

The House on the River

by Fred Merrick White, 1859-1935

Published: 1925

in »The Dubbo Liberal & Macquarie Advocate«, Australia

Published: 1928

in »The Goulburn Evening Penny Post«, Australia



Table of Contents

Chapter I ...	In the Library.
Chapter II ...	On the Common.
Chapter III ...	In the Garden.
Chapter IV ...	The Skeleton at the Feast.
Chapter V ...	A Bootless Errand.
Chapter VI ...	The Sanctuary.
Chapter VII ...	The Involuntary Host.

Chapter VIII ...	„When Thieves Fall Out...“
Chapter IX ...	A Helping Hand.
Chapter X ...	As from the Dead.
Chapter XI ...	Kent Knows Something.
Chapter XII ...	Missing.
Chapter XIII ...	„Friend or Foe?“
Chapter XIV ...	A Letter from Claw.
Chapter XV ...	Written Evidence.
Chapter XVI ...	The Man at the Window.
Chapter XVII ...	Rogues in Council.
Chapter XVIII ...	The Search.
Chapter XIX ...	A Fight for Freedom.
Chapter XX ...	The Gold Cup.
Chapter XXI ...	The Dollar King.
Chapter XXII ...	The Trap.
Chapter XXIII ...	The Boat Express.
Chapter XXIV ...	The Weasel’s Teeth.
Chapter XXV ...	Click!
Chapter XXVI ...	The Open Door.



Chapter I

In the Library.

Outside, it was a thick November night, with now and again a rift in the bank of fog, with a sheaf of misty stars, half blurred against a sky of indigo. A warm night withal, and with a hint of rain behind, the gentle breeze that fanned the lights on Barnes Common and set them trembling in a waving ribbon of fire. Somewhere in the distance a church clock was chiming the hour of nine.

Barnes Place stood out against the gloom as it had done any time the last four centuries, for it was a survivor in an area of constant change, and one of the landmarks along the river. Not that Ralph Enderby cared much about that, not that he valued the beautiful old-world gardens and the ancient lawns or the old oak with which the house was panelled through out, because he cared for none of these things, except as the outward semblance of his wealth, and his credit in the city. To him it was no more than a week-end office where he entertained his

friends and, weaved those business schemes which had made his name a byword amongst the city men who knew, though, outside that class, he was popular enough and passed as a good sportsman and a good fellow. He was a member of most prominent golf clubs, he wore the M.C.C. tie on occasion, and his handicap at Sandwich was three.

The house stood, silent and solitary, in the darkness of the night. Apparently Enderby was away, for no lights shone out across the fog, except one over the hall door, and the whole place might have been deserted to all outward appearance, though, behind the closely drawn blinds in the library, with its French windows opening on to the terrace, the electrics were ablaze and the door leading into the hall stood open. From somewhere out of the dim recesses of the hall there came a faint murmur, not unlike the ripple of a telephone bell, only more mechanical and dull, as if the bell had been muffled. In the big oak-panelled room itself, with its old prints and its book-lined walls, a solitary figure stood in front of an old-fashioned safe which rested in an angle. It was a small, youthful figure, alert and quick, with furtive eyes darting here and there, from time to time as if the intruder was half-afraid of being discovered at any moment. It was a slender figure, too, not unlike that of a woman, though the rough tweeds and the cloth cap at the back of the small head were masculine enough. At the burglar's feet was a bag of up-to-date tools, including all the latest appliances of the predatory art, such as an acetylene flame, and the last word in the way of wedges and cutting instruments.

For quite a long time the man in front of the safe worked on, till, at length, the hinges of the safe gave way, and the door fell open.

Apparently the burglar knew what he was looking for, for his eyes lighted with triumph and a chuckle of pleasure escaped him. He swooped on the safe like a hawk, and a second later had concealed a bundle of papers in the inside pocket of his coat. At that moment the clicking, whirring sound ceased, and the burglar rose to his feet.

"I think that will do," he said to himself. "Yes, I think that will do very well. Perhaps it would be—"

The intruder broke off suddenly as he turned at a slight noise that came from the direction of the window curtains in an angle of the room that was hidden from the doorway, and, as the curtains parted, a face looked in.

It was a man's face, a pleasant face with regular features and a clear slate-blue eye, the face of a younger man, unmistakably an athlete, though his hair was quite grey and fell in thick locks over the intruder's forehead. Then a finger was upraised as if commanding silence, and the youthful burglar stepped across the room towards the window.

"I think that will do, George," he said aloud. "You had better ask Mr. Enderby to come this way."

Out of the blackness of the hall the hidden George responded suitably, and then, with a sudden change of manner, and a suggestion of almost fear in his eyes, the burglar crossed over to the window where the intruder was standing, half-hidden by the curtains.

"It's all right, Ennie," the intruder said. "For God's sake don't raise an alarm, and, whatever you do, don't let Enderby know I am here. I want five minutes; just five minutes at that safe. I must have it."

The youthful burglar faltered. And then, as she removed her cap, it became plain enough that it was a woman who was doing this thing. A young woman with a touch of flame in her abundant hair, and a look, half mischievous, half frightened, in a pair of brown eyes as innocent and clear as those of a child, but full of a certain audacity. It was quite plain, too, that she was on the best of terms with the white-haired, brown-skinned athlete who stood, half-concealed behind the curtains.

"I had to come, Ennie," he said. "There is devil's work going on here, and that scoundrel Enderby is at the bottom of it. He is trying to ruin me and Ted Somerset and the proofs are in that safe. I know they are—he brought them down with him to-night. I watched him place them in the safe. Ah, if only I could have caught him when he was crossing the common! But the devil always looks after his own, and I was five minutes too late."

"But Mickey," the girl began.

Michel Quint made an impatient gesture.

"There's no time to explain," he said. "I'll do that later on. I have been waiting for a couple of hours for my chance. Then I recollected that you were coming down here to-night to be filmed in the burglary scene of that big crook drama of yours. It was just as if providence had played into my hands. But Lord! I am wasting time. Here let me——"

Michel Quint strode into the room, just as a footstep echoed in the hall, and he had scarcely time to conceal himself again before Ralph Enderby entered.

A thin, tall man, about fifty, with grey hair, sparse and thin, and a furtive expression on a face that he strove in vain to render genial and good-natured, Enderby was suspect by those who knew him, though he found it easy enough to impose himself on outsiders. He came forward now, and held out a flabby hand to Ennie Barr, and paid her a fulsome compliment or two in his own repulsive fashion. For he was a great man in the cinema world, the controlling shareholder in the "Open Road" Company, and he knew, full well, the value of his star artiste. He knew that she was young and beautiful. He knew that she had come to him from America, but, beyond that, he knew nothing, and Ennie Barr was not in the least likely to enlighten him.

"Ah, so it has been a success, young lady," Enderby said, in that familiar way of his that always filled Ennie with disgust and loathing. "But, of course, it was. Why my dear child, how pale you look! I am afraid you have been throwing yourself too much into your part. The operator tells me that he has never seen you do anything better. But come into the dining room, come and have supper with me. A glass of champagne, and a cold grouse, or something of that sort."

"I'd much rather not," Ennie said coldly. "I have a taxi waiting for me outside now."

"Oh, nonsense," Enderby said. "You must have something. Are you cold? Why, you're trembling. By Jove, I believe someone's left the window open."

Ennie stood there, holding her breath. Her face had grown pale though her lips were steady enough, for it seemed to her that Michel Quint must be discovered. She could see the curtain shake and then it seemed to her that she could catch the faint echo of a footstep on the terrace outside. When Enderby crossed and drew the curtains back to close the window, Ennie saw, to her immense relief, that

Quint was no longer there. So great was the relief that she laughed aloud. Meanwhile, the safe door stood open, with the precious papers to obtain which Michel Quint had taken so great a risk, still intact inside.

“Ah, that’s better,” Enderby smiled. “Here, come along. Just a glass of champagne and a biscuit, anyhow. I hoped I should have the pleasure of motoring you back to town. Now, confess it, Miss Ennie, wasn’t it a good idea of mine to have that scene from your big drama filmed down here? That’s going to be one of our biggest successes, and I don’t mind telling you I’ve got a far bigger thing than that up my sleeve. What do you say to a new invention by which we can make our characters stand out like real figures on the stage, and get them to speak in perfect time with their action. You know what I mean. Well, let me tell you it will be done before long.”

“Do you actually mean that, Mr. Enderby?” Ennie asked.

“My dear girl, it’s as good as done. I’ve got everything in that safe yonder. It’s only a matter of the necessary machinery. But come along.”

“My tools,” Ennie exclaimed. “I must not forget them. They were borrowed for me by Mr. Michel Quint from a friend who is a great criminologist. Quite as a favour you understand, and I wouldn’t lose one for worlds.”

With that the famous film actress gathered up her implements and placed them in her bag. She was cool and collected enough now, outwardly, at any rate, and was only too anxious to find herself outside the house. She drew a long deep breath when the door of the taxi closed behind her.

“Thank goodness, that’s over,” she said to herself.

“On the contrary, my dear Ennie,” a quiet voice by her side said. “I’m afraid it’s only just beginning.”

It was Michel Quint who spoke.

Chapter II

On the Common.

A little cry broke from Ennie’s lips.

“Michel,” she exclaimed. “How did you get here?”

“Oh, that was easy enough,” Quint said. “I slipped into the taxi when our driver was fraternizing in the kitchen, and I trusted to the darkness to help me. Now, are you going to drive straight back to London.”

“I don’t know,” Ennie said. “I picked up this taxi at the station. But what do you want me to do?”

“That I hardly know,” Quint confessed. “It all depends upon circumstances. Let me try and explain, and when I have explained, we can either go back to London together or dismiss this man and return by train. Ennie, do you know that I am in danger of arrest at any moment?”

“Oh, Michel,” Ennie cried. “What have you done? I can’t conceive you doing anything wrong.”

"I've been a fool," Quint groaned. "A perfect fool. You know all about me. During the year you've been sharing my sister's flat you have seen quite enough of me to know that I am a good bit of a rotter."

"You're nothing of the sort, Mickey," Ennie said indignantly. "You're one of the best and kindest men in the world. I know no one who has more friends."

"Ah, that's just it," Quint muttered. "I've got a jolly sight too many friends. It's all very well to be an International Rugger hero and an ex-amateur champion golfer, but you can't do that sort of thing on two pence per week. After all, any fool can be good at sport, though I've only come to realize it lately. But all this time when I've been a little tin god in my way, welcomed in country houses, and having my photograph in the paper once a week, I've been living on next to nothing. And I was never a sponge, Ennie, never. I ought to have passed my final medical examination by this time, instead of which I have been running about the country with a bag of golf clubs, or posing to the gallery in Richmond Old Deer Park. Look here, Ennie, I haven't got a bob; worse than that, I owe a goodish bit. So when Ralph Enderby asked me to join him in a big sport's enterprise I jumped at it. And so did Ted Somerset. You know old Ted, one of the very best, but an awful ass, so far as business is concerned. Well, I got him to come in, too. I introduced that invention of his—"

"What invention," Ennie asked quickly.

"Well, I don't quite understand it, but it's something to do with films. Makes the characters talk and move as if they were alive. Quite a big thing, I believe."

"Ah, now I begin to understand," Ennie said. "That was the very thing that Enderby was talking about to me to-night. He told me it was as good as done. He told me he had all the plans and everything in his safe. I mean the safe that I burgled, with those tools you borrowed for me."

"And you did it jolly well, too," Quint said admiringly. "It was the real thing with real burglar's implements. Why, when I was watching you through the curtains, I forgot entirely why I came down here. For the moment, I thought I was watching the real thing."

"Never mind that," Ennie said. "What are you going to do?"

Quint set his teeth together.

"There's only one thing I can do," he said. "I must do a bit of burglary on my own account. Now, this is Thursday night. I know that Enderby isn't going back to town till Monday, except to attend the Golfers' Association dinner at the Leinster Rooms on Saturday evening, after which he comes back here. That means that the papers I want will be in that safe till Monday morning, anyhow, and I'm coming here to get them. I must, Ennie, I must."

"Is it as bad as all that?" Ennie whispered.

"My dear girl, it couldn't possibly be worse. That scoundrel is going to ruin Ted Somerset and myself. He might leave me alone, only he knows that Ted and I are partners in that invention, and, therefore, both of us have got to be disgraced. It's a regular conspiracy between Enderby and two of his City friends to get Ted and myself a long term of penal servitude, and, with the evidence they've bought and paid for, it will be done. We shan't have a dog's chance. I haven't got to the bottom of it yet, but I shall know something before long. Once we are out of the way, Enderby will make a fortune out of that invention."

"It seems almost incredible," Ennie cried.

"Ah, not when you have to deal with two fools like Ted and myself," Quint said bitterly. "He laid that trap for us, and we walked deliberately in. And once the police are put on our track, we can't escape, at least, I can't. Why, everybody in the world of sport knows me, and like the idiot I am, I used to be proud of the fact. You can't pick up an illustrated paper—and they're all illustrated now—without seeing Michel Quint playing golf, or the famous international footballer, Michel Quint, in some attitude or another. Ennie, I think I am as plucky as most of them, but the mere idea of imprisonment takes all the strength out of me. I am an outdoor man, and I couldn't stand it. I should beat my brains out against the walls of my cell. It would be worse than death to me."

Ennie leant towards him in an attitude of pity and sympathy. She could feel the muscles of his arm tremble as she laid her fingers on it. For she loved this man, she had loved him from the very first, and, none the less because he had never treated her anything more than a friend.

"Is there nothing that can be done?" she asked.

"Nothing—unless we can get those papers back," Quint said. "If we could do that, then we might drive a bargain with the scoundrel. But they won't wait, my dear; they won't wait. Time is everything, and that's why I am going to use those tools I borrowed for you to come down here on Saturday night, when I know that Enderby will be at the golf dinner, and break into his safe. Till then I shall have to risk it. If there were only a place I could go to, and lie there for a week or two, without the chance of being disturbed, I should feel that I have a fighting chance. But where am I to go? Where is the sporting pal of mine who would run the risk of hiding me? And I have no money, I haven't a five-pound note in the world."

Ennie sighed in sympathy. She would have helped him if she could till the last farthing she possessed, but her case was no better than Quint's, for her salary, in most cases, was spent before she got it.

"Ah, if I could only assist," she said. "But you know what I am, Mickey, and I don't see any prospect of another penny myself for a least a week. And the allowance my father makes me is not due for quite a month. But, as to the other matter, do you know, I think I can see a way out. Did you ever hear me speak of an eccentric old uncle of mine who lives by himself in a house on the river not far from here?"

"Yes, I think I have," Quint said. "A sort of hermit who lives entirely alone and never see anybody."

"That's the man," Ennie said. "And we are within a mile of his house at the present time. Now listen, Mickey. You've got no head for business, but I have."

"That's why you're so well off," Quint said drily.

"Ah, but that doesn't prevent me having a business mind. All American girls have. My dear boy, you can't travel across London with those burglar's tools in your possession. It's all very well for me, because I can talk about what I've been using them for. But never mind that. Let's tell this man to drive us to Barnes Station, where we can dismiss him, then we can walk across the fields to my uncle's house and get a train a little later. It isn't ten o'clock yet. Now, please, don't ask any questions. I'll tell the man to drive to the station, and the rest you leave to me."

A little later and the two were crossing the common under the shelter of the fog until they came at length to a road which bordered on the river. Down the side of this road ran a narrow lane which formed a tradesman's entrance to several of the houses, all of which boasted lawns and gardens that ended on the stream. With her hand on Quint's arm, Ennie led him down the lane and through a dilapidated gate into one of the gardens, at the bottom of which stood an old boat-house, the mouldy timbers of which were half in ruins. Beyond this damp and crazy structure were a neat lawn, and a garden that seemed to be full of flowers. At the top end of the garden stood the house, an eight or ten-roomed house with a conservatory at the back, over which was what was probably a bathroom, and to the left of the conservatory a French window opening to the lawn.

"Now, what do you think of this," Ennie asked. "Nobody comes here because my uncle does everything for himself. He hates visitors; in fact he gave me a pretty good hint the only time I came that he would prefer not to see me again. What I was thinking was this. If the worst came to the worst, and you had to go into hiding, you could sleep in the old boat-house, or, at any rate, I should know where to find you if you wanted me. I could come down here in an evening on the off-chance of seeing you, but, at any rate, you can hide those tools in the boat-house, and come and get them on Saturday night. It's a desperate enterprise, Michel, and it frightens me terribly."

"If you are really afraid," Quint said. "Oh, how selfish I am. I ought not to have brought you into this at all."

"I am not afraid in that sense," Ennie said. "Michel, whatever happens, I am going to be with you to the end."

Chapter III

In the Garden.

The fog was thinning now, with clear patches in between and the rising moon touched a point here and there in the garden that almost seemed like daylight. It was a lonely garden enough, with a quiet path down the side, and the river creeping along the bottom of the lawn against the piles of the ruined old boat-house. So lonely was it that it might have been miles remote from civilisation.

But Quint was not thinking of that just then. He was thinking of the look on Ennie's face and the expression in her eyes as she turned towards him. He could read something there that he had hardly dared to hope for, and, at any other time, the realisation of what that glance meant would have filled him with sheer delight. But not now—there was much to be done, and many dangers to be circumvented before he could hope to tell Ennie what had been uppermost in his mind for months past.

He almost groaned as he contrasted his lot with hers. At any moment now, he might find the strong grip of the law upon his shoulder, at any moment he might

have to face an accusation which, unless a miracle happened, would mean social damnation.

He put these thoughts aside, and came back to the stern realities of the moment. He stood there, under the dusky shadow of the boat-house, and laid a hand that was none too steady on the shoulder of his companion.

"Perhaps I had better tell you all about it, Ennie," he said. "We're not likely to be interrupted here, and there is plenty of time. I told you what I am going to do. It sounds like a wild and reckless enterprise, but there is nothing else for it. I am going to break into Barnes Place on Saturday night, which will be the best time. I can leave these tools here, if you think that they will be absolutely safe."

"I'm sure they will," Ennie said. "My uncle never enters the boat-house. Perhaps you would like to hear why he is leading this lonely life?"

"It would be just as well, perhaps," Quint said.

"Well, it was like this. He has been here over forty years. This is his own house and he lives here as a bachelor."

"You never told me his name."

"Didn't I? Well, he's called Everard Geere, and he is my mother's only brother. You see, though my father is an American, he married an English wife. In those days, the poor old man was young and popular and quite well off. He lived here as a bachelor. He was engaged to be married to a young and beautiful girl, and, as far as I can understand, they used to do a lot of boating together. One night they had some sort of misunderstanding when they were on the river, and my uncle got out and left his fiancée to go home by herself. Nobody ever knew exactly what happened, but the boat upset close to where we are now, and the poor girl was drowned, and my uncle has been alone in the house ever since. No, not quite mad, but nearly so, poor man!"

"It's a very sad story," Michel Quint said. "Didn't you say you had been in the house?"

