled the man into one of the rooms and locked the door on him. The man had evidently been alone, for no one followed him through the window. Therrold looked out.

A small crowd had gathered at the foot of the fire escape. Another man had preparing to mount the ladder. At sight of the Englishman he dropped back to the ground, hastily. The fire escape extended up to the roof. Therrold could see little choice. To stay in the corridor meant to miss the boat and being starved into surrender—and an inquiry by the authorities. To descend to the streets meant inevitable delay and explanations.

To go up to the roof was the best choice. They might find some means of gaining the streets, unperceived. Climbing out of the window. Therrold called softly to Thomas. The Australian looked round and waved his hand. For a few seconds longer he continued to watch, then stepped back and ran down the corridor softly. Therrold watched his companion's progress, automatic in hand, prepared to cover his retreat.

Thomas gained the window, and at a word from Therrold went up to the roof. The Englishman followed. The roof was empty. Therrold had wondered if their opponents had taken possession of it, but he had to chance that. Possibly they had been too intent on holding the elevators. Now they had to find out what opportunities for escape the roof offered. A quick circle of the place gave no hope of escape.

A big crowd had gathered at the hotel, guarding the fire escapes. He gave up all hopes of catching the boat. All they could do was to guard themselves until the police arrived and then, face the subsequent inquiry.

"Top of the wheel house, man," shouted Thomas, after a quick look around. "Come on!" He raced for the small house sheltering the elevator works. Therrold followed. Lying prone on the house-top they would offer little mark for the Chinese bullets. For a long time nothing happened.

At length a Chinaman's head showed on top of one of the escapes. Therrold sent a bullet over the man's head. He was determined he would not allow anyone on the roof until the police arrived and explanations had taken place—explanations that would result in the hotel being cleared of Dr. Night and his followers. Then he and Thomas would go to police headquarters under guard.

"Wish we had that." Thomas pointed straight up. Therrold followed the line of his pointing finger. High above them circled a large aeroplane. For the moment he thought the Asian had brought some new instrument for their destruction. Then he smiled. Even Dr. Night would not dare to try to land from an aeroplane on a roof-top.

The aeroplane circled above, then, coming, considerably closer to the roof. Thomas waved his hand to the pilot. The plane circled and came back in a long dive that seemed likely to end in a smash on the roof. At the last possible moment it turned and mounted swiftly.

"Good lord!" Thomas was gazing at the plane in astonishment. "Therrold, I thought Miss Carlington was in that plane!"

Therrold did not answer. He, too, had thought he had recognised the girl in the craft. He watched, as the plane went into the a stance and turned. Again it mounted high, and as it went up he thought something white had been waved from the cockpit. The plane circled above the hotel. From the cockpit a long rope fell, streaming back. The craft dipped and came towards them in a long downward glide. Again Therrold thought the pilot waved to them.

It was Betty! But what was she doing there? Did the girl think that she could pick them from off the roof. She was waving again. Thomas was on his feet, waving to her. The course she was steering would trail the rope directly across them. Therrold turned and surveyed the roof-top. At the head of one of the fire escapes a dusky head showed. Then a hand came in view, pointing a revolver straight at the Australian.

The Secret Service agent fired quickly and with a wild yell the man lost his balance and fell to the street below. "Quick, Therrold!" The rope was almost on them. Thomas stepped to one side, to give the Englishman first chance.

"Together!" The Englishman yelled. As he spoke the rope trailed between them, appeared to hesitate a moment then swept them off into space.

"Got us on a little piece of string, hasn't she," laughed the Australian as they dangled at the end of the rope over the city. "Get on up, old man; there's plenty of knots."

Therrold started to climb. In a few minutes he reached the cockpit. As he tumbled aboard Betty looked back and nodded, brightly. Therrold answered her glance with one full of gratitude and admiration. What a wonderful little girl she was! He looked over the side.

Thomas was almost up to the plane. Betty pointed the machine out over the harbour. She waved her hand to Therrold, pointing down. Below, Therrold could see a big ship steaming down the harbour. It was the English mail boat. So Betty planned to land him on his ship!

He felt in his pocket. The enamelled box was there and in it the Green Pearl. He had accomplished another stage of his task. In an hour or less he would be on that boat and with the authority he carried the whole resources of the ship would be gathered to guard his treasure. Heading northwards, Betty sent the plane along at a terrific rate. Far out of sight of the city she headed for the coast.

Suddenly Thomas rose and bent over to the girl's ear. At first indecision showed in her face, then she nodded. She leaned over the side, watching the ground below.

"This is where we part, old man." Thomas grasped Therrold's hand. "Best of luck. I think you're out of the Australian wood, now."

"What do you mean, you ass," shouted Therrold. "You can't get out and walk!"

Thomas was unstrapping a white bundle on the back of the seat before them. He lifted it to his knees.

"Parachute, old thing!" he called. "Did a bit of that in the war. Help me buckle it on, then watch me. I'll get back to Martin Thorne and arrange an alibi for us both. It'll be interesting to watch Dr. Night and his crowd make the necessary explanations, also."

The straps adjusted, Thomas crawled out on to one of the wings. For a moment he watched the ground below, then straightened himself and stepped out into the air.

Therrold watched the falling man for a full minute; then between them spread a white cloud. Betty circled the plane, leaning over the side, watching the falling man. The cloud seemed to hang for an intolerable time, then collapsed. Another minute and a little figure crawled from under it. The plane circled and mounted higher.

Now Therrold could see the heads before them, like toy rocks guarding a narrow line of silvery water. Between the rocks rode a miniature ship, heading out into the large expanse of the silent waters beyond.

Betty began to spiral down. The vessel grew larger and larger. The long spiral straightened to a glide and the plane came to rest on the water a couple of hundred yards from the ship. The girl looked back at the man, a triumphant smile on her lips.

"What can I say, Betty?" Therrold leaned over the back of the pilot's seat. "That you should have guessed our plight and come to our rescue."

The girl's eyes sparkled as she turned in her seat to face the man. "But the plane, Betty?"

"The 'Seagull,' Mark. What do you think of her. She is cousin Eric's invention and will take off from water or land. I've flown her several times. Surely you've heard of her?"

Now Therrold remembered. The name 'Carlington' had seemed familiar when first he heard it. Now he remembered the long newspaper reports on the wonderful plane invented by an Australian—a plane that British and Australian Governments were testing with a view to purchase.

"How will you get back, Betty? Will you be able to fly the plane back by yourself?"

"I could, but I needn't." The girl looked past him. "There is the launch with cousin Eric on board. He's bringing out more gas and will fly the plane back home."

"Betty!" Therrold leaned over the girl. "Cousin Eric can fly the plane back—by himself."

The girl looked up, startled. She caught Therrold's eyes and blushed hotly.

"He—might—Mr.—"

"Mark, please, Betty," Therrold interrupted. "Betty, dear! Do you know that ship's captains have wonderful powers—beyond the three miles limit?"

The girl fingered the controls for a few seconds, then lifted her eyes, mischief dancing in them. "Do—do you think—it would be—troubling him—too much, Mark—dear?"