"Just once," Ennie explained. "I thought I would go and see him, but though he was polite enough, he gave me a strong hint that he wished to see nobody, and I have never been since. He is quite old and feeble, now, but perfectly capable of looking after himself. He has all sorts of ingenious contrivances in the house for saving himself trouble. No one is allowed to call; and everything he needs from his tradesmen is left on his doorstep. He goes out occasionally in a bath chair, when he has to go to the bank and that sort of thing, but never otherwise. He is fond of his garden. As you can see, it's beautifully kept, but nothing would ever induce him to go in the boat-house."

Quint glanced up the well-ordered garden, towards the house, and then back again to the dilapidated shadow of rotting timbers, which formed all that was left of the boat-house. In front of it, floating on the river, was a decayed baulk of timber, attached to a rotting post, which, evidently at one time, had been a sort of makeshift landing stage. Inside the building the floor was moist with rainwater, and here and there were lockers without doors, and behind one of these Quint hid the tools which Ennie had been using in her realistic pose as a lady burglar.

"They'll be quite safe there, anyway," he said. "I shall know where to find them on Saturday night. And, if the worst comes to the worst, I can hide here for a night or two. But I was going to explain to you."

Ennie laid her hand upon Quint's arm, and, at the same time, pointed towards the house. A sudden ray of light flashed out in the breakfast room window then the blind was drawn up, and a figure emerged down a flight of steps into the garden. The moon was high enough now to see everything, so that the thin spare figure, with its blue spectacles and ragged fringe of whiskers, was picked out decidedly enough. Quint and his companion stood there, under the shadow of the boat-house, till Geere came so near to them that they might have touched him. He was muttering something to himself that they could not catch, his eyes appeared to be looking into vacancy from behind, his blue glasses, he was almost like a man who walks in his sleep. Three times did he pace in that somnolent way round the lawn, until he disappeared at length through the conservatory door, and, a moment later, the blind in the breakfast room was pulled down, and the light vanished.

"It's like a scene out of play," Quint murmured. "The poor old chap isn't afraid of burglars, anyway because he certainly didn't lock the conservatory door behind him."

"It's all very sad and pathetic," Ennie said. "But, oh, Mike, what a hiding place for you! If we could only enlist the sympathy of the old gentleman, you might remain hidden here for a month. No one would look for you here. But you were going to tell me the story."

"Ah, I had quite forgotten that," Quint said. "Well, it is like this Ennie. You know what I am, you have been living with my sister Margaret quite long enough to know something about my character. When my father died, there was just a thousand pounds to come to me, quite sufficient to finish my medical course and buy me a share in a practice. Instead of passing my finals I gave up myself to sport."

"You couldn't help that, Mike," Ennie said. "They wouldn't leave you alone."

"I am afraid I didn't want to be left alone." Quint sighed. "Rugby football all the winter and golf all the summer, and never a stroke of work. Lord, Ennie, what a fool I've been! It's a sort of conceit, I suppose. And there's something in it, too. It's so good to feel physically fit, to feel yourself better than other men, and to hear the roar of applause from twenty thousand people on a football field when you've got a try right behind the posts. You're a jolly good little sportswoman yourself, and you know the joy of winning a tie in a golf match."

"I know," Ennie said softly. "And if I'd been you I shouldn't have resisted it. It must be glorious to have your photograph in all the newspapers, and see men whispering about you in a corner. Far better than my picture in the *Sketch* and *Tatler* as Ennie Barr, the cinema star. But, go on, Mike, about this trouble of yours."

"Well I realized about two months ago that I had spent all my money, it came quite as a shock to me. Here was I, without a penny, and almost a certainty of being ploughed in my finals. Then I ran up against Ted Somerset. He's quite a good sportsman, and he's done some pretty fair things, as you know. If he could only fight an uphill game, he'd be as good as the best of us, but he can't, he hasn't got it in him. He lacks that—well—stuff that champions are made of. But he's devilish clever, and one of the most brilliant inventors I know. He told me all about the cinema business of his, and offered me a partnership if I could find him £250.

Anybody could recognize it as a good thing if it came off, and that's why I took it to Enderby. I hate the beast, and he dislikes me. He's not a bad golfer, but he's a dead wrong 'un, Ennie. Still I thought he had money, lots of it—"

"But hasn't he?" Ennie asked in surprise.

"My dear girl, he's no better off than I am. His position is desperate, though he does live at Barnes Place, and entertains lavishly. If he doesn't get hold of something good before long, he's done. But, of course, it was like my luck that I didn't learn that before it was too late. I took the invention to him, under the impression that he was a capitalist. But he wouldn't look at it. That was all part of the game. Told me to come back in a month, and all that sort of thing. When I suggested money, he referred me to a man called Kent—Alfred Kent. Well, to make a long story short, Kent lent Somerset and myself £250 on our joint note of hand, which he, Kent, accepted, and then passed us on to another chap called John Claw, who discounted the bill. To get this money, we had to deposit all the specifications of the patent and to assign it as a security for the money. A day or two afterwards Kent told us that, being temporarily short of money, he had passed on the security to Enderby. Well, that sounded all right, because Somerset hoped to complete his invention before that bill fell due. Then Kent disappeared. He's supposed to have been drowned. But before he vanished, he wrote to Enderby and repudiated his signature on the back of that bill. He said that the whole thing was a forgery on our part, and that he was quite prepared to get in the witness box and say so. Now do you begin to see the conspiracy?"

"I think so," Ennie said. "You see that's one of the advantages of being the daughter of an American millionaire. Before I defied my father and went on the stage he used to tell me all about his business affairs until he said I was almost capable of managing them myself. Oh, I see, Mike, they are going to compel you and Mr. Somerset to hand over those patents to them, or, in the alternative, to prosecute you."

"You've got it exactly," Quint cried. "They know that Somerset will do anything when the pinch comes, and if they'd only him to deal with, then the swindle would be dead easy. If I only agreed to what Enderby wants, then the matter lapses, and they get off with the patents. I know that all those papers are in Enderby's safe, and if I can get hold of them, then I can defy him, even if there is a warrant out against me. And I must do it, Ennie, I must do it."

Ennie nodded vigorously. It was a wild, hazardous adventure, just after her own heart. It was the sort of venture that had led her to leave her luxurious home on Fifth Avenue, New York, to embark upon a stage career. She had done this in the face of her father's bitterest opposition. She was his only child, and her decision cut him to heart.

And so they had parted with some bitterness, but without vindictiveness on James P. Barr's side. He had even offered to allow his daughter sufficient to keep her almost in luxury till her madness had passed and she decided to return home. But not one penny more than that monthly allowance would he go, feeling in that shrewd mind of his that it would not suffice, and that three months would see his wilful child home again. And that was two years ago, since when father and daughter had not met, though they corresponded freely enough.

“Ah, if I could only help you,” Ennie said. “But I have no money and I cannot ask my father for any more. That’s a point of honour with me. But you know my story.”

“Yes,” Quint said. “I know, and I’m quite sure that when the time comes you’ll do the best you can for me.”

Chapter IV

The Skeleton at the Feast.

It was close on midnight before Ennie Barr closed the door of the little flat in Halford Street that she shared with Quint’s sister, Margaret. The latter was one of a brilliant band of lady journalists connected with the “Daily Telephone,” and Ennie was not sorry that her closest friend happened to be away in the North of England on business for the next few days.

She had ascertained from Michel that Margaret knew nothing of the terrible charge that was hanging over the head of her brother. It was just as well, perhaps, for Margaret could have been of no possible assistance at that moment.

For over a year now Ennie Barr had been sharing that cosy flat, and her friendship with Margaret Quint was a warm one. The girls had a deal in common, and many a paragraph Margaret Quint had made out of Ennie’s adventures.

But Ennie was not thinking anything of that just now. She was quite alone in her flat, for the woman who did for the two friends only came in the early morning, and Ennie wanted to be alone. As she sat down in the cosy sitting room the tears came into her eyes, and, just for a moment, she felt like giving up the struggle in despair. For it was only in the last few hours that she had learnt the full extent of her feelings for Michel. She had seen him almost daily for the past twelve months, and though they had very much in common, she had not regarded him as a potential lover. But now everything was different. Now she knew that there was nobody else for her, and that, unless she could save Michel from the terrible danger that threatened him, life would never be quite the same again.

They had so much in common—they were both fond of sport and the outdoor life, and, indeed, Ennie was a brilliant exponent of most games herself. She had been glad of this when she had come to realize that the legitimate stage was not for her, and that unless she was to return home a confessed failure her only chance was a film actress.

And here she had made good from the first. It was not only that taking audacious beauty of hers that gave her a footing in the film world from the start. She liked the dangerous side of it, it appealed to her sporting nature, and in a very short time, she had made a big reputation as a feminine impersonator of male parts. The new big film called “The Lady Burglar” fitted her to perfection, and she was wondering now if she could turn her talents to account so far as Quint was concerned. She knew that she could pass anywhere, and in any light as a

handsome young man, and gradually, as she sat there, staring at the fire, and smoking a cigarette, she began to see her way.

But the next day passed, and Saturday morning arrived with no further sign from Michel Quint. A telephone message to his flat produced no response. But surely, Ennie thought, nothing could have happened to him, or she would have seen something of it in the papers. She bought one editor after the other, and scanned it carefully without any sign to the effect that that famous athlete, Michel Quint, had fallen into the clutches of the law. It would have been impossible for him to have been arrested without the papers being full of it. So prominent a sportsman would never have been overlooked by the argus eye of the reporters, whose business it is to see to these things.

And so the hours dragged on wearily, till the Saturday afternoon of the big golf dinner at the Leinster Rooms. It was going to be a great night in the golfing world, and many ladies would be present in the gallery. It had been arranged that if all went well, Ennie was to be one of them, and, indeed, Quint had seen to it that she was allotted a prominent seat.

It was just before dinner and Ennie had come down, changed for that meal, when there came a knock at the front door of the flat, and Quint's friend, Somerset, almost stumbled in.

His face was white and wet, his lips unsteady, and he wiped his hands nervously on a handkerchief. At the sight of him Ennie felt her heart sink within her.

"Come inside, Ted," she said. "I am afraid you have very bad news for me."

Somerset groaned. He was a tall, slender, young man, with all the alert keenness of the athlete, slightly marred by a rather weak, sensitive mouth, and a none too prominent chin. The sort of man, in fact, to fail at a pinch. But his eyes were clear and honest enough, and Ennie's heart went out to him, not so much for his own sake as for that of Margaret Quint. She knew the bond of sympathy between them.

"Sit down," she said. "Will you have——"

Somerset waved the proffered cigarette aside almost impatiently.

"I couldn't," he groaned. "It would choke me. Now, you know all about it, Ennie, Mike came to see me the night before last, and told me that you knew everything. Well, the blow has fallen. There's a warrant out for our arrest, and it may be executed at any moment. They may even have followed me here."

Ennie pressed her lips together. It was no time for emotion, no time for any maudlin sympathy.

"I am sorry, Ted," she murmured. "More sorry than I can tell you. But that you know. Now, what are you going to do?"

Somerset laughed with a certain bitter helplessness.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Ennie, those devils are too clever for us, we're like rats caught in a trap. They'll prove their case, and Mike and myself will go to gaol for years. There is no other way of looking at it. It's the vilest conspiracy ever concocted. And all my work for the last three years will go to those scoundrels."

"But what are you going to do?" Ennie asked.

"I? Nothing. I'm just going to take it as it comes, and make the best of it. If Mike weren't in this thing I should let those blackguards walk off with all my work, and cut my loss for the sake of my freedom."

Ennie looked at the speaker with a certain pity that is not quite free from contempt. It was just as Mike had prophesied—Somerset had collapsed when the pinch came. And yet he was not a coward. He was a fine sportsman who had done fine things, and this strain of weakness was no fault of his.

"I didn't want Mike to fight," he went on. "I wanted him to cut his loss. But I knew he wouldn't. He would rather fight it out to the bitter end. You see, old Mike's the sort of chap who never knows when he's beaten."

"And he isn't going to be beaten now," Ennie cried.

"But he must, my dear girl, he must. Mike goes his way, and I go mine. My idea is to go to my rooms and wait there till they come for me."

It was hopeless to argue with a man distracted and driven, and in Somerset's frame of mind.

"Does Mike know this?" Ennie asked.

"No, he doesn't," Somerset replied. "And I can't find him. You'll have to do it, Ennie, I can't go to that accursed dinner to-night, I can't. But if they haven't arrested Mike, he will turn up—old Mike will bluff it out to the finish. He knows you'll be there in the gallery, and you must contrive to warn him. You can manage that, can't you?"

"I will manage it," Ennie said, "only I must do it in my own way."

She sat there thinking for some time after Somerset had gone, with a weight at her heart, and a feeling almost akin to despair. Then her native courage came back to her, and she shook off the troubles that oppressed her, and, having forced herself to eat something, took a taxi presently and went off to the Leinster Rooms. She found her seat in the gallery, a corner seat in the front row where she could look down into the hall, and watch that brilliant array of sportsmen over their meal. It was some little time before she could make out the figure of Michel Quint, and her heart leapt in the knowledge that he was still at liberty. There were three long tables running down the room, and about the centre of the second table facing her was Quint. Opposite him, with his back to the gallery, Ennie could make out the slightly bald head and thin grey locks of Enderby. The man who sat next to him was not unlike him in age and appearance, and Ennie's nimble mind jumped to the conclusion that this was probably the capitalist, John Claw. She was to learn later that she was right.

The dinner had come to an end and the speeches had begun before Ennie managed to attract Quint's attention. He gave her a sign and a little later on rose from the table in a casual way and sauntered round to the gallery. The few seats next to Ennie were unoccupied, so that they could talk without being overheard by anyone near at hand.

"What is it?" Quint murmured. "It is bad news, Ennie. I can see it in your eyes."

"The very worst," Ennie whispered. "Ted Somerset came to see me just now in a terrible state. The warrant has been issued, and you may be arrested at any moment."

Not a muscle of Quint's face changed.

"I expected it," he said coolly. "They'll be waiting for me when I get home. How did Ted take it?"

"Oh, terribly, terribly. All the courage has left him. He is going to do nothing, Mike, he is simply going to sit down and wait for them. He wants to compromise, he wants you to let these men have all they're after on condition that there are no further proceedings."

"Yes, that would suit them very well," Quint smiled. "And would you like me to do it, Ennie?"

Ennie hesitated just for a moment. It was such an easy way out. There would be no trouble or anxiety then, and, in any case, Michel Quint would be none the worse off. Then he could look the whole world in the face, and go his own way. But it was only for a moment, and then Ennie's eyes hardened.

"No, I wouldn't," she said. "I'd fight them to the bitter end. The truth must come out some day. Oh, Mike, I hope you don't think that I am hard and unfeeling?"

"On the contrary, I never admired you more than I do at this moment," Mike said. "And I am going to fight those devils and beat them. I start to-night. In Enderby's safe lies our salvation. I believe that the alleged forged bill is there. If I can get hold of that I can laugh at Enderby, and even if I can't get away with all Ted Somerset's blue prints, without which those chaps can make nothing of their theft."

"If you only could!" Ennie sighed.

"Well, why not? I know where the stuff is. I know every inch of the ground, and I have the finest set of safe-breaking implements in the world. More than that, I have been sounding Enderby. I told him just now that I should like to see him for a few minutes after dinner, but he told me that he had important business with John Claw that would take him till after midnight. That's John Claw, sitting by his side. The bald-headed man with the sanctimonious face and the red nose. He's one of the biggest hypocrites in the City of London. A sanctimonious, oily humbug, who robs people all the week, and thanks God he is better than most men on a Sunday. He doesn't mind being a shareholder in a big golf club where Sunday play is the backbone of its fortunes. Never mind about Claw, we shall probably hear more of him later on. You see I have established the fact that Enderby won't be home till long after midnight, and by that time the papers ought to be safely in my pocket."

"And if you fail?" Ennie asked.

"Oh, I'm not going to fail."

"But, if you do?"

"Ah, there you have me," Quint confessed.

"Then let me make a suggestion," Ennie said eagerly. "If you fail, go across the common and hide yourself in the old boat-house. Stay there all to-night and half to-morrow if necessary. I can't tell you more now, because there is no time. If those men down there miss you, they may become alarmed. Go back to your seat, and good luck to you."

With a few words more, Quint strolled carelessly out of the gallery, and went back to his seat. Ennie stayed till she saw him talking across the table to Enderby and the man called John Claw, then she stole out of the gallery in her turn, and made her way homewards. Just then she rejoiced in the fact that the small flat in

Halford Street boasted no porter, for the scheme she had in her mind was one that called for the utmost secrecy. She was glad, too, that Margaret was away, and that the woman who cleaned up in the flat only came there in the early mornings. Once the front door was closed behind her, Ennie darted into her bed-room. She emerged half an hour later, but changed absolutely beyond recognition.

The masses of her luxuriant hair were rolled up and tightly hidden under a tweed cap that came well down over her forehead. She was attired from head to foot in the sort of loud costume that the coster affects on a holiday. Over her coat was a double-breasted pea-jacket, and round her neck a flaming red scarf. But the boots she wore were brown tan, of a golfing pattern, with india-rubber studs on the soles. With one glance at herself in the glass to see that all was correct, she turned off the lights, and, putting down the latch of the front door, stole down the stairs unperceived, and was presently swallowed up in the darkness of the night.

Chapter V

A Bootless Errand.

The purple outline of the big house on Barnes Common was faintly blurred against the velvety umber of the night, like a touch of ragged brushwork on a canvas. It was still comparatively early, barely eleven o'clock, for it was no far cry from the Leinster Rooms to Barnes Common once Quint had left the dinner with a promise to call and see Ralph Enderby at the club shortly after mid-night. If Quint were successful, then he had small intention of troubling Enderby that night or at any time in the future.

At the same time, there was no margin to spare, because, within an hour the moon would be up, and Quint was taking no risks so far as that was concerned. He stood outside the library window presently, under the shadow of the house, with his hands on the clasp. He knew that the application of a stout knife-blade would be quite sufficient for his purpose. A quarter of an hour later, and the thing would be done. He felt in his pocket for the case of tools that he had picked up on his way past the old boat-house, and the touch of the cold steel seemed to give him fresh courage. Not that he needed the stimulant, he told himself half-boastfully, for he was never more cool and collected in his life. Still, he could hear the regular piston beating of his heart, as he worked in the indigo dusk of the night, he could catch the faint warm smell of leather in the library as he pushed back the catch.

Then a point of golden flame stabbed into the darkness of the night, and a tense silence broke into a shatter of sounds with the tramping of feet, and the crackling of parted bushes.

In an instant, Quint realized that he had been betrayed.

He wriggled back like an eel. This was a phase of the game at which he was emphatically at home. Thrusting his bag of tools deeper in his pocket, he headed instinctively for the river.

But he was not clear yet. Two dark figures rushed him from either side, cunningly and warily, like men who know their work. Quick as light, Quint feinted as he darted between them, side stepped in that priceless way of his, and the two minions of the law crashed together with stunning force.

Quint was through now, and grimly set his face towards the goal—the big lodge gates leading to the Windsor Road. He ran on, until his teeth were stripped to the gums, and that great chest of his was calling aloud for a halt. Would he be safe, now, he wondered? But where was he going to find safety? The old boat-house, perhaps, for the next few hours, but after that, what?

His senses were wonderfully alert as he crept into the old boat-house. He seemed to feel more than see that he was not alone. He reached out his arms in a darkness that was pungent with the smell of decaying wood, and grasped something with those wire and whipcord muscles of his.

“Please, please,” a pained voice whispered. “Michel, I didn’t know you were as strong as all that.”

“Ennie!” Quint gasped, with a vibrant note of thankfulness that had almost a touch of tears in it. “My dearest girl, what madness has brought you here?”

“Then you’re not glad to see me, Mike?”

“God knows I am,” Quint almost sobbed. “But why do you take this risk? What real good can you do? And suppose you had been seen? You’re almost as well-known as I am!”

“Not in my present garb,” Ennie chuckled. “You can’t see, of course, but I’m in my lady-burglar kit. It was quite easy, Mike, I went back to the flat and changed without anybody being a bit the wiser. Then I came down here by train, because I could not wait. I knew you’d come back here to hide the tools. Well, you got the papers, I suppose?”

“Indeed, I haven’t,” Quint groaned. “I failed, Ennie, failed miserably. I don’t know what happened, but the police were there, and if I hadn’t been what I am they would have got me to a certainty. It’s no use talking about things, little girl, not a bit. I’ve had a big chance and missed it, and the opportunity is never likely to occur again. I’m done, old girl. The best thing I can do is to follow Somerset’s example and give myself up to the authorities.”

“Oh, not yet, not yet,” Ennie urged. “I think there’s just one other way. Suppose you could go into hiding so securely that they couldn’t find you? Couldn’t you show me a way then in which I could help? Oh, surely there is some way! So long as you have your freedom, everything is not lost.”

In the boat-house now, Ennie could just catch sight of Quint’s face. It was tense and drawn with the racking emotions of the moment, the palms of his hands were wet, and his brow seemed to be frozen into a frown. Physical courage he had to the full, moral courage he had never lacked, but the spiritual heart in him was slipping away, and he knew it.

“I am afraid it’s no use, Ennie,” he said. “I have done all I can, and that’s all there is to it. I don’t think I’m a coward. I have carried through too many a tight fight for people to say that of me, but I am not going to drag you into this dirty business. I don’t know how to thank you for what you have done already.”

“Then why try?” Ennie asked. “We have always been the best of pals, haven’t we Mike?”

"More than that," Quint groaned. "Much more than that, though I never dared to say so, and because why? Because you are the only daughter of a great millionaire, and I am just a rotter of a sportsman without a bob in the world. Now, I think you understand, only I've never dared to say so much before."

He bowed his head in his hands for a moment in an attitude of utter despair. Instinctively Ennie's arm went around his shoulders. At the touch, he sat up again suddenly.

"This won't do, Ennie," he said. "Oh, no. Just think a moment. Perhaps, some day—but there never will be a some day. Nothing can be done now."

"Ah, there you are quite wrong," Ennie said with a queer little catch in her voice. "You have quite forgotten about my eccentric uncle."

"Your uncle," Quint echoed. "Why what's he got to do with it?"

"Everything," Ennie said. "Can't you see that's why I came down here to-night. I came because I thought you might fail, though I little expected it. Now, listen, Mike. Everard Geere is absolutely alone in the world. No one ever enters his house, and he never speaks to a soul. He hardly ever goes out, except occasionally, in a bath chair, and only then when he's going to the bank, and don't forget he's lived here for nearly forty years. He is absolutely beyond suspicion."

"Go on," Quint said. "Go on, Ennie."

"Well, can't you see what I mean? Why shouldn't you stay here and become part of the household? I think if I tell my uncle the truth, that he is just the sort of man to help us. And even if he won't, there's no harm done. Suppose I persuade him that he wants assistance—a man to help him in the house and drag his bath chair when he goes out? You could stay here for a day or two while I got you an efficient disguise, and the thing is done. In my position, I can get as many disguises as I like without incurring any suspicion. Oh, don't say no, Mike—give it a chance, at any rate, and then I can come down here and see you, and we can make all sorts of plans for confounding those scoundrels. And don't forget that I see Ralph Enderby nearly every day. I hate to say it, but he admires me. It was only because he hoped I would stay and have supper with him the other night that he asked me down here to get that burglar scene filmed. I think you might trust a woman's wit—"

"No, no," Quint protested. "I hate the idea. The thought of that scoundrel being in your company maddens me."

"But think of the opportunities," Ennie urged. "Think what might happen if only you—"

But Quint was not listening. His quick ear caught the snap of a breaking twig, and the next minute he was on his feet.

"They are here," he whispered. "I might have guessed it. Quick, hand me that punt-pole. I am going to snap that stay post and float that big balk of timber down the stream. Don't you see what I mean, Ennie? I can lie full length along it as it drifts down the tide. Then, when I do that, you slip away whilst I draw them off the scent, then you hang about in front of the house, say in one of the opposite gardens till I get back again."

"But suppose you don't come back?" Ennie asked.

“Oh, I shall come back again,” Quint said, with all his splendid confidence alive within him. “I shall give those chaps the slip as I did before. This is the sort of game I can play at. We’ll baffle them.”

With that Quint reached out and snapped the stay-post with a steady pressure of the punt-pole, and, throwing himself forward lay at full length upon the beam of timber that drifted along under the shadow of the bank just out of the moonlight. Ennie crept back from the boat-house and, treading as lightly as a cat, reached the road, then hiding herself behind a group of shrubs in a garden on the other side of the thoroughfare, waited with a beating heart for the next development of the drama.

Chapter VI

The Sanctuary.

Ennie crouched there under the friendly cover of the bushes, beyond which she could see across the road into the front garden of the house opposite. There was no light to be seen there, and, doubtless, the solitary occupant had been in bed and asleep for some time. It was all very still and silent now, with the echo of a fugitive footstep in the distant windows.

One by one these were blotted into the darkness, and still there was no sign of Michel Quint. The moon was rising, and presently, unless the fog came down again, it would be almost as light as day. Then, mercifully a thick belt of cloud drifted overhead, and the November fog came down again on the back of the chill breeze.

In spite of her slim figure, and that dainty audacious beauty of hers, Ennie did not lack the fibre that goes to make a sportswoman. And, moreover, she was fighting now for the safety of the man she loved. Yes, she had come to admit that to herself the last day or two, and the last vivid hour or so had shown her that Michel returned her affection. For his sake she was ready to do anything. She could not leave him in the lurch now.

As she sat there waiting, all a-quiver with expectation, her mind wandered to the past. She thought of the time when she had first met Michel shortly after she had decided to share rooms with Margaret Quint. And Michel had come into her life like a fresh, healthy breeze. She had seen him under all sorts of conditions, had seen him that memorable day in Edinburgh when he had won the International Rugger match for England, snatching the game out of the fire at the last moment by a magnificent dash and initiative, only to pass the ball at the last moment, when he was sure of the crowning glory of that final try. And in the stillness of the night there, Ennie could hear the great volleys of cheers that rose spontaneously to greet one of the most brilliant and sportsmanlike actions that ever happened on a football field. And she had been present, too, at Westward Ho, on the occasion of that amateur International, when Quint was two down and

three to go, and had snatched victory at the last moment by a bare hole. And these were only some of the great things she had seen Michel do.

Meanwhile, she waited with her heart beating like a drum until Quint should return. He would know exactly where to find her, he would come over to where she was hiding, and tell her what his plans were. That was, of course, provided that the ruse of the floating log proved successful, and that he had succeeded in throwing his pursuers off his track. There was a wild idea in the back of Ennie's mind that she and Quint might knock Everard Geere up presently and explain the situation to him. And so it went on, minute after minute, until the strain of it was almost more than Ennie could bear.

Then, presently, it seemed to her that she could hear a cautious footfall padding along the road. A little later the familiar form of Quint came in sight. But he gave no sign, except by slightly raising his hand, as if to impress upon Ennie that she should stay where she was. She gave a little cough, at which Quint half raised his head, then turned into the gate of the house opposite, and, as Ennie could see, went round to the back of the premises. To Ennie's ears, listening keenly, there came a faint sound like the closing of a door, and after that she breathed more easily.

She had not the slightest doubt, now, that Quint had entered the house by means of the conservatory door, which she remembered that Geere had omitted to fasten. So far at any rate, so good, for Michel was in the house now, and he would give the sign as soon as he was ready. The mere fact that he had not stopped and called Ennie as he came down the road was proof positive that danger was not averted, and that there was still need for caution. The police, undoubtedly, were not far off.

Suddenly a thin paring of light, a mere shave of illumination, shone out a little way down the road, and a figure that looked suspiciously official, crept into the opening and whistled softly. Beyond doubt, Ennie thought, here was an officer who had been left behind in case the quarry adopted doubling tactics, and it seemed any odds that this representative of the law had become aware of the fact that Quint had entered the house. If he could get the others up quickly, then Quint was caught like a rat in a trap. And they did come quickly. They stood in the road within a few yards of where Ennie was crouching.

"He's in the house, sir," the constable said. "Doubled back in 'is tracks, 'e did, and walked in through the conservatory door, as bold as brass. Good thing as I stayed be'ind. 'E's goin' to 'ide in there all night, knowing as the old gent is in bed and fast asleep. We've got 'im, sir."

"Sounds like it," the inspector in charge said. "All the same, I'm almost sorry."

"Sorry, sir," the officer stammered.

"Well, yes. Duty's duty, and all that sort of thing, but he's a fine sportsman, he is. One of the best halves that ever put on a jersey. I know—I was up against him more than once when I used to play for Leicester, and he's a real gentleman."

The inspector sighed reminiscently.

"Well, let's get on with it," he said, with an abrupt change of tone. "You've done very well, Bassett. You go down and hide yourself at the bottom of the garden in case he makes a bolt that way, and I'll knock up the old gentleman."

Ennie lay there listening, with white teeth shut tightly down on her upper lip, and a queer little tickling sensation going up and down her spine. No one could touch her, she was fairly out of it, despite that burglar kit of hers, but Ennie was not banking on that. At any cost, even that of personal liberty, she was going to see Michel through. And Michel wanted her badly.

The little police force moved across the road, and a moment later the inspector in charge was knocking on the door of the lonely house on the river. He knocked again in a crescendo of increasing noise, whilst, Ennie, hiding in the darkness there, was vainly endeavouring to get a practical grip on the situation. She was wondering why no reply came, and what the old man was doing whilst all that hideous din was going on, an explosion of knocks, which, sooner or later, must rouse the neighbourhood. And still there was no sign of light in the lonely house, and so it went on until Ennie could feel her nerves fairly on edge.

But she was going to stand by there and see the thing out to the bitter end, whatever happened. But she would have given a good deal to have known what was taking place in the darkened house behind the shadow of the night. Michel Quint was not going to take it lying down, he never took anything lying down. And a man with his wonderful resource and combativeness would surely be busy on some brilliant scheme.

Then, at the end of ten long lurid minutes, whilst Ennie crouched there in the garden, came a faint wavering light in one of the rooms of the house opposite and, after that, a flickering shadow over the fanlight. The door opened, and, standing there, with a candle in his hand, was old Everard Geere himself.

Ennie had no reason for a second glance to assure herself that just across the road, behind a little patch of front garden, was her eccentric relative in the flesh. She had a cinema flash of him as he stood there, with a candle in his hand, shading the wavering flame from the draught. He was clad in a long flannel dressing gown, the collar of which he had turned up so that he had half concealed his face, and perched on his head was a deerstalker cap, the flaps of which were tied round his ears. His eyes looked with a mild astonishment, through a pair of blue goggles. In a thin, high-pitched voice, he demanded querulously to know the meaning of this outrage.

“A man in your house,” the Inspector said crisply. “A burglar we are after. He doubled back here and got in through the conservatory door.”

The old man mumbled something. He appeared to be either half asleep, or almost scared out of his wits by this sudden intrusion on his privacy. Then, as if conscious of his obligations, he invited the police inside, leaving the front door open as they followed him. The door was flung so widely open that Ennie could see down the narrow hall as the procession in blue followed the old man, who preceded them with the guttering candle in his hand, the flame blown by the draught of the open door.

Ennie crept from her hiding place, and, crossing the road, squeezed silently into the darkness of the hall, with every nerve in her body taut and rigid. By the feel of it, and the heavy scent in the air, she realised that the tiny hall was full of flowers and shrubs in pots. Then she recollected that she had noticed these things the only time she had been in the house.

Everard Geere, followed by the police, climbed the stairs, and was now standing on the landing, engaged in a somewhat heated argument. There was no light, except that afforded by the candle which the angry occupant of the house had placed upon the floor. In its feeble, uncertain rays, as the draught played havoc with the flame, Geere was a nebulous sort of figure with features that seemed to tremble, like an object that is seen behind a screen of smoke.

“Here, where are the lights?” the Inspector demanded. “Got electricity on the premises, haven’t you?”

“Gone wrong,” the old man croaked. “One of the switches blew out. Got nothing but candles, and there is no one here, I am sure there isn’t. Come here, frightening an old man at my time of life like this—”

The speaker broke off suddenly in a fit of coughing. He coughed until he barked again like a child with whooping cough.

Standing there hidden amongst the flowers Ennie could see the landing above the shallow stairs. The shadows were all the darker for the uncertain candle light, so that it was easy for Ennie to creep up the stairs, which she did on her hands and knees, and thence along the skirting till she came to what she took for the bathroom.

She was right, fortunately, and a moment or two later, crouched half-hidden, behind the folding-doors of a big wardrobe. There was just sufficient light from the dim, uncertain moon, for her to realise her surroundings, and note the fact that the bathroom window was open. Underneath it was the small conservatory, through the door of which Quint had entered the house, and, beyond this, was a small enclosed yard, with a wall on one side, beyond which was a lane leading to the river.

If the worst came to the worst, then, it would not be a difficult matter to escape from the bathroom window along the flat ridge-pole of the conservatory, and from there climb the wall and drop into the lane beyond. And there, with a certain knowledge in her heart, and the feeling that things were going well, Ennie waited with a fine tranquility.

She could hear a querulous argument going on outside the landing, could follow every word that was said, and, best of all, satisfy herself that the whole of the police force was now in the house. She could make the diversion presently, which she knew was exactly what Quint required.

“I don’t believe he’s here at all,” Geere piped. “You’ve made a mistake, unless perhaps—did you hear that? The bathroom, he’s in the bathroom.”

As if the words were a signal that Ennie was waiting for, she stepped out of her hiding place and through the open window, along the ridge-pole of the conservatory, like a rope-dancer. She was feeling the joy of the fight now, and she felt perfectly safe, for the cinema had given her more perilous adventures than this, and, moreover, she knew exactly what to do. As she stepped along the crest she dropped her left foot twice, crashing through the glass of the conservatory, and filling the house with a noise, almost sufficient, at that time of night, to wake the dead. It seemed as if the whole world was full of the explosion of crashing glass. Then she dropped lightly in the yard, and, with a running leap, grasped the coping of the wall, and dropped over into the path beyond.

"There, what did I tell you?" the old man croaked. "Oh, I know I said there was nobody here, but I found out he was in the bath-room. Now, you just clear out and follow him. Don't you come disturbing an old man at this time of night again."

There was no time to stop for argument, and a moment later the police force were streaming across the garden in the direction of the river. With a chuckle, Geere saw them off the premises, and closed the door behind them.

Meanwhile, Ennie had raced down the path for a hundred yards or so, then, doubling down her tracks between a narrow alley and the next house, lay hidden in the rough grass by the side of the lane. And there, for a quarter of an hour she remained, listening to frenzied footsteps tearing in every direction until, finally, the inspector called his bloodhounds off, and they faded dejectedly away down the road, in the direction of Barnes Common.

But Ennie was taking no chances. She waited there till it seemed perfectly safe to cross the road, after which she crept down the path to the lonely house, and tapped very gently on the front door.

It was opened to her almost at once by the old man, still in his cap and goggles, then, immediately afterwards, behind the closely drawn blinds of the little dining-room, the spare figure in the flannel dressing gown discarded his cap and tossed his goggles on the table.

"That was splendid of you, Ennie," he said, in a voice, none too steady. "I shall never forget what I owe you to-night. It was marvellous, simply marvellous, how you tumbled to the whole thing. How did you guess?"

Ennie dropped into a chair, a little unnerved now with the sudden reaction.

"I think it was your cough, Mike," she said. "That comic cough of yours. A silly thing, and a poor joke, but to-night—and oh, Michel, what's become of the old gentleman?"

Chapter VII

The Involuntary Host.

It was a strange scene in that well-appointed dining room, with the flowers in the conservatory beyond, and the few good pictures on the walls. In that peaceful setting with the quiet world outside, the two figures standing there were almost in grotesque contrast to their setting. On the Chippendale table stood a solitary candle in a china stick, and, in the light of this, Ennie Barr and Michel Quint regarded one another almost as if they had been strangers. Then Ennie spoke.

"It is amazing," she said. "I can't understand it even yet. How did you manage it, Michel?"

She spoke almost in whispers, as if afraid that the very air would carry her words outside. Quint laughed.

"It was all on the spur of the moment," he said. "Luck gave me a sporting chance and I took it. That is one advantage of being an outdoor man. Sit down, Ennie, we're perfectly safe here, and no one is in the least likely to interrupt us."

"But the old gentleman?" Ennie persisted, "What has happened to him? Michel, you didn't—"

"Of course not," Quint protested. "It was like this. Directly those men began knocking at the door, I crept up the stairs. I was standing on the landing when the old gentleman came out. Mind you, those men were hammering on the door all the time. The old man had a candle in his hand, the candle on the table there as a matter of fact, and he seemed to be greatly disturbed."

"Poor old soul," Ennie said pitifully. "He would."

"Yes. I dare say he was fast asleep, and they woke him up. Well, as he came near to me I could see that he was shaking from head to foot, and that he was evidently on the verge of collapse. He did collapse right at my feet, and then I saw that it was a seizure of some kind. I may not be a qualified doctor yet, but the whole thing was plain enough to me. With the knocking still going on, I managed to find the candle and matches which the poor old chap had dropped, then I picked him up bodily and laid him on his bed. He was like a dead man. Then the great idea came to me. I snatched off his dressing gown and his big spectacles, and, with the candle in my hand, came down the stairs. In fact, I passed myself off as Everard Geere. And I fooled them nicely, didn't I? It all came like a flash, and, I played the thing for all it was worth. I even persuaded the police that the electric light had gone wrong. I knew that you were not very far off, and I hoped that when I coughed in that peculiar manner you would grasp the situation. And you did, Ennie, like the dear brave little girl that you are. I could see the light shining in your eyes as you stood at the top of the stairs; you must have understood from the first."

"I believe I did," Ennie said. "Though I couldn't make out how you managed it. I had the happy idea of getting out through the bathroom window and drawing those men off the track. But the poor old gentleman, what of him?"

"Oh, he's comfortable enough for the present," Quint explained. "He might get better, and he might hang on in his present condition for months. Probably the latter."

"But what are we going to do with him?"

"Look after him, and act as his nurse," Quint smiled. "Can't you see how wonderfully fortunate everything has fallen out? The old gentleman hasn't a friend in the world. He looks after himself, and even cooks his own meals. Why, he's got all sorts of electrical dodges up in his bedroom—a small stove, and a hot water plate, and all that kind of thing. I am going to stay and look after him. No one will know I am in the house for at least a month, and, during that time we ought to be able to devise some scheme of getting the better of those rascals. You see, there is no reason why you shouldn't come here occasionally and relieve me whilst I can be outside looking after my interests."

"And who is going to cook the food?"

"I don't think there will be much trouble about that. I have had a fair amount of experience in camping out, and I can manage anything in the way of fish or eggs—I can even make a rice pudding and an omelette, just the very stuff for invalids."

"And if the poor old gentleman dies, Michel?"

"Then we must do the right thing, at all costs. But I don't think he is going to die, Ennie. I believe this is an intervention on the part of Providence. But come upstairs with me, and see for yourself."

Everard Geere lay motionless on his bed. He was not asleep, for his eyes were open, though there was no consciousness in them, and he was evidently entirely oblivious to his surroundings. On a little table by the side of the bed was a glass of milk, and into this Quint put a few drops of brandy, which he took from a bottle on the mantelpiece. The invalid drank it gratefully enough, and presently his limbs stirred as the stimulant went to the right spot. Then his eyes closed, and in a few minutes he was fast asleep. As soon as Quint was sure of this, he led the way downstairs again.

"You see how it is for yourself," he said. "He may go on like this for months. He may suddenly get better, but, at any rate, he must have someone to look after him, and I am as capable of doing that as anybody else. Now, let's see if we can find any books and papers, anything to give us an idea of his habits."

A close search of a large American desk in one corner of the room disclosed a pile of tradesmen's books receipted a week or so before, from which it was evident that Geere was in the habit of paying monthly, indeed, the series of receipt stamps in the red-covered volumes was proof of this. In addition, a cheque book was found, and also a bank passbook showing a large sum to the credit of the sick man, and the fact that regularly once a month he had been in the habit of drawing a cheque payable to "self".

"There you are," Quint said. "It's quite plain that our unfortunate friend goes as far as his bank on the first day of every month and draws the money to pay his debts. He probably deposits the money on the doorstep, or perhaps he goes round in his bath chair and pays them himself. That you can easily find out. Now, you see exactly how we stand. The old gentleman will be quite safe in my hands, and, late in the evening, or during the night, I shall be able to leave him comfortably in bed. Just think of it, Ennie, Michel Quint moving about freely, and his enemies not knowing in the least where he is. I'll have those papers from Barnes Place yet. I'll get out some night with those tools in my possession, and if all goes well—"

"I've got an idea," Ennie cried. "Why shouldn't you pass yourself off as Everard Geere? Why shouldn't you advertise for a bath-chair man to come and take you out every day? The people here won't notice, they will come to the conclusion that you are acting under doctor's orders, and you'll be able to have as much fresh air as you want. Besides, think how nice it would be if we could come and see you on the Common—that is, myself and your sister Margaret, and talk to you as if we were casual acquaintances?"

"I don't quite follow," Quint said.

"And yet it's easy enough. Suppose I put an advertisement in the local paper for a bath-chair man who is wanted daily."

"Yes, but who's going to be the bath-chair man? We must have somebody who is on our side. And that advertisement would bring scores of them here."

"Not necessarily. We might arrange it so that all answers go to the newspaper. Oh, don't you see what is in the back of my mind? If the blow has not yet fallen, why shouldn't Ted Somerset be the bath-chair man?"

“By Jove, that’s a fine idea,” Quint cried. “If we could only manage that, then the whole situation is saved. You could get a bath-chair—buy one, if necessary—and let Somerset bring it here. Of course he’ll have to be disguised, but you can put him up to all those tips. It’s a precious lucky thing that you took up cinema acting, Ennie. You’ll be able to turn out Somerset as a broken-down bath-chairman to perfection. But what’s the good of us talking like this? It’s long odds that poor old Ted has been arrested before now. If not, we have a sporting chance. Lord, how I’d love to get even with those devils! Enderby, the man who poses as a sportsman and a gentleman. That crawling scoundrel, Kent, who would do anything for money, and who was supposed to be drowned crossing the Channel after he had repudiated his signature, and cleared off with Somerset and myself being face to face with a charge of forgery. And then Claw again, the most cunning scoundrel of the lot. Oh, they’re a nice set for honest men to come in contact with. Ennie, will you try and see Somerset? There’s just a chance that he is still at liberty.”

“I’ll do it this very night,” Ennie said. “It isn’t too late yet, and, with any luck, I can get round to his flat before he goes to bed. In this man’s kit of mine I shall attract no attention, and if any questions are asked, I can say that I am one of Mr. Somerset’s workmen. You can trust me to do my best, Michel, and if I am successful, then I will come back here before I sleep and bring Ted Somerset with me.”

Quint pondered over the matter for some little time, and the more he thought of it, the more sanguine he became. So far as he could see, there was no danger for himself for some few weeks to come. He would be perfectly safe in the house on the river, looking after the unfortunate invalid upstairs, with a feeling that he was quite competent to deal with the case. So far as he could judge, Everard Geere lived by line and rule, and therefore, each morning he would find on the kitchen doorstep all requisites in the way of food for the day. And no one called there, though even if by some extraordinary chance a stranger turned up, it would be easy to interview him and send him about his business with the aid of the old gentleman’s flannel dressing-gown, and his big spectacles. No, there was little or nothing to fear in the way of detection for some time to come at any rate, and there would be long intervals both by day and by night when Quint would be free to go abroad and set in operation the plans that he had formed to bring about the confusion of the three rascals who had concocted this diabolical scheme. It would be hard indeed if he and Somerset could not hit upon some way of doing this. But, on the other hand, if Somerset was already arrested, then things were going to be more difficult.

But Ted Somerset was clever enough in his way. Initiative was not his strong point, but with a driving force like Quint behind him, he was capable of quite big things, and if once he was assured that he had a fighting chance, and realized that Quint was behind him, then he might indeed prove a valuable ally.

“I like your scheme, Ennie,” Quint said. “I like it very much indeed. But I think it would be better still if we could so arrange it that Somerset, as the bath-chair man, becomes an inmate of the house. Yes, you’d better put that in the advertisement. ‘Wanted. A bath-chair man to act as indoor servant to an invalid.’ This had better go into the local paper on Saturday. All the local tradesmen and

the bank manager would regard it as a sensible thing for the old gentleman to do. And now it all depends as to whether old Ted is free or not.”

Chapter VIII

„When Thieves Fall Out...“

They sat there, in the comfortable dining-room, discussing the various details, until a clock somewhere in the distance struck the hour of eleven. By this time they had seen their way to carry out the scheme in its entirety. If only it were possible to get into direct communication with Somerset, then all might be well. And, so far as the invalid upstairs was concerned, it seemed to Quint and his companion that they were doing the best for him in all possible circumstances.

“And now I think I’ll get along,” Ennie said. “Oh, I’m not in the least afraid. Do you know, Michel, if it weren’t for the danger in which you stand, I should enjoy this adventure amazingly, and it won’t be my fault if I don’t come back before long with Ted Somerset. We can have a taxi down here, and drop the driver at Barnes Station. Then I’ll come down to-morrow, and bring one or two effective disguises with me, and all the clothes you want. But I think, first of all, that I had better go as far as our flat in Halford Street and take your sister, Margaret, into our confidence. She’ll be back from her journalistic visit to Manchester by this time, and I think she ought to know. Unless I am greatly mistaken, she regards Ted Somerset as something more than a friend.”

“I am afraid she does,” Quint groaned. “Poor Old Margaret, she has been a real good sister to me. If I had taken her advice I should never have got into this mess.”

“But you’ll get out of it again, Michel,” Ennie said eagerly. “I am sure that it will come right in the end.”

Quint laid his hands on her shoulders and looked down lovingly into her eyes.

“I am quite sure I shall,” he said. “How could it be otherwise with such a splendid friend as you? I’ve been a great fool, Ennie; I have allowed myself to neglect my work for the sake of mere enjoyment with a lot of men who call themselves my friends. But if I come out of this all right no one will be able to say that about me in the future. I should like to thank you for all you have done for me this evening, but I don’t know how. If it hadn’t been for that wonderful pluck of yours, and the amazingly quick way you understood what was in my mind, I should be in the hands of the police now. Some day, perhaps—”

“Why not now?” Ennie asked demurely. “Oh, Michel, don’t you think I understand, and do you think that anything would matter if the real big trouble came to you? It would make no difference to me; I shall always be the same.”

With that, she looked up into his face, and he bent down and kissed her with lips that were none too steady.

“I think you had better go,” he said hoarsely. “I must be a poor feeble sort of coward to let things go to such a pass that you are almost bound to speak to me

like this. I have no right to touch your hand, let alone your lips, till I am clear before the world, and that may never be.”

“Oh, yes, it will,” Ennie said. “I think I can understand your feelings, Michel, and now, I really must go.”

She passed cautiously out through the door, and made her way across the deserted common in the direction of the station. She was fortunate enough to catch a train a few minutes later, and dropped in a corner of a third-class carriage with every suggestion of being a belated workman, or the typical Cockney who had been out in the suburbs on some business. Once arrived in town, she made her way to the little flat in Halford Street, which she shared with Quint’s sister, Margaret, and burst on the astonished gaze of that pretty friend of hers, who looked up from her writing desk with amazed eyes.

“Why, Ennie,” she cried. “What does this mean? You haven’t been doing cinema work at this time surely? I thought that the ‘Lady Burglar’ film was finished.”

“On the contrary, it has hardly begun,” Ennie said. “Now, my dear girl, put that work on one side, and listen to all that I have to say. Don’t interrupt till I have finished.”

It was an attentive listener indeed who sat motionless in her chair until Ennie had finished. Her face grew white, and the unshed tears lay on her eyelids, but Margaret was Quint’s own sister, and she restrained her feelings splendidly.

“It is a most dreadful thing,” she said. “And I shudder to think what the end of it may be. But I am going to be as brave as you are, and, whatever happens to Michel, he is lucky man in one respect. Now, is there anything I can do? I should hate to think that I was sitting here with folded hands whilst you are taking all these risks for the sake of the man you care for.”

“I see,” Ennie said, half demurely. “You also want to do something for the man you love. There is no occasion to blush, my dear girl. I think you and I understand one another. And we shall be able to make use of you when the time comes. Meanwhile, I must go and see Ted Somerset at once. I only pray to Heaven that I shall not be too late.”

It was no far cry from Halford Street to the small block of flats where Somerset resided. There was nobody in the hall, no sign of the porter, for which Ennie was thankful, for she was thus enabled unseen to mount the stone stairs to the second floor on which Somerset’s flat was situated. There were only two of them on that floor, so she could make no mistake, and, as one of the front doors had a plate on it, obviously, the other was Somerset’s. Then, just as Ennie was about to push the bell, she noticed that the door was ajar. There was no light in the hall beyond, and, acting on the impulse for the moment, she pushed her way inside and walked along the corridor which was dimly lighted by the electric lamp on the landing.

Just for a moment, the awful thought occurred to her that she was too late. Probably the police had been before her, and had taken away their prisoner without the precaution of closing the door behind them. Evidently, the flat was empty.

But there Ennie was wrong. As she stood there in the darkness, hesitating as to what she should do next, her quick ear caught the sound of voices that proceeded from a room somewhere at the back of the flat. Then she was conscious of a long

slit of light that came from behind the door that was open a few inches. A second or two later, she recognized Somerset's voice.

So, therefore, she was not too late, unless, indeed, at that very moment the people from Scotland Yard were interviewing their prisoner. If that was so, then it behoved Ennie to exercise extreme caution. At any rate, she was not going to make her presence known until she was quite sure who Somerset's visitor was. She crept along noiselessly, and, without making the slightest sound, opened the dining room door another few inches.

At a table, with his back to her, was an elderly man with a bald, shining head, and a fringe of hair about the base of his scalp. He was smoking a cigar, and appeared to be completely at his ease. There was something about him, even from a back view that seemed to strike Ennie as familiar. Then recollection came to her. This was assuredly the man whom Quint had pointed out to her at the Golf dinner as John Claw, the head of the rascally syndicate which was conspiring to rob Somerset of the fruits of his labour. Claw, the leading spirit, Claw the one capitalist of the three. And yet, it was Claw, beyond the shadow of a doubt, and Ennie bent forward curiously to hear what he was saying.

Looking in at the open door, she could see Somerset plainly enough, for he was huddled up in a chair, immediately facing her. His face was white and set, and his whole soul writhing under the stress of some strong emotions. His eyes were fixed so steadily upon the man opposite that he could see nothing of Ennie, though she beckoned to him with a warning forefinger.

"And now you quite understand how it is," the man called Claw was saying. "The matter is entirely in your hands, Mr. Somerset, You've been a fool, of course."

"Aye, by heaven, I have," Somerset said bitterly.

"Well, it's not too late to repair the damage," Claw went on. "Now, listen to me, my friend. You are in hourly danger of being arrested. But for the fact of my interference, you would be languishing at Bow Street at the present moment."

"Why should you interfere?" Somerset asked. "You've got all you want. I can speak plainly to you, because you know that what I am saying is true. With the aid of the other two scoundrels, you've got hold of my plans for that new cinema patent, and, once that was done, you set about discrediting Mr. Quint and myself so that we might be in jail when you were enjoying the result of my invention. Who on earth would believe two ex-criminals against a man in your position? Oh, you planned it very carefully, and you paid that scoundrel, Kent, handsomely, to do all the dirty work. And, now, what is it you want? You know that I am entirely powerless, and you wouldn't go out of your way to show me my freedom unless you had something to gain by it. What is it?"

"Ah, that's easily answered," Claw said, with a greasy smile. "I want your duplicate copy of those specification's."

"But why? Mr. Enderby has the originals, which I believe are locked up in his safe at Barnes Place, and, this being the case, you three—er—gentlemen have all you need."

Claw pulled thoughtfully at his cigar.

"Well yes, you might think so," he said. "But it's always been an axiom of mine not to trust any man in business. I want to have something to show myself."

"In other words," Somerset said bitterly. "You are afraid that your confederate is going to play you false, and get off with all the plunder himself. You are very wise, Mr. Claw, because Enderby is as big a scoundrel as you are."

But Claw showed no sign of resentment. He did not even disguise the fact that Somerset's shot had gone home. He begged and threatened, he offered Somerset immunity from any further trouble if he would only part with those draft plans. And Ennie, standing in the doorway, saw that the victim was weakening. Then she caught his eye, and spelt out a few words in the deaf and dumb alphabet on her fingers. She drew a deep breath when she saw that Somerset understood, and that, after the first start of amazement he was holding himself well in hand.

"I won't do it," he cried. "I can't. It's not fair, either to myself or my partner. Why do you come here trying to tempt me in this way? What do you think I am made of? I am so worried and worn out that I hardly know what I'm talking about. My head is all in a whirl. I couldn't fit those draft plans together if you paid me. Oh, go away. Come back in the morning when I am fit to listen to you."

Claw rose to his feet as Ennie hid herself in the gloom, and made his way slowly down the staircase.

Then Ennie stepped into the dining-room with a smile on her lips.

"Come with me at once," she said. "Ask no questions. If you are brave there's daylight ahead for you yet."

Chapter IX

A Helping Hand.

Somerset looked at his visitor with a certain dazed astonishment. The amiable weakness of his face had never been more apparent than at that moment. And yet it was not so much weak as wanting in initiative. Here was a man, undoubtedly, who, well led, was capable of big things. There are some men like that. And Somerset was one of them.

"What—what are you doing here?" he gasped.

"I'll try and tell you," Ennie said. "Now sit down and listen to me and my story. But, first of all, I should like to know exactly what Mr. Claw was doing here?"

"Trying to bully me, trying to bribe me," Somerset said. "I suppose you know everything, or you would not be here."

"I think so," Ennie said. "I have just parted with Michel Quint, and you are both in hourly danger of arrest. Perhaps you can tell me why you are still free, and why the very man who has set all this trouble in motion should have gone out of his way to call upon you to-night."

"It's about that invention of mine," Somerset explained. "You know what I mean, the device by which I can make the characters on the screen talk, just like they would do on the stage."

“Yes, I know all about that,” Ennie said. “Mr. Enderby explained it to me. He was awfully keen about it, and, from what I could gather, he has all the designs and drawings in his safe at Barnes Place.”

“Ah, that’s the source of all the trouble,” Somerset groaned. “Enderby, with his accomplices, Claw and Kent, deliberately robbed me of my invention. You see, I wanted money. I had to have money, and Michel Quint introduced me to these people.”

“Yes, yes I know all about that,” Ennie said, impatiently. “I have just come away from Michel Quint.”

“Really,” Somerset cried. “Where is he?”

“He’s in safe hiding. In hiding so safe indeed that those rascals will never find him. And, before you sleep to-night, you must be under the same roof. Oh, can’t you see what it means, Ted? You will have time to make your arrangements and, I hope, get the best of those scoundrels. And now, perhaps I had better tell you what has happened the last few hours.”

Somerset listened intently enough, whilst Ennie told her story. As she went on, his face gradually cleared, the haunted look left his eyes, and something like strength and resolution came into his face. He was quite another man.

“That’s very fine of you, Ennie,” he said. “I am entirely in your hands. So long as I am anywhere near old Quint I feel brave and resolute enough for anything. He could always make me do exactly as he liked. I suppose you want me to go down with you to-night to the house on the river?”

“Exactly,” Ennie smiled. “You had better put a few things together, and we will walk down the street and pick up a taxi. After what you said to Mr. Claw just now, I don’t suppose that you will be watched. I am quite sure he went away, under the impression that when he comes here to-morrow morning you will be quite ready to do anything he asks. What did you promise?”

“Oh, all sorts of things,” Somerset said. “He wants another set of those specifications. If I will give them to him he swore that I should be free. He didn’t say anything about Quint, but then he hates Michel, and would do anything to put him out of the way. I was too upset and agitated to follow very carefully what he said, but, now I come to think of it, he is evidently suspicious of Enderby’s loyalty. Enderby has those drawings, and Claw won’t be happy till he has a duplicate set.”

“Yes, I gathered that, from what I overheard,” Ennie said. “Ted, are those drawings complete?”

“Well, not quite,” Somerset replied. “Though, of course, a skilled electrical engineer would have no great difficulty in understanding them. The demonstration of my patent that I gave to Claw and Enderby was carried out upon an impromptu sort of model, but good enough to demonstrate the value of the process.”

“Ah, now I begin to understand,” Ennie said. “Claw wants another set of plans because he fears that Enderby is going to play him false. Now, I happen to know that the plans are in Mr. Enderby’s safe. He told me so the night that I was down at Barnes Place, playing a scene from the ‘Lady Burglar’ film. They must be there still, or Claw wouldn’t be so anxious to get hold of your drawings. The first thing you and Michel have to do is to get those drawings back.”

“Yes, but how?” Somerset asked.

“Steal them. Burgle the place. Anything. In the circumstances, you are quite justified, and, once you have done that, you are practically safe. Those rascals don’t care anything, so long as they can rob you of your invention. Look at the dastardly plot they laid to get hold of it, and discredit you two, and make you powerless. If once you had the plans back, you could laugh at them. They will be ready to make any compromise. But we are wasting time here, talking like this. Come along.”

Somerset hastily threw a few things into a kit bag, and, a quarter of an hour later, he and Ennie were on the way to Barnes in a taxi. They pulled up at length a quarter of a mile away from the house on the river, where the taxi-driver was ordered to wait until Ennie came back. They walked cautiously along the deserted roads until they reached their destination, where the door was opened by Quint, who literally welcomed his comrade with open arms.

“Well done, Ennie,” he said, when he had closed the door behind them. “Upon my word, you are worth any dozen men I know.”

Ennie laughed and flushed with pleasure. So far, everything had gone smoothly, and, naturally enough, she rejoiced in her triumph. Her eyes gleamed.

“Well, never mind about that,” she said, “I can only stay here a few minutes. There is a taxi waiting for me down the road, and I don’t want to keep Margaret in suspense any longer than I can help. Now, listen, Michel. You must stay here for the next day or two quietly, and look after the old gentleman, whilst I am doing the rest. The day after to-morrow the advertisement I speak of will appear in the local paper, and replies will be sent to the office. They will be forwarded to me. Needless to say that the selection of a bath-chair man is made already. He will be Ted Somerset. Then I will buy a bath-chair at Harridges, and send it down to the station here to be called for. After that, everything will be in the hands of you two. You will be able to get as much fresh air as you like when you are being wheeled about the place disguised as Mr. Geere, which will enable you to go a long way. I mean, you will be able to travel miles outside the neighbourhood. But I don’t want to waste a lot of time going into that. You must please understand I can’t come here again.”

“Of course you can’t,” Quint said. “I had quite forgotten for the moment that Enderby is aware of the fact that you and I and Somerset and Margaret are something more than friends. In the circumstances, for you to come anywhere near here would be madness. But there’s no reason why you shouldn’t write.”

“I will,” Ennie said eagerly. “I can write to Everard Geere, Esq., and you will recognize my handwriting. It’s a fortunate thing that I am in such close contact with Mr. Enderby, and that most of the scenes of the ‘Lady Burglar’ are being filmed at Barnes Place. It will be very hard luck indeed if I can’t send you something useful.”

“Yes that’s the idea,” Quint said eagerly. “You keep a close eye upon him, Ennie, and see that we are posted in all his movements. I should like to know what happened to-night.”

But Ennie refused to be drawn into any discussion. Time was getting on now, and there was just the chance that the taxi-cab man might become suspicious. It was only someone in the guise of a working man who had hailed the driver in the first place, and, in all the circumstances, he might make up his mind that he had

been done out of his fare and drive back to London without waiting any longer. And, besides, was there not Somerset to tell Quint all that he needed to know? To all of which Quint listened with approval.

“Very well,” he said. “Perhaps you are right. But my dear girl, I hate the idea of you rushing all around London at this time of night quite alone, and entirely unprotected.

“My dear boy,” she protested. “I am enjoying it thoroughly. At least, I should enjoy it if the situation you two stand in was not so desperate. Besides, who is going to interfere with the working man?”

And indeed, she looked the part so thoroughly that Quint’s uneasiness was allayed.

“Very well,” he said. “Good-night, my brave little girl, and thanks from the bottom of my heart for all you’ve done.”

With that, Ennie made her way cautiously out into the road in the direction of the place where she could see the taxi was still standing. She drove back to town again and finally paid her man off, some distance from Halford Street. It was just after one when she put her key in the door of the flat, thankful enough to find herself safely at home. The world appeared to be fast asleep, and, so far as she knew, her movements had been unobserved from start to finish. She found Margaret Quint sitting up for her in a state of miserable anxiety.

“I thought you were never coming back,” she said. “I imagined all sorts of things happening to you. Have you been successful? Did you manage to see Ted?”

Ennie threw off her coat and removed the deerstalker cap from her head. Then she let down her luxurious masses of hair and dropped contentedly into a chair.

“Ah, that’s better,” she said. “I feel like a woman once more. What a fortunate thing it was that I happened to be in my burglar’s kit this evening. My dear girl, give me a cup of tea and a cigarette, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

A little later on Margaret sat listening to the strange story that Ennie had to tell. When she had finished, the tears rose to the listener’s eyes, and she drew a long breath of relief.

“Wonderful, Ennie,” she cried. “Wonderful! Heaven knows what those two unfortunate men would have done without you. And now, thanks to that marvellous courage of yours, they stand a good chance of getting out of this terrible scrape. Is there anything I can do? I feel so useless?”

“We shall see,” Ennie laughed. “We might find some occupation for a lady journalist yet. At any rate, you can draw out that advertisement and send it to the ‘West Surrey Herald.’ Make it as brief as possible, and have the replies sent to the office of the newspaper. On Monday morning you can go down and collect them. No one will be suspicious of your presence near Barnes, because, being a journalist, you can go anywhere. Meanwhile, I’ll make it my business to look after the bath-chair. And, oh yes, the disguises. The best thing I can do is to pack them in a case and send them to the house on the river by Carter Patterson. Thank goodness I am au fait with that sort of thing, and know where to get everything without exciting suspicion. Courage, all will be well yet.”

Chapter X

As from the Dead.

It was a somewhat monotonous existence that Quint and his companion passed for the next two or three days. It was necessary, of course, to keep strictly within the house, the blinds of which were down, for the most part, and to look after the old gentleman who was still lying, more or less unconscious in his bedroom. He was no better and no worse, and, so far as Quint's professional training told him, was likely to remain in that condition for a considerable time to come. There was a chance, of course, that another seizure might carry him off altogether, but, on the other hand it was possible that he might before long, return to the normal. Meanwhile, he gave no trouble, he ate his food and slept for long periods without apparently being conscious of the fact that he was being waited upon by strangers.

"It's quite an ordinary case," Quint said. "He's a very old man, but evidently has taken great care of himself, and his heart and lungs are very sound."

"Yes, that's all very well," Somerset said. "The point is, would it be safe to leave him?"

"Oh, I think so," Quint said thoughtfully. "He seems to sleep practically all night, and he never utters a sound. We shall have to take the risk, anyway. As soon as Ennie has got things properly going, I mean to have another shot at burgling Enderby's safe at Barnes Place. When that is fixed up, we shall have to leave the old gentleman for a few hours. That is, unless you prefer to stay behind and look after him."

"Nothing of the sort," Somerset said. "If there is any danger, I am going to share it. It's a strange thing, Michel, old man, but I feel another being when you are behind me. I don't want to be left behind if there is any danger."

Quint nodded approvingly, for he was glad to see his friend in this mood, and he was more glad still when, on Tuesday morning, a large box was dumped down from a motor van at the back door, and he went down to receive it and give the receipt, dressed in Everard Geere's old flannel dressing gown, together with that individual's cloth cap and big glasses. Here, at any rate, was an indication that things were moving. Here was everything to fit out Somerset as a broken-down looking individual, in fact, the beau ideal of the class of man that one usually sees pushing a bath-chair. Apparently, Ennie had forgotten nothing. There was even a fringe of grey whisker and beard for Quint, exactly like those worn by the unconscious individual upstairs.

The afternoon post brought a letter from Ennie in which she said that the bath-chair had been dispatched to be called for at the station, and, furthermore, a piece of information to the effect that the plans were still in Enderby's safe, and that he himself would be away playing golf over the week-end.

"Ah, that's worth knowing," Quint said. "I'll bet a dollar he's gone down to Sandmouth. That gold challenge cup is being played for at the end of the month, and I know that Enderby hopes to win it. At his handicap, he ought to have a big chance."

"Isn't that the cup you won twice?" Somerset asked. "The cup that you were particularly anxious to get hold of?"

"That's right," Quint said. "As a matter of fact, both Enderby and myself have won it twice. If he wins this time, it's his own property, which same remark applies to me. Lord, I'd give a trifle to be able to turn up there and put his nose out of joint. Besides, I'd set my heart on that cup. But it's no use worrying. Look here, you just jump into your disguise and sneak down to the station after dusk and bring that bath-chair back. I'm longing to get out in the open air; but, lord, what a game it is. Michel Quint, the golfer and International football player, for whom the police are searching everywhere, being shoved about Barnes Common by his fellow-conspirator in the guise of a broken-down valetudinarian. But that isn't what I was going to talk about. What you have got to do is to push a little further out of the area of old Geere's shops and buy a good big supply of food. I'm getting tired of living on eggs and milk puddings, which seem to be all the old man's tradesmen send him. I have taken the liberty of borrowing a ten-pound note from his desk, which, of course, we can replace later on. And for heaven's sake, don't forget to buy some tobacco and a few hundred cigarettes."

Somerset turned out presently, most fittingly disguised as an elderly bath-chair man. He wore a seedy suit of clothes, consisting of a frock coat and black trousers, which had every appearance of descending to him in the way of charity. He had, too, a seedy top hat, a muffler round his neck which was innocent of a collar, and a straggly brown beard and moustache tinged here and there with grey. When the process of transformation was complete, Quint stood back and regarded Somerset admiringly.

"By Jove, you'll do!" he cried. "Your own mother wouldn't know you. Now be off and get back as soon as possible with the bath-chair and the food. You know the names of all the tradesmen the old gentleman deals with, so that you need not go near any of them."

Somerset returned in due course with a second-hand bath-chair which was loaded with provisions. There was enough, with care, to last the adventurers for the best part of a week, nor had he forgotten the cigarettes and tobacco. It was after a luxurious meal which consisted of a tin of Irish stew, with potatoes, and a smoke to follow, that Quint laid his plans before his companion.

"This is all very well," he said. "We might stay here for a month without being detected if the old man gets no worse, but that doesn't help us. Action, my boy, action. Now, on Saturday night, we'll make our host as comfortable as possible and go as far as Barnes Place. The tools are all in the boat-house, so that there will be no great difficulty. Enderby will be away, and, of course, his domestic staff will be taking it easy. I propose to cross the common about midnight and enter the house by the library window. That's the way I got in last time. You see, I know the room which happens to contain the safe, and I know how easy the catch of the French window is to force. With any luck, we shall come back with those papers in our possession, after which we shall be able to dictate our own terms to those blackguards."

"That means a compromise, I suppose?" Somerset said. "I should like to beat them out and out. I should like to get hold of that rascal Kent, who is no more

drowned than I am. They probably gave him five hundred pounds and sent him to America.”

“So I think,” Quilt replied. “But we can’t have everything. If I could get down to Sandmouth in time for that golf cup I should feel that I was almost equal with Enderby. Still, it would be a fine thing to get hold of Kent. Lord, we might even kidnap him and keep him a prisoner here.”

It was a dark and rather stormy evening when, on the following Saturday the two adventurers left the house cautiously and made their way across the Common in the direction of Barnes Place. They had fed and looked after their aged patient, and settled him down for the night, and he was sleeping peacefully enough when Quint softly closed the front door behind him. There was not a soul to be seen, as they wended their way in the direction of the big house on the Common, for it was just commencing to rain, and even the most hardy wayfarer had vanished. They passed through the lodge gates, and thence up the drive until the big house loomed before them. So far as they could see, there was not a light anywhere, but that was no proof that there was nobody about, because the curtains of all the living rooms were too heavy for any beam of light to penetrate them.

They stood presently under one of the library windows that led on to the lawn, and waited for half an hour or so before Quint took the tools from his pocket with the intention of forcing his way into the library. They stood there so quietly that they could hear one another breathe, and it seemed to Somerset that the pumping of his heart and the throb of his temples must be audible at least a dozen yards away. Still, he was conscious of no fear. Indeed, he never experienced anything of that sort when in Quint’s company. And so another quarter of an hour passed under the intense darkness and the amazing stillness of the night before Quint reached for the tool that he required and set to work.

“Aren’t you going to begin?” Somerset whispered.

“Well, that’s rather a compliment,” Quint murmured in reply. “As a matter of fact, the window is already open. Now, follow me very carefully. There is a sort of alcove just inside the window, covered by a pair of heavy curtains. There is plenty of room for two of us there, if you keep close to me. The notion is to hide behind the curtains, and listen for a moment or two. If it’s all quiet, I shall creep across the room with the aid of my torch and lock the door. Ten minutes on an old safe like that with such tools as ours, and we’ll cut into that safe as if it was a piece of rotten cheese. Now come along.”

Very softly, they stepped inside and stood there for a few moments listening, hidden behind the heavy blackness of the velvet curtains. Then, just as Quint was in the act of stepping forward, there came a soft click, and the library was flooded with light. The curtains were not quite closed, being some half inch apart, so that it was possible for the intruders to stand there, perfectly hidden and see was going on inside the room.

With a quick intake of his breath, Quint saw the heavy figure and scowling anxious face of Enderby. He was apparently disturbed and agitated about something, for he wiped his face on his handkerchief, and sat down at his desk with a queer look on his features. Then he reached over and rang the bell attached to his writing table. Almost immediately a servant entered.

“A whisky and soda,” Enderby demanded. “A big one, and don’t be sparing with the whisky.”

The servant bowed and withdrew. As he did so, there was a sound of a distant bell, and Enderby sat up listening with a look on his face that was not good to see. He sat there, hardly moving a muscle till the servant came back with a big glass on a tray.

“A gentleman to see you, sir,” he said. “He declines to give his name, but says he must see you, late as it is. He says it is business of great importance.”

“Send him in,” Enderby growled. “And shut the door behind you. You needn’t trouble to come back.”

With that, Enderby emptied his glass, almost at a gulp, and sat like some wild animal awaiting an onslaught. The two men behind the curtain could hear approaching footsteps, then the door was opened widely almost insolently, and a little man with red hair and ferret eyes came in. There was an ugly look on his face as he turned his glance in Enderby’s direction. At the same moment, Quint grasped his companion’s arm and whispered something in his ear.

“Do you see who it is?” he asked.

“Great heavens,” Somerset murmured. “Kent himself. I knew that blackguard wasn’t dead. Now what’s to be done?”

“Wait,” Quint hissed. “Wait.”

Chapter XI

Kent Knows Something.

There was no doubt whatever about it. The man confronting Enderby with a smirk on those thin lips of his, and the light shinning in his ferret eyes was none other than Kent, the jackal and financial lion’s provider to John Claw. Both the men hiding behind the curtain had come in contact with him on more than one occasion, and both of them deeply regretted that they had ever heard that wily scoundrel’s name. He had not exactly been in Claw’s employ; that is, he was not a regular clerk on the establishment. Occasionally he worked in Claw’s office, but usually his business was to be outside, picking up all sorts of dubious information and luring victims into his master’s web.

He was a little, tiny rat of a man, red as a fox, and cunning as a weasel, and despite his poor physique there was a certain assurance about him now that boded ill for Enderby, who was still writing at his table. At a little cough from the intruder Enderby looked round and, as he saw who his visitor was, the agitation on his face deepened for a moment, then he turned with a murderous glance that caused Kent to smile. Evidently he was not in the least afraid of the man he had come to see.

“Kent!” Enderby cried. “What the devil are you doing here? Now, sit down you scoundrel, and let’s have this out. Are you drunk or mad, that you should dare to come here in this open fashion? Why, my very butler—”

“Oh, you needn’t worry about that,” Kent said, dropping into his chair, and helping himself coolly to a cigarette. “Your servant doesn’t know me, and I didn’t give him my name. Look here, why should you have all the good things to yourself. Ring the bell and ask your flunkey to bring me a whisky and soda. Whilst he’s about it, he might bring in a few sandwiches or something of that sort, for I am most devilish hungry. Anything will do, but a drink I must have.”

It was quite evident to the two men behind the window curtains that all this cool insolence was having a decided effect upon Enderby. The murderous gleam was still in his eyes, and his hand went out involuntarily to a heavy ruler that lay upon his desk. But he seemed to think better of this and, at a further hint from Kent, rang the bell. His voice was calm enough as the servant entered and took his master’s orders. So that, before long, Kent was sipping a large glass of whisky and soda, and eating the sandwiches in a wolfish way which was eloquent of the fact that he had been without food for a long time. And all this went on without a word from Kent until he had finished his meat and drink, and had helped himself to another cigarette.

“Sorry to keep you waiting all this time,” he said impudently. “But I have had nothing to eat since my breakfast, and I haven’t got a penny in the world. Perhaps you will kindly explain why I am without money, and who is to blame.”

“Now, don’t you take that tone with me,” Enderby snarled. “We are all in the same boat, and if those two fools, Quint and Somerset, only knew as much as we do, we should all hang together. At any rate, we should all be standing in the dock—”

“To the devil with all that sort of talk,” Kent laughed unpleasantly. “What’s the good of it to me. I want money, and I am going to have it.”

“But you’re not keeping your contract.”

“Oh, I’m not, eh? Then what about you and John Claw? Where does your share of the contract come in? Listen to me, Mr. Enderby. To please you and my late employer I committed perjury. I laid information against two innocent men, and I swore that my signature was a forgery. What did I do that for?”

“To make money, I suppose,” Enderby sneered.

“Yes, but where is the money? You know what the price was to be. Five hundred pounds. I was to lay the trap for those two idiots and leave evidence enough behind to convict them, and I was to do this so that Somerset’s invention should fall into your hands and for you to make a fortune with it. Well, I did it. I gave you enough evidence to send those chaps into penal servitude for five years, after which I vanished according to the programme. I was supposed to be drowned, supposed to have fallen off a Channel boat. It was all very nicely arranged, but you know that it was all humbug. Still, we don’t want to go into that. I was quite willing to leave England, because London is getting too hot to hold me, and, with my knowledge of the world I could easily make a fresh start in America. But you didn’t trust me, and that’s why you didn’t let me have the money till I was out of the country. I was to make my way to Hamburg, where the cash was to await me in a certain place—”

“Well, didn’t it?” Enderby asked.

Kent burst into a sudden spurt of rage.

“You know devilish well it didn’t,” he said. “It was never meant to reach me. You two chaps played me deliberately false, and left me stranded without a shilling in a country where I couldn’t even speak the language. I was a fool to trust you. I ought to have insisted upon having every penny before I left England. If you had played the game fairly with me, I should never have troubled you again. And here I am now, ready for anything. I am going to have that money before I sleep to-night. Now, don’t tell me it’s all a mistake, because I shan’t believe you. Give me the cash. No, I won’t take a cheque. Give me the cash, and I’ll clear out to-morrow. I don’t want to stay in England.”

It was quite evident that the little red man was in earnest, and that he was not in the least afraid of Enderby, and the latter, by his moody silence, seemed to tacitly acknowledge the truth of the accusation. He wriggled about uneasily in his chair, without saying anything, in fact, the watchers behind the curtain had never seen him so disconcerted.

“There must have been some extra-ordinary misunderstanding, Kent,” he said. “Honestly there must. I thought Claw was going to send the money, and evidently he was under the impression that I had promised to do so.”

“You lie, you dog, you lie,” Kent cried furiously. “You both knew that I should land in Hamburg penniless, and that’s all you cared. Even now I am willing to forget all about it if you will give me the money and let me go.”

“I can’t do it,” Enderby almost groaned. “I couldn’t put my hand on a hundred pounds now to save my life. I have been having a rotten time lately, Kent.”

Kent waved his hand comprehensively around.

“Yes; looks like it, doesn’t it?” he sneered.

“I’m up to my eyes in debt and difficulties,” Enderby said. “If we can’t get those two chaps out of the way and safe in jail, then I’m done. And, what’s more, I believe Claw’s done, too. Can’t you wait a bit? Can’t you stay here for a day or two as my guest? I know this all looks wealthy and prosperous, but I’m living absolutely on credit on the strength of my ownership of Barnes Place. I’m ready to do anything.”

“Yes, and so am I,” Kent sneered. “I’m through with you, my friend. Give me some money. Give me a hundred pounds to go on with. I wouldn’t stay here for a kingdom. Because why? Because you wouldn’t hesitate to murder me some fine night.”

Enderby held himself in with an effort.

“What I am telling you is the truth,” he said hoarsely. “I have got no money. But, of course, when I tell Claw about your coming here to-morrow he will help me out.”

“Oh, will he? I very much doubt it. And so I am to hang on like this until you have laid Quint and Somerset by the heels and put that wonderful invention of theirs on the market. And what am I to do in the meantime? Starve, I suppose? But here, tell me one thing. When were those two men arrested?”

“Well, to tell you the truth,” Enderby stammered, “they haven’t been arrested at all. They have just vanished in the most extraordinary way. They ought to have been in the hands of the police the best part of a week ago.”

“Oh, it’s like that, is it? Well, you are telling me the truth so far, I know. You mind that they are not too many for you yet. Somerset is a visionary and a

dreamer, but Quint is a man of courage, and, moreover, no fool either. It looks to me as if they had powerful friends somewhere.”

“Powerful friends or not,” Enderby retorted, “they would be in the hands of the police now if we could get hold of them. And once that happens, nothing can save them.”

“Yes, but you haven’t got hold of them,” Kent said, with a sneer that drove Enderby nearly to madness. “And what’s more I don’t believe you ever will. I don’t care either way. What I want is my money. Give me what you promised me, and I’ll clear out of the country to-morrow. I’m not going to wait. It’s too dangerous a game for my taste.”

“Well, you’ve got to wait,” Enderby said. “And if you are not satisfied, you can do exactly as you please. It won’t be long before those plans in my safe yonder——”

Kent broke into a cackle of laughter.

“Are you quite sure they are in your safe?” he asked.

With a sudden fear knocking at his heart, Enderby rose and threw open the door of his safe. With fingers that were none too steady he took out a large folio envelope and broke the seal. From within he produced a mass of papers, consisting of drawings and specifications, and a large sheet which is technically known amongst engineers as a blue print. This he unfolded and laid on the table under the rays of the electric light.

“These are not the plans at all,” he cried. “This is something quite different, something you might have got from any technical drawing school. Now, look here, you rascal, what’s the meaning of this? It was you who interviewed Quint and Somerset in the first instance, and it was to you that the drawings were handed over. You placed them inside that envelope and passed them on to me. In good faith I placed the envelope in my safe, where it has been ever since. You dirty dog you—you——”

“No reason to get into a rage,” Kent said coolly. “After all you are no more trustworthy than I am. And now, when you come to realize that the papers upon which your salvation depends are not in your possession, perhaps you will be a little more disposed to regard matters from my point of view.”

“Where are the genuine papers?” Enderby demanded.

“Ah, that, for the present, I am not going to tell you. But I can put my hands on them when I want them. And if that doesn’t satisfy you, I’ll go a bit further and tell you that I can put my hands upon Quint and Somerset to-night if I want to. And so it comes to this. If you are so keen on those papers and so keen on laying your victims by the heels, you’ve got to give me four times the original money, and that before to-morrow night.”

“It sounds incredible,” Enderby said. “Do you mean to say you really know where those two men are hiding?”

Chapter XII

Missing.

“Aye, indeed I do,” Kent said, and there was a ring in his voice that convinced Enderby of the truth. “I know exactly where they are. But as to telling—that’s another thing.”

It was only by an effort little less than miraculous that Somerset, standing behind the curtain, checked the cry that rose to his lips. He could feel Quint breathing heavily, and the latter’s grip on his arm. It was indeed a dramatic announcement that Kent had made, and there was no possibility of passing it off as mere bluff on his part. By some means or another the little red man had ascertained their hiding-place and as soon as it suited his purpose to betray it, he would most assuredly do so. The only thing now was to hang on there as long as possible and pick up all the information they could.

“Where are they?” Enderby asked.

“Ah, that’s my business,” Kent said. “You know my terms, and when they are carried out, then I will give you all the information you need. I don’t mind telling you that I am the only man in London who knows where those two men are to be found.”

This, at any rate, was reassuring, and the two men hiding behind the window curtains breathed all the more freely.

“Well,” Kent said, “it’s no use us sitting here talking all night. I’ve got to get back to my hiding-place, and I can’t move without money. I walked all the way down here, and a precious long journey I found it. Give me something to go on with. Give me twenty pounds, then I can sneak down here to-morrow evening and collect the balance. If you can’t find it, Claw must. Two thousand pounds for me, not a penny less. And I’m going to have it all at once. And when I’ve got it—”

“You’ll bring the right papers with you,” Enderby said eagerly.

“Not I!” Kent laughed. “I don’t put my head into a trap like that. You two skunks have had me once, but it isn’t going to happen again. I trusted you implicitly, and this time you’ve got to trust me. I tell you what I’ll do? I’ll post you the papers so they will reach you here the day after to-morrow, but I’ll arrange that they are not posted till after I’ve got my money. Anything else you want to say?”

As Kent rose, Enderby left his chair, and just for a moment the two men glared at one another fiercely. Then, in a blind paroxysm of rage and wild fury bred of the knowledge that he had been duped and deceived by his tool, Enderby caught up the heavy ruler from the table and flourished it over Kent’s head. He was absolutely beside himself by this time, so that Kent started back, and for the first time there was fear in his eyes.

“For God’s sake!—for God’s sake!” he whispered. “Don’t—”

But he spoke too late. The big ebony staff struck him viciously on the top of the head, and he went down without a sound at Enderby’s feet. There he lay, limp as an empty sack, and apparently without breath or motion. Almost as soon as he had done this thing Enderby recoiled, sick with horror from that murderous act of his. He bent down and listened for any sign of life. But none came and even the two watchers behind the curtains were convinced of the fact that Kent was dead. They could see his flaccid body lying there and Enderby, with a ghastly white face and shaking hands trying to restore the vital spark once more. And, then as he

was crouched over his gruesome task, there came a knock on the library door that sounded in the dreadful silence of the place almost like a thunder-clap.

Enderby started to his feet and dragged the body of Kent behind the big library table where it was hidden from sight. He dropped into his chair again, and with his face shaded by his left hand, made some sort of pretence of being busy writing. The knock came again, and in a voice that was hardly audible Enderby called out to the knocker to come in. Then the door opened and the butler entered. He had a card in his hand, which he laid on his master's table and stood there awaiting instructions, and in a mechanical sort of way and without raising his head, Enderby signalled that the late caller was to be admitted. Almost immediately another man came into the room.

"Claw," Quint whispered in Somerset's ear. "The plot thickens, my boy. Now, what on earth is he doing here at this time of night. What will he say when—"

Claw glanced curiously at the figure by the desk, then, as Enderby looked up, he saw the ghastly bedabbled whiteness of the other's face. Just for a moment Claw mistook that horrible expression for fear of himself.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked. "What have you been doing? You don't mean to say that that troublesome conscience of your has been worrying you again? Hello. Hello. What have you got down there? Been murdering somebody?"

Enderby drew his tongue over a pair of dry lips.

"For God's sake, don't jest, Claw," he said. "I must have been made to do it. I killed him with my big ruler, and I had only just time to drag his body behind the table before my man came in with your card. And don't forget you're in this. You must help me to get the body away. Once we can bury him safely then we shall be free to breathe again. Nobody knew he was in England, because he came back secretly and he had told all his friends that he was going to America for good."

All this came from Enderby's lips in short, quick gasps, as if he found it difficult to speak. Claw stood regarding the paralytic wreck that he knew as Enderby with a wild astonishment that he made no sort of effort to conceal.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he asked.

"Look and see for yourself," Enderby groaned.

Almost indifferently Claw turned over the prostrate body with his foot. Then the terror seemed to grip him.

"My God!" he whispered. "Kent!"

"Yes, Kent right enough," Enderby stammered. "He found out all about it. He discovered there was no money waiting for him on the other side of the water, and that we had no intention of sending it. It seems that he worked his passage home, and came here to demand money. I couldn't give him any, I hadn't a ten pound note in the house. Of course I tried to make terms. I tried to put him off because he was desperate and threatened to go to the police and tell them everything. And that's not the worst of it, Claw. He has humbugged us both finely. He never handed over those drawings at all."

"What!" Claw cried. "Do you mean to say that those two chaps have got them still? If they have, we must make terms. We are in a position to do that."

"That isn't what I mean at all," Enderby groaned. "Kent had them. He didn't trust either of us so he palmed off a lot of counterfeit rubbish on me. If you don't believe it, look at those plans on the table. Neither of us know much about them,

but we know enough to see that they are not what we paid for. However, look for yourself and you will see what I say is true.”

“Good heavens, you are right!” Claw said, after a brief inspection of the rubbish on the table. “But where are the plans?”

“Ah, that Kent wouldn’t say. He told me to tell you that he now wants two thousand pounds—at least, he did want two thousand pounds—and that he was coming here to-morrow to get it. And even then he wasn’t going to bring the right drawings with him. Said he would post them, and that we should have to trust him for a change. And then I suddenly saw red, and before I knew what I was doing, I bashed him over the head with a big ruler.”

“And a pretty mad thing it was!” Claw snarled. “Don’t you see we are done entirely? I don’t mind you killing Kent, and I don’t mind helping to get his body out of the way now that he is dead, because he always would have been a source of danger. He would have blackmailed us for years. But that’s not the point. Don’t you see that by this act of yours you have cut the ground clean from under our feet? What’s the good of going on with this prosecution of Quint and Somerset so long as we don’t know where those drawings are. We shall never see the money. Very likely they are lying in some shabby lodging-house where Kent slept last night. The only thing we can do is to make a compromise. Find out where those two chaps are hiding and make overtures to them. Tell them that there has been an honest mistake, and that you are ready to make any sort of terms that are fair to both parties. Tell them that Kent utterly deceived us both—oh! tell them anything of that kind, and they’ll swallow it right enough.”

“Yes, that’s all very well,” Enderby said dismally. “But where are we to find them? The most maddening part of the whole thing is that Kent knew their hiding-place.”

“Kent did?” Claw cried. “Do you mean to say he told you so? What a mess you’ve made of the whole thing!”

Enderby acknowledged it guiltily enough. Utterly cast down, he told his accomplice the whole story, and he had barely finished before the library door opened and the butler came in.

“Sorry to disturb you, gentlemen,” he said. “But an Inspector from Scotland Yard wants to see you. He’s waiting in the dining-room now. Shall I ask him to come in?”

“Not in here!” Enderby shrieked. “Not in here! What are we talking about? Tell the Inspector we’ll see him at once. Offer him a glass of wine or something.”

As the butler vanished Enderby turned a white face to his companion, who looked at him with a countenance quite as pallid, if possible, as his own.

“I wonder if they know anything?” he whispered. “But that’s impossible. Let’s go and face it out.”

A quarter of an hour, half-an-hour elapsed and the two conspirators were still absent from the room where that ghastly object lay behind the big table. Then, when the best part of three-quarters of an hour had elapsed Enderby and Claw returned a great deal more cheerfully than they had departed.

“We’re well out of that,” Claw said. “What did they want to come and bother you at this time of night for? It’s their business to find out those missing men, not ours.”

Enderby drew a deep breath of relief and wiped the heavy moisture from his forehead.

"I wonder if the Inspector noticed anything," he said. "Lord, if he'd only guessed! But I think we carried it off all right, didn't we? I was never nearer collapse in my life. Let's have some more drinks in."

"Not yet," Claw said. He was far more cool and collected than his companion. "Let's get rid of that body. Haven't you got a stable or a shed outside we can put it in? Then, when everybody is fast asleep we can go and bury it in the shrubbery. Plenty of dead leaves about at this time of year. Here, for goodness sake, be a man. What are you staring at? Anybody would think that Kent's ghost was haunting you."

A great cry burst from Enderby's lips.

"It's gone!" he said. "The body's gone!"

Chapter XIII

„Friend or Foe?“

Scared out of his wits, as he evidently was, at the unexpected summons of his butler, Enderby had been prudent enough to lock the library door behind him and drop the key into his pocket. So the two men behind the curtain stood there waiting with the deepest interest to see what would happen next. They felt perfectly safe there, for even Somerset had lost his nervousness in the intense drama of the moment. And there they were safely hidden with the door of the library closed and a soft rain pattering on the terrace behind them. They would be free to move now, for even if Enderby came back, it would take a moment or two to open the door.

"Now, what do you make of it?" Quint asked.

"Oh, I don't know," Somerset said. "I haven't grasped it yet, but it seems to me that we have not been wasting our time."

"I should think not, indeed!" Quint said. "To begin with, we know that those two rascals have been done by the man whom they regarded as a mere tool. They haven't got those plans of ours, and without them I don't see what they can do. And if Kent is dead, why, we're more or less masters of the situation."

"Do you mean that we can compromise?" Somerset asked.

"Well, if the worst comes to the worst, perhaps. But I don't want to do anything of that sort, Ted. Every fibre of my being cries out against it. Of course, we don't know, but it is long odds that most of our friends know by this time that criminal proceedings have been taken against us. You see, if we compromise, there will always be hundreds of people ready to shake their heads and look wise when Michel Quint's name is mentioned. That's the worst of being a public character. Don't you see we shall never live it quite down, and that's why I'd rather fight it out to the finish. Those rascals have nothing to gain by proceeding to extremes now—it would pay them to compromise with us. Of course, they will bluff and

expect to get ninety per cent. of the profit. Enderby will pretend that he has got the plans, but we know better. No, I think we'll go on."

"Wait a moment," Somerset said eagerly. "Don't forget one thing. You heard Kent say that he knew where we are hiding."

"Probably a lie," Quint said contemptuously.

"Very likely. But, on the other hand, it might have been the truth. Let's assume that it was."

"Well, he's dead now, anyway," Quint said. "It's a horrible business, but I can't feel any sympathy with him."

Suddenly Somerset grasped his companion's arm, and a strange cry rose to his lips.

"Look!—look!" he whispered. "He's moving!"

And surely enough, the man lying by the side of the table stirred uneasily and a groan came from him. A second or two later he half-rose to his feet and then collapsed again helplessly. A sudden gleam came into Quint's eyes.

"Look here," he said. "Let's make sure one way or another. Those chaps won't be back for some time yet. And you can imagine their feelings when they find that Kent has disappeared. We must do something for him, anyhow. Common humanity calls for it. Now, then, come along before it's too late."

With that, Quint darted into the library and raised the stricken man to his feet. Kent swayed about drunkenly, but his eyes were open now, and he was looking into Quint's face with a vacant expression that was only half-sane. But Quint was not waiting just then for anything in the way of an explanation. With Somerset to aid him they carried the injured man through the window and supported him across the terrace. The fresh air seemed to revive him somewhat, for he could walk fairly well with a hand in each arm and presently the trio were going slowly down the drive in the direction of the road. It was very late, now, and very dark, and there was not a sign of life to be seen anywhere.

"Where are we going to take him?" Somerset asked.

"Why, to the house on the river, of course. Where else could we possibly take him? I've got an idea, Ted. If this chap really knows where we are hiding, then it doesn't matter two pence whether we take him there or not. On the other hand, after his treatment here to-night he might be disposed to help us. It's a matter of money, after all. And surely we could find someone amongst our friends who would lend us a hundred or two to square this chap. And don't forget that he knows where your plans are. He's got them, right enough, and if we can only keep him out of Enderby's hands we shall be able to fight those blackguards on level terms. It's no time for dillydally."

All this Quint said more or less breathlessly across the limp body of the semi-conscious Kent. He was groaning dismally now, his eyes were closed, and more than once he collapsed on the roadside. But a few drops of brandy administered to him from the flask in Somerset's pocket revived him, and so they went painfully along for an hour or two until, just as the clock was striking five, with a feeling of thankfulness, then entered the house on the river and laid Kent out on the couch in the dining room.

“Thank the Lord that’s done,” Quint said, as he wiped his forehead. “Now you run upstairs and see how the old gentleman is getting on, and if he is all right we’ll administer first aid to the wounded. Hurry up.”

And indeed Kent wanted attention badly enough, for he was in parlous case. There was no fracture of the skull so far as Quint could ascertain, but the blow had been a serious one and for the moment at any rate the injured man was not in possession of his senses. They tended him as best they could through the next day or two, and settled him down comfortably in one of the spare bedrooms. Apparently he could eat all right and he slept for the greater part of the time but when he was awake he spoke like a man in a dream. He hadn’t the least notion as to who he was or where he came from and the only sign of anything like sanity about him was a constant delusion to the effect that he had lost something and that it was necessary to find it without delay.

“The poor chap has lost his identity altogether,” Quint said. “That blow on the head has evidently injured the brain. It is probably a temporary injury and his memory might come back at any time. On the other hand, he might go on like this for weeks, and all this time we are doing nothing. If we could only get a clue as to where those papers are hidden, I shouldn’t so much mind. It’s this inaction that drives me half crazy, Somerset. We have wasted three or four days—precious days—during which our position has not improved.”

“Oh, well,” Somerset smiled. “I don’t suppose that Claw and Enderby feel any happier than we do. I should like to have seen their faces when they came back into the library and found Kent had gone. You may depend upon it, they are looking for him everywhere. Anyway, they can’t get on without him.”

“No, I suppose not,” Quint said thoughtfully. “But don’t forget that the police are after us, and that every day we keep out of the way appearances are more and more against us. Perhaps it would have been better, knowing what we do, for us to have come out into the open and defied those two ruffians to do their worst. However, it is too late for that now. Let’s hope that before the end of the week our unfortunate guest will be in a position to say something.”

But a day or two more went on and Kent remained in the same unsatisfactory condition. There were moments every now and again when the light of reason shone in his eyes and he made rambling allusions to some house down in the East End of London where, apparently, he had been hiding. But where the house was and what was the name of the street Quint and Somerset could not learn, because directly they began to ply Kent with questions the veil dropped again and he was a little worse than ever. But one thing was plain enough—he was filled with a deep hatred against some unknown persons though it was not difficult for the men looking after him to guess who they were.

“There is one thing in our favour, anyhow,” Quint said. “Whatever is the matter with the fellow’s brain he is all right again physically. From that point of view he is as fit as you or me. Let’s give him another day or two.”

A week had now elapsed without either Quint or Somerset having been beyond the front door. With Kent on the one hand and the invalid upstairs on the other, both the adventurers had quite enough to do without thinking of anything else. Then there came a fine evening when Quint could restrain himself no longer.

“Look here Somerset,” he said, “I must go out this evening. I must indeed. I can’t stick the house any longer. We can leave the old boy easily enough, and I don’t see why we couldn’t trust Kent for an hour or two. He’s very quiet this evening, and, apparently, very sleepy. Suppose we put him to bed; that’s the idea. Give him some supper and shove him between the sheets.”

Somerset acquiesced none too cordially. It seemed to him that Quint was taking unnecessary risks, but, as usual, when the latter resolved upon anything, Somerset made no protest. They settled the master of the house down comfortably—indeed, he never gave any trouble—and after supper it was no difficult matter to persuade Kent to go to bed. Once he was comfortably in the sheets, Somerset brought down the bath-chair, and in the darkness he and Quint went off down the road in the direction of the common.

It was good to feel the fresh air on their faces once more, and catch the smell of the good red earth, and so Quint’s spirits rose until he seemed almost to forget the troubles that he and Somerset left behind them. They crossed the common and made their way up to the high ground beyond where occasionally the bath-chair pulled up at a seat there whence it was possible to command the surrounding country and see anyone coming from a long way off. It was there that Quint had made up his mind to fix up an interview with the two girls at some early date. Indeed letters had already passed confirming the arrangement.

There they stopped for the best part of an hour or two before they made their way back towards the house on the river. The bath-chair was put away in the boat-house and Quint was enjoying a cigarette and a whisky and soda when Somerset came almost headlong downstairs with disaster written on his face.

“He’s gone,” he cried. “Michel, the beggar’s gone. Just got up and dressed himself and vanished.”

“Do you mean Kent?” Quint asked.

“Who else should I mean? He’s gone right enough. He’s taken his hat and his overcoat and even one of the old chap’s walking-sticks. He must have been shamming all the time. But, look here, old chap, it’s pretty serious, isn’t it? What’s that?”

There was a sudden ringing at the bell and a knock at the door. Without hesitation Quint went to answer it. There was no one there, nothing but a letter in the box which had just been dropped there by the postman on his final round. It was addressed to Everard Geere, but the writing was that of Ennie Barr.

Chapter XIV

A Letter from Claw.

There was no questioning the fact that Kent had vanished, leaving no sign behind, him. Nor did Quint think that he had been shamming all this time. His senses had probably come back to him whilst his jailers had been out on that unfortunate walk, and seeing that Kent was now quite physically fit, he had

evidently gone off as soon as he could get his clothes on. He might or might not have gone over the house first with a view to ascertaining his whereabouts, but as to that it was impossible to say. Moreover a five pound note was missing from Geere's desk in the dining room, and beyond question Kent had helped himself to this. It was a most unfortunate situation, and one for which Quint blamed himself bitterly. There was no help for it now. No doubt Kent had gone off to his humble hiding place, somewhere in the East End, and from there would direct his campaign against Enderby and Claw with a view to forcing good terms from them. But where had he gone and how could they find him?

It was apparently a hopeless task, and from it Quint turned a little later in the expectation that he might derive some consolation from Ennie's letter. He read it over two or three times before he turned to Somerset, who was seated moodily smoking on the other side of the fireplace.

"It's from Ennie," he explained. "There are two or three messages for you from Margaret, old chap, but we needn't worry about that just at present. They have been very busy the last two or three days, especially Ennie, who has been working from morn till night on that 'Lady Burglar' film. It's a serial in goodness knows how many numbers, and they've just completed the first three. Ennie says that the film will appear almost immediately, and they're not going to wait till the whole thing is finished. She says that there is a cinema palace in the High Street close by here where the film will be released next week. By jove, I vote that we go and see it. What do you say?"

"Oh, don't be an ass," Somerset said, irritably. "I never saw such a reckless chap as you are. Haven't we got into trouble enough because you couldn't do without a mouthful of fresh air?"

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't go," Quint went on. "It's safe enough. However, I won't say any more about that. Now listen. If it's fine to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock both Ennie and Margaret are coming down here to see us. They want us to meet them on the hill behind the common. You can wheel me out there and we'll wait for them. If anybody comes along they can easily go on to the next seat. Any objection to that?"

"Oh, I should think that's all right," Somerset said. "We can have a long talk and part as if we were casual acquaintances."

"I wonder if Ennie has noticed anything wrong with Enderby. She must have seen him nearly every day, especially as so many scenes in that film were taken at Barnes Place."

"Well, as a matter of fact, she does mention Enderby," Quint said. "She says there is something seriously wrong with him. That he has grown moody and nervous and hardly takes any notice of anybody. Depend upon it, those chaps don't know what they're at, and you can bet anything you like that they haven't found Kent, or Enderby wouldn't be so unhappy. And, here's another dashed funny thing in the letter. Ennie says that a few days ago she was down at Barnes Place on business when Claw turned up. You know he's Enderby's partner in the cinema show. It so happens that Ennie has never met him before. She says he is a horrid man, but you see in the circumstances her opinion is rather coloured. Anyway, Claw made himself exceedingly agreeable, and went out of his way to be polite. Of course, he'd found out that Ennie is the daughter of a big American

millionaire, and that there is no occasion for her to appear on any stage. He told her that he knew her father slightly, and then he made a remark that aroused all her suspicions. He wanted to know if she was the niece of an eccentric old man in these parts called Everard Geere. What do you think of that?"

"Strange, very strange," Somerset murmured. "It sounds as if Claw was acquainted with Geere."

"Yes, very much like it, doesn't it? Of course, Ennie's suspicions were aroused, but she said nothing beyond the fact that Geere was related to her. She told Claw that she had been to see him once, but did not intend going again, as he had shown her plainly enough that he desired no visitors. And with that the conversation finished. It's a very strange thing, all the same."

It was fine enough the following afternoon when Quint, in his neat disguise climbed into his bath-chair and was pushed across the Common by Somerset, secure in his own artistic outfit which Ennie had procured for him. They came at length to the high ground at the back of the common from which they could see a mile or two in either direction, so that if anybody came along who looked in the least suspicious it would be easy enough for the four conspirators to separate and occupy other seats. At that moment, however, there was no one in sight, not even a solitary nursemaid. With a sigh of pleasure Quint lay back in his chair and surveyed the surrounding landscape.

"I feel a different man when I'm up here," he said. "Some of these days I'm going to get you to trundle me as fair as the Golf Links. The mere fact of seeing a man with a club in his hand would make me feel years younger. Lord, Ted, what a joke it would be if I went down to Sandmouth next month and entered for that gold cup—the one that Enderby hopes to win."

Somerset burst into ribald laughter.

"Oh, it wouldn't be so very difficult," Quint said. "I could get Ennie to give me another disguise and I could play in an assumed name just like I used to when I was studying at Edinburgh University and I didn't want the professors to know that I was wasting my time. I belonged to a little club called Lossie, and I used to play under the name of Edwards. I am still a member there, and if I won that cup under the name of Edwards I should be able to claim my third victory all right, and put Enderby's nose out of joint at the same time. I wonder if I could manage it."

"What an extraordinary chap you are," Somerset said, half in anger and half admiringly. "Of course, it is just the sort of mad idea that would appeal to you. And you think you could manage it, eh? My dear chap, half a dozen people at Sandmouth would recognize that swing of yours."

"Oh, they might," Quint admitted. "Or at any rate, they would say it was like my swing. But it would never occur to anybody to think that I should have the infernal cheek—here come the girls."

At that moment Margaret and Ennie appeared on the slope of the hill, and for the next hour or so all troubles were forgotten in the joy of that meeting. And by great good chance nobody came along to interrupt them.

"Well, how are you getting on?" Ennie asked, as she took her place by the side of Quint's chair. "Do you feel that you are making any progress?"

"I am afraid I don't," Quint said. "It's this inaction that maddens me. I told you last time I wrote all about our adventure at Barnes Place. If I hadn't been an absolute fool I should have seen to it that Kent did not get away until I had found out where those plans were hidden. It would have cost a few hundred pounds, but I daresay I could have borrowed that."

"Of course you could," Ennie agreed. "Or I could have done it for you. I had a letter from my father yesterday, a letter that made me feel rather ashamed of myself. It was full of affectionate messages, and, I could see how the dear old man misses me. I really have behaved very badly to him Michel. But he's on his way to England by this time, and when he comes I am going to tell him your story. There's one strange thing about it. The day following the arrival of his letter saying he was coming here I had a cable from him telling me that on no account was I to let anybody know that he was sailing for England. I am beginning to wonder if he knows anything about Mr. Claw. You see Claw asked me a lot of questions about my uncle, and he seemed to be very anxious to know whether my father was contemplating a voyage to England or not. Of course, I said nothing. I pretended that I thought it very unlikely. What does it mean, Michel?"

"Heaven only knows," Quint said, a little hopelessly. "If we could only struggle on and pray for the best, if I could only be doing something I should feel happier. All this hiding business doesn't suit my temperament. I want to be outside carrying on the fight as it should be carried on. And I want to come in contact with Kent again. By this time, of course, hundreds of people know that I am under a cloud—but I'm not going to worry about that. It's selfish. Tell me about the film."

"Oh, the film is going splendidly," Ennie cried. "The last scene in the first part which we re-took yesterday, is fine. We went down to the East End among the slums and the little shops, and we got just what I wanted. A background of sordid little tenement houses and miserable lodgings over dirty shops—a background that you couldn't improve upon. Then we had all the people in the neighbourhood standing by with their mouths open, and men and women looking on through dusty windows with most of the panes broken. If we'd paid a thousand pounds we could have got nothing better. A splendid curtain, Michel. You really must go and see it. Next Thursday night at the Palace Cinema in the High Street, which is only a quarter of a mile from where you are hiding."

"Dashed if I don't," Quint cried. "I suggested it to Ted, but he was in such a funk that I dropped the idea. Whether he likes it or not I'm going. It will be a change in a drab life like mine. Besides, I've never seen you on the film."

Then they commenced to talk more confidentially until the shadows began to fall and it was prudent to stay no longer. After that they separated, the two girls going off in the direction of the station and the bath-chair turning to the house on the river. They reached it presently without incident of any kind and after the involuntary host had been made comfortable, Quint and Somerset settled down over their own tea. They talked for some little time in the rather hopeless fashion that they affected when things were going none too well until there came a double knock on the front door that brought Quint to his feet.

"That's welcome anyway," he said. "The postman. I wonder what he's brought this time. Nothing for us surely. And there hasn't been a letter for the old gentleman ever since we came here. I'll go and see."

Quint came back a moment later with a foolscap envelope in his hand that seemed to be filled with a number of sheets of paper. It was addressed simply to Everard Geere Esq., and Quint turned it over idly in his hand with the curiosity of the man who has nothing whatever to do with his time.

"I wonder where this comes from," he said. "Hello, hello, what's this? Look here, Ted, 'John Claw and Co., 95a, Fenchurch Street, E.C.' This letter is from our friend, Claw."

Chapter XV

Written Evidence.

The fine afternoon had turned to wind and storm, and the volleying rain on the window-pane rendered the dining room of the house on the river a haven of rest not to be despised by fugitives from justice who might easily be in a far worse case. A cheerful fire burnt on the hearth, the dinner things had been washed and put away, and the two friends were seated on either side of a blazing fire talking over the events of the afternoon.

But Quint was giving signs of being uneasy and dissatisfied. Sooth to say, the confinement of the last week or two was getting on the nerves of a man who had been accustomed all his life to all sorts of vigorous outdoor exercise. True, a certain amount of progress had been made. They were evidently on the edge of moving events, but all this underhand diplomacy was repugnant to a man of action like Michel Quint.

He sat there smoking for quite a long time whilst Somerset had been looking after the old gentleman upstairs. The latter had come back at length with the usual good report.

"Do you know he is rather a wonderful patient," Somerset said. "He never seems to want anything besides his food and sleep. I never saw a man sleep like it in my life."

"And a very good thing for us, too," Quint said. "I am beginning to think he will never get any better. He may go on for months like he is now, and fade out gradually. On the whole, it's a lucky thing for the poor old chap that we turned up here. At any rate, he could never be better looked after. But never mind about him for the present. I am getting tired of all this sort of thing, Ted. Here we go on day after day with nothing happening, and I am getting as soft as putty."

"Well, you get out a good deal," Somerset said.

"Oh, I know all about that. But I want to be up and doing. I am weary of these four walls."

"For heaven's sake don't do anything rash," Somerset suggested. "Just try and realize how much worse things might have been. And we haven't been wasting our time either. We know all about Enderby and Claw, and what the understanding is between them and Kent. Surely that is so much to the good?"

"That is as it may be," Quint said. "But don't forget that Kent knows where we are, and that he is in a position to give us away at any moment. He would betray anybody for a five pound note. And you can bet your life that those two rascals are looking for him everywhere. I grant you that he may be hiding from them, but if they can find him, they will pay his price twice over before they let him speak. You may argue that he is not likely to speak. You may say that it would pay Kent best to come to an understanding with us. In that case he would be called as a witness, and not stand in the dock with the rest. Do you see what I mean? He will appear on our side for a consideration, and escape scot free with almost as much money as Enderby has promised him."

"Oh, I see all that," Somerset said. "I believe that Kent wandered off. I believe that he is still suffering from that blow on the head, and that his memory is gone. He might have wandered away to his hiding place, but you may depend upon it that we should have heard something before now if he had made up his mind to stick to the old gang. And you must be careful. I forgot to tell you that only this morning when I was out buying provisions a well-dressed man accosted me and asked how Everard Geere was. I was alert enough to pull myself together, and reply that Mr. Geere was fairly well and fortunately with that the stranger went on. I ascertained afterwards that he was the manager of the United Bank here, where Geere keeps his account. Now don't forget that within a week or so the time comes when Geere is in the habit of calling at his bank and collecting his monthly cheque. If he doesn't do it suspicion is sure to be aroused and something unpleasant might happen. You see what I mean?"

Quint saw it plainly enough, and evidently the news was disturbing to him. He glanced at the mantelpiece where the envelope that had arrived from Claw was standing.

"Yes, I hadn't thought of that," he said.

"Now look here, Ted, desperate diseases require desperate remedies. In the circumstances I propose to see what's inside that letter. Get a kettle of hot water and we'll steam it open. It's any odds that we find some useful information inside."

The kettle was procured, and a minute or two later the flap of the envelope yielded to the moisture. Inside were half-a-dozen sheets of long foolscap paper which contained a mass of figures and which was clearly a balance sheet. From the dates it was plainly evident that the transactions related extended over a period of at least twelve months. They were complicated figures and more or less unintelligible to the men who were studying them.

"I can't get much out of them," Quint said. "As far as I can judge, Claw is acting as agent for the poor old chap upstairs. It must be so, because here are dividends credited to one side of the account and payments out on the other. But so far as my limited knowledge tells me there is no balance to come to the owner of the shares."

"But isn't there a letter with it?" Somerset asked.

"Oh, there's a letter all right," Quint said. "A letter signed by John Claw himself. I'll read it."

It was not a long letter, brief and to the point, and couched in the jargon of the city. From what the two men bending over the letter could gather the figures related entirely to American securities, mines, and trusts, and all that sort of

thing. The communication went on to say that Claw and Co. regretted in the face of American labour troubles and a big fire in connection with some oil wells, that the balance on the year's trading due to Mr. Geere only amounted to a few shillings. The letter concluded with congratulations to the effect that Mr. Geere was in a position to make light of this loss, and that the firm of Claw and Co. hoped to have a better report to make at the end of six months.

"Well, there isn't much in that," Somerset said.

"Perhaps not," Quint replied. "But I shouldn't be surprised to find that John Claw is robbing his eccentric client wholesale. It's just the sort of thing they would do with a man who shuts himself up from the world and refuses to see anybody. There is a suggestion in the letter that Claw and Co. would be more satisfied if Mr. Geere would call upon them in the City, failing which Mr. Claw himself would come down to the house on the river.

"Ah, that's merely a suggestion," Somerset said. "They know perfectly well that poor old Geere is not in the least likely to drop in at Fenchurch Street."

"By Jove," he cried. "Wouldn't it be a joke to forge the old gentleman's signature, and get Claw down here? We could easily do it by copying the signature on one of the returned cheques."

An eager light leapt into Quint's eyes.

"Now that's not at all a bad idea of yours," he said. "It wants thinking out, and it may be useful. It's rather a strange thing, isn't it, that all the old gentleman's money should be in America? Hang me if I don't make a list of all those securities, and ask Ennie about them. When her father comes over here we can take him into our confidence, and if there is anything really wrong in Fenchurch Street, then we've got Claw at our mercy. And if we can lay him by the heels, then Enderby goes down as a matter of course. I'll write a note to Ennie and ask her to meet me behind the Common to-morrow afternoon. You can wheel me up there and leave us together for an hour or so. Even if we are watched there will be nothing unusual in the fact that Miss Barr has stopped to pass a word or two with her own uncle. Here, give me a sheet of paper and a pen and ink, and I'll make a list of those securities. Anything to be doing something, old chap."

Quint placed the copy carefully away in his pocket, and the conversation drifted to less personal things. It was a little later when Somerset was going round the house previous to retiring for the night when Quint picked up a copy of the *Times* and began to turn the pages over idly. He had gone through the news earlier in the day, and was now killing a moment or two with the advertisements on the first page. He ran his eye idly down the column devoted to births and deaths, with the off-chance of seeing some familiar name there, and then he proceeded to scan the agony column. Half-way down it was a brief advertisement that brought him to his feet and caused him to call out eagerly for Somerset.

"What's up now," the latter asked as he came into the dining room. "My dear chap, you are actually excited."

"I don't mind admitting it," Quint smiled. "We're getting on, my boy. The enemy is alarmed. Just cast your eye over that advertisement. If it isn't meant for you I'll eat it."

“Somerset. If Edward Somerset, of 5, Morton Place, now believed to be out of England, will send his address, or call at 95a, Fenchurch Street, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage. Claw and Co. as above.”

“Well, what do you think of that, my boy?” Quint asked excitedly. “Doesn’t it speak for itself? The hawks are scared. You might say it is a trap. I don’t believe anything of the sort. They want you to call upon them and make terms. If they didn’t they would never expect you to put your head in a noose like that.”

“What shall we do about it?” Somerset asked.

“Do nothing,” Quint snapped. “Just lie low and wait for the next move, it won’t be long.”

Chapter XVI

The Man at the Window.

There was something very heartening about the *Times* advertisement and the two men hiding in the house on the river were encouraged accordingly. They sat over the fire a long time after they had intended to go to bed, discussing this sign of weakness on the part of the enemy and drawing all sorts of more or less illogical deductions from the mass of figures which John Claw had sent to his client. But the advertisement in the *Times* was the thing that encouraged them most. Turn it over how they would, they could read in it signs of nothing but weakness. It seemed plain enough on the face of it that if those two wily scoundrels had found Kent and patched up their quarrel with him there would have been no occasion to spend money on newspaper advertising. And with Somerset fully acquainted with the fact that a warrant was out for his arrest they would never be simple enough to believe that Somerset would step into so clumsy a lure. No, Kent was either out of his mind still or he had come to the conclusion that it would pay him better in the long run to keep out of the way of his late accomplices.

“What we have to do now,” Quint said, “is to find Kent. No doubt he is hiding somewhere in the East End, preparing his plans, or he is still in the same mental condition as he was when he was here. It doesn’t much matter either way, so long as he keeps clear of Fenchurch Street. And we’ve got to find him, Ted, we’ve got to find him. How on earth we are going to do it goodness only knows, but it must be done. Perhaps Ennie can help us, or even Margaret. Still, we can do nothing till after I have seen Ennie to-morrow. You might go as far as the pillar box and post that letter.”

On the off-chance of Ennie Barr being at leisure the following afternoon Somerset got out the bath-chair and pushed his friend up to the high ground behind the common. It was a fine, warm afternoon just the sort of day that an invalid would bask in the sunshine, and Somerset was quite content to leave his friend there whilst he went down to the shops to procure certain goods that he and Quint were in need of.

"I shall be quite all right here," Quint said. "Don't you worry about me, old chap. Come back in about an hour, by which time I ought to be ready for you. I should like to smoke a cigarette, but I suppose that wouldn't be quite safe."

Without taking the hint, Somerset went his way, leaving Quint to his own devices. It was about a quarter of an hour later before a slender figure loomed over the brow of the hill and Ennie made her appearance. There was no one in sight so that she was free to pause by the bath-chair and hold out her hand to Quint.

"Ah, it is good to see you again, Ennie," he said. "You have no idea how deadly monotonous it is in that little house on the river. We seem to drift on day after day with nothing done, and I am getting utterly weary of it. But there, I ought not to grumble. With a helper like you—look here Ennie. There's nobody in sight, don't you think you might—"

Ennie looked swiftly around her, then bent down suddenly and touched Quint's lips with her own.

"There," she laughed. "And now will you please behave yourself and discuss business. Don't forget that I am an American girl who understands all that sort of thing. My father used to tell me about his affairs and he said that I should have made a splendid partner. And besides, you didn't ask me to come here this afternoon for the mere sake of seeing me."

"Well, you can put it that way if you like," Quint said. "But I have been looking forward all the morning to the mere chance of seeing you. Now tell me how things are going. Are Enderby and Claw happier?"

"No, indeed they're not," Ennie said. "I see one or other of them most days and I am sure that there is something seriously wrong. I never saw two men so utterly miserable."

"Ah, that's good hearing," Quint said. "In that case it's pretty certain that they have seen nothing of Kent. If they had then they'd be happy enough. He's still wandering about in a fog, or he's got back to his hiding place in the East End. People do that sort of thing I'm told just as a wounded dog creeps back to his lair. It seems to me that we are pretty safe so far as Kent is concerned, and I begin to think he was bluffing when he told Enderby that night at Barnes Place that he knew where we were hiding. So we'll put him on one side for the moment. And now I'll come to the reason why I am so anxious to see you to-day. Last night, to our great astonishment, a letter was delivered at the house on the river addressed to Mr. Geere. I happened to turn it over quite casually and, to my amazement saw on the flap of the envelope a medallion with the name of Claw and Co., Fenchurch Street."

"That must have astonished you," Ennie said.

"Well, I ask you? Here was the man we had more cause to fear than anybody in the world actually in communication with the individual in whose house we are hiding. Of course, if Claw had known that, he would never have written the letter. But there you are; here's Claw as Geere's correspondent."

"Have you got the letter with you?" Ennie asked eagerly. "Did you open it by any chance?"

"Oh, we opened it all right," Quint grinned. "We steamed it open with a kettle. It wasn't exactly the right thing to do, but in the circumstances I make no apology."

"And what did you find?" Ennie asked.

“Well, I discovered that Claw is acting as Mr. Geere’s agent and transacting all his business. He evidently collects dividends and that sort of thing. But what struck me most strangely in the letter was the fact that there was no money to come. There were excuses about fires in oil wells and labour troubles. But no money. So, being a little prejudiced perhaps, I came to the conclusion that Claw is robbing the old gentleman.”

“Did you notice what the securities were?” Ennie asked.

“I saw they were all American,” Quint replied. “However, I made a list of them which I have in my pocket at the present moment. My dear girl, if you are as good a business woman as you say, perhaps some of them will be familiar to you.”

With that Quint handed the list over to his companion and she read it with knitted brows.

“This is very extraordinary, Michel,” she said. “And I am quite sure you are right. These are nearly all oil and steel shares and it so happens that my father is interested in every one of them. Unless I am greatly mistaken, my unfortunate uncle invested in the whole group at my father’s suggestion. And I am quite certain that there have been no labour troubles in America for the last year. And as to fires in the oilfields, rubbish! That was all very well in the old days, but those sort of things rarely happen now. You are quite right Michel. Mr. Claw has taken advantage of my poor uncle’s state of mind and is robbing him audaciously. But I can put that all right when my father comes over. It will only be a day or two now.”

“As soon as that?” Quint asked eagerly.

“Well—yes. I didn’t tell you exactly the truth yesterday when I said I had asked my father to come over. As a matter of fact, I sent him a marconigram. I was so terribly anxious about you and poor Ted that I couldn’t rest until I had communicated with America. Once my father is here you will see that things will take a different course altogether.”

“And you are quite sure your father won’t mind?” Quint asked, anxiously. “Won’t he be disgusted to discover the relationship between us? Here are you, the heiress to all those millions, carrying on with a sort of athletic pauper who might be arrested at any moment.”

Ennie laughed wholeheartedly.

“Oh, dad’s a darling!” she said. “I’ve had my own way all my life, and when he knows the truth and realizes that my happiness is at stake he will make no objection. But we won’t go into that now, Michel. I dare say you are wondering how it is that Everard Geere has most of his money invested in America. Let me tell you. Many years ago Everard Geere went to America on a combined business and pleasure trip, and took his sister with him. She was at least twenty years younger than he, and when she met my father they fell over head and ears in love with one another, and were married. They were not very rich then, but things were going well, and before long my father was one of the richest men in the West. At his advice, Mr. Geere invested most of his money in the very securities set out on that list of yours, and then he went back home to be married. Shortly after that came the dreadful tragedy on the Thames which changed the poor man’s whole life. From that moment he shut himself up at home and refused to see anybody. He used to write to my father occasionally, but that stopped three years ago when there was something in the nature of a silly quarrel, and Mr. Geere placed his

affairs in the hands of an agent in London. You can see now a who the agent was. In the circumstances we can do nothing till my father arrives. But only have a little patience, Michel, and I am sure everything will be well."

"Indeed, I hope so," Quint said moodily. "But you can't understand what all this idling means to me. If I could only get a game of golf again."

"Well, why not?" Ennie laughed. "I can find you another disguise. A shabby suit of tweeds with a red wig and a straggling beard and moustache. A pad or two in your cheeks and you will be changed beyond recognition. I should love to come with you. It would be a glorious joke. You could run down to Sandmouth or something like that and come back without anyone being any the wiser. I can send you anything you want."

"I wish you would," Quint said, wistfully. "If I don't get a day or two's good exercise I shall break out into some madness, and the whole thing will be ruined."

"Now, you must promise me not to do anything of the sort," Ennie smiled. "Why don't you go to some place of amusement? What about that film I spoke of? Get Ted Somerset to wheel you as far as the cinema in High Street, where the first instalment of the series is running all the week. Why shouldn't you go to-morrow afternoon? I am most anxious for you to to see it, because I believe it is the best thing I have ever done."

"I'll go," Quint said, with decision. "I'll go to-morrow afternoon. And now, as I can see my broken down man coming along up the hill, you had better be going."

Somerset was not in the least anxious to carry out the programme for the following afternoon that Quint and Ennie had arranged between them. But as he was always more or less wax in the hands of his friend he made no demur, and three o'clock the following afternoon saw the chair pulled up before the cinema, and Quint, in the guise of a broken-down invalid, creeping into his seat. They sat there for half-an-hour or more watching a dull so-called, humorous film till presently with a flourish, the first instalment of the *Lady Burglar* flashed on the screen. They were interested enough now, for here was Ennie, a central figure, going through various hairbreadth escapes and winning triumphantly by sheer audacity. Here was the very scene in the library at Barnes Place where the safe had been burgled at the very moment that Quint was hiding behind the window curtains.

And so it went on for the best part of half-an-hour until there appeared an episode in a dreary street in the East End where the lady burglar's taxi-cab was held up by the police, and she herself escaped by a daring bit of strategy. It was just the scene she had described to Quint, with its mean buildings and the sordid inhabitants looking on, not realizing that they were watching a slice taken from a film drama. Here was a dilapidated public house and a man with a bandage round his head looking out of a window with the keenest interest in his eyes. Then Quint gripped Somerset's shoulder and whispered eagerly into his ear.

"Look at that man," he said—"the man leaning out of the window? Don't you recognize the red hair and the foxy eyes?"

Somerset almost jumped from his seat.

"Kent," he murmured, breathlessly. "Kent beyond the shadow of a doubt. But for you I might have missed it."

Chapter XVII

Rogues in Council.

At the very moment when Quint and Somerset were gazing in fascinated astonishment at the face of Kent looking out of the public-house window, fate was taking a hand at the game only a few miles away. In his office in Fenchurch Street, Claw sat immersed in the contemplation of a mass of figures which he had taken from his private safe and was now puzzling over with a knitted brow and an almost painful compression of his thick lips. The big bald head was bowed down and the heavy crimson cheeks were not quite as florid as usual. If ever there was a man who was sore afraid it was John Claw at that moment. The mere contemplation of the figures before him caused him to start and tremble at every passing sound.

Outside in the clerk's office there was every suggestion of bustle and prosperity. People came and went, but Claw had given strict orders that he was not to be interrupted for the next hour. He gazed almost hopelessly round the luxuriously-furnished office before he went back to his figures again. He felt half-inclined to lock the door, to deny himself to everybody, and when the time for closing came slink off to his chambers and there seclude himself from the world. But that was impossible. There were people to see and directions to be given before he could turn his back upon the city and seek the seclusion of his rooms.

The more Claw contemplated the figures before him the worse did the situation appear. He pushed the papers away from him presently with a hopeless gesture and lighted a cigarette.

"What a fool I ever was to touch it," he murmured to himself. "I was doing well enough a few years ago up to the time when those people of New York asked me to take over Everard Geere's affairs. I ought to have waited a bit; I ought not to have launched out as I did. And what does all this mean, these big offices and this large staff of clerks? It means that I have to struggle every week-end to pay my men, and where the rent is coming from in a fortnight's time heaven only knows. And yet if I could tide over the next three months I am a made man. That invention of Somerset's alone means a huge fortune if I had only the capital to develop it. It would take time, of course, and it's time that's going to beat me. I wonder if I could get hold of those securities of Geere's. I have had all the interest for the last twelve months, but that is not sufficient. I want the securities to dispose of. And I wonder if I went down to see him if he would give me a Power of Attorney to deal with all his stock. That's the only way I can see out of it. Or perhaps a neat little forgery. Yes—that's the idea, and needs must when the devil drives."

These were the thoughts that were racing through Claw's brain as he sat at his desk smoking his cigarette and gazing into vacancy. He had made up his mind now that nothing should stand between him and the fortune that lay behind Somerset's wonderful invention and the more he thought of the forgery of Geere's signature the better he liked the idea. Geere was utterly alone in the world—a man

without friends or even acquaintances, and it was long odds that he would never find out the fraud so long as he received his interest regularly. It was the only way, too, out of a desperate situation, for Claw was beginning to find other people were talking, and if once his credit in the City was shaken, the ruin indeed lay in front of him. It was just when he had come to this decision and had commenced to plot out the forgery in his mind that a clerk came in with a message.

"Mr. Enderby downstairs to see you, sir," he said.

"Tell him I can't see him," Claw said. "Tell him to go to—I mean, tell him I'm too busy to see anybody."

"But, sir," the clerk expostulated. "Mr. Enderby says he must see you on the most important business. He says he has some information that cannot wait."

Claw looked up with a scowl. He was on the point of dismissing his clerk abruptly when a sudden idea came to him. Perhaps Enderby had found out something in connection with the missing Kent and just for the moment in the thick of his troubles Claw had forgotten Kent entirely. If Enderby had got on the track of the absconding man then it might be as well to see Enderby now.

"Show him up at once," he commanded. "And I am not to be interrupted till he is gone. If anybody else calls you had better say I am not in the office. I shall be too busy between now and closing time to see any clients."

A minute later Enderby came in. He passed the clerk with his usual arrogant assumption of superiority and contempt that so made him a marked man with all subordinates wherever he went, but directly the door was closed his mask dropped and the fear in his eyes was as marked as that in Claw's.

"I had to come," he said huskily. "I put it off as long as possible, but now I can wait no longer."

The stronger man of the two looked at his companion under his brows with absolute contempt.

"The old story," he said. "Money, I suppose. Well you've come to the wrong shop. You can't get blood from a stone, but if a ten pound note is any use to you—"

"Ten pound note," Enderby echoed furiously. "I suppose that is your idea of a joke. I want a thousand, and I must have it by the middle of next week. I am giving you as much notice as possible because I know you are rather pushed yourself."

"Oh, you do, do you?" Claw sneered. "Well, it's knowledge that will be common enough in the city in the next few days, unless something like a miracle happens. Why should I disguise it any longer. I am as hard up as you are. I couldn't find a hundred if my salvation depended upon it. I shall just be able to pay the staff on Saturday, and I couldn't do that if my bank manager hadn't proved amiable. Now look here, Enderby, we'd better understand one another. When I took this business over five years ago I hadn't a penny. I thought I could bluff it through because the late owner had really got a fine thing here, only he had so terribly neglected it. I took on his offices and his staff to give people a good impression, and I have been struggling ever since. Nobody knew it, and I was within an ace of pulling the whole thing around. Then I must needs embark on a speculation which turned out disastrously, and I have been holding on by the skin of my teeth ever since. When you brought the cinema proposition to me I began to see my way through. And we should have got through too, if Kent had not made a fool of himself. I had arranged for him to have that money paid over in Hamburg, but he

made up his mind because he didn't get it at once that I was going to play him false. I suppose that is why he came back again."

"And ruined the whole thing," Enderby said.

"Oh, did he? It seems to me that you ruined the whole thing. If you had waited the other night till I turned up I could have satisfied Kent, but the mischief is done now and it's no use crying over spilt milk. We must make the best of it."

"But I tell you I am ruined," Enderby cried. "I must have some money. There's hardly anything in Barnes Place that is paid for. There are two or three writs out, and I might have an execution in there at any moment. We must find Kent; he must be somewhere, hiding himself. The question is where has he got to?"

"Have you any idea?" Claw asked. "I haven't."

"He was in your employ. He did all the dirty work for you both inside the office and out. Oh, come, you must have some sort of a notion as to his whereabouts."

"Very little," Claw said. "When he came to me he was in very low water. I believe he lodged in some public-house down east, but where, I haven't the faintest notion."

"Well, we must find the man," Enderby went on. "And we must keep our promise. If he will hand those drawings over to us then we ought to pull through. I have talked about them to my fellow directors and they are deeply impressed. You see, there's money enough in the 'Open Road Cinema Company,' but I can't touch it because I am merely one of the Board. But the Chairman told me that if he could have a demonstration he would support an advance of ten thousand pounds provided that he was satisfied. Don't you think we might get hold of Somerset and come to some arrangements with him. Say an equal division of the profits."

Claw smiled sourly.

"I had thought of that," he said. "In fact, I put an advertisement in the agony column of the 'Times' telling Somerset that he would hear something to his advantage, if he applied to me here. But no response of course. You may depend upon it that those chaps are not idle. At any rate, I am sure Quint isn't. They have powerful friends somewhere who are hiding them, and at any moment we may get a nasty shock."

"But don't forget that Kent has the plans," Enderby said. "We must find him. Isn't it possible that one of your office boys or some subordinate knows where Kent lives? If we could square him and get hold of the plans, then I should feel more or less safe. As to the money, I suppose it must wait. But I feel like a man walking on the edge of a razor."

Before Claw could reply there came a knock at the door, and a clerk entered with a card in his hand.

"Very sorry, sir," he said. "But this gentleman says he must see you. I told him—"

Claw snatched the card from the clerk's hand with a strange look on his face as he read the name. He seemed to be holding himself in with a powerful effort.

"Tell the gentleman I can't possibly see him this afternoon," he said. "I am getting out some figures which must go by this post. But tell him he can fix his own time to-morrow. Go and ask if that will do for him."

There was a dead silence in the office for a minute or two before the clerk returned. Even Enderby, engrossed as he was in his own troubles, could see that

there was something seriously wrong. But he refrained from asking a question till the clerk appeared again with his message.

“The gentleman says he is going out of town to-morrow, as far as Sandmouth for a week-end’s golf. He will be very pleased to see you at eleven o’clock on Tuesday morning if that will suit.”

It seemed to Enderby that his fellow conspirator heaved a deep sigh of relief and that the look of intense anxiety on his face grew less as the clerk vanished with a little nod from Claw to the effect that the appointment was confirmed.

“What is it?” Enderby asked. “What has happened now?”

By way of reply, Claw pushed the card across the table and Enderby read the name on it.

“Oh, is this Mr. James P. Barr, the American millionaire?” he asked. “The father of the girl who is our leading lady in the ‘Open Road’ company. If so, I congratulate you.”

“Oh, you do, do you,” Claw snarled. “You wouldn’t if you knew everything. Look here Enderby, this is the very worst thing that could possibly happen. The last man I want to see in the world is James Barr. Perhaps I had better tell you why. Mr. James Barr has a brother-in-law living not very far from you, an eccentric sort of individual who is more or less out of his mind. But he’s quite a rich man because he invested most of his money some years ago in gilt-edged American concerns, most of which are under Barr’s management. But this Everard Geere had some sort of quarrel with his brother-in-law and took the management of his property into his own hands. In other words, I was appointed as agent, or at least the late head of my firm was. The revenues amounted to some thousands a year, and they all went through my hands. You see Geere lives quite alone and never goes out of the house. He never comes near me, and he accepts my balance sheets implicitly. Now can you see what happened?”

“You borrowed his money, I suppose?”

“Better say stole it,” Claw said, brutally. “In fact, I stole every penny of it. I wrote him all sorts of lies. He has reports signed by me which will land me in jail if ever they come into Barr’s hands. And Barr is certain to go down to Barnes and see his relative. Look here, we’ve got from now until Tuesday morning to get out of this mess. If you can suggest anything I shall be profoundly grateful.”

“The first thing is to find Kent,” Enderby said.

“Yes, let’s find Kent by all means, and the sooner the better. I’ll make enquiries at once, and you had better come back here about seven o’clock this evening. Upon my word it’s almost a pity that you didn’t kill that rascal when you were about it.”

Chapter XVIII

The Search.

No sooner was the film at an end than Quint and his companion left the cinema and made their way back to the house on the river. By great good chance they had made a discovery which was likely to lead to important results provided that they acted without delay. They had their dinner presently and once the things were cleared away and the old gentleman upstairs religiously attended to, they sat down with their pipes to discuss the situation.

“Now what’s the next thing to be done?” Somerset asked.

“Well, I think that’s obvious,” Quint said. “I don’t know whether you studied the film in detail, but I did.”

“I was too utterly astonished,” Somerset confessed. “When I saw Kent looking out of that public-house window you could have knocked me down with a feather.”

“Yes, I thought you seemed to be a little bit dumbfounded.” Quint smiled. “But you see I am used to taking advantage of emergencies like this. On the football field one has to think quickly. You didn’t notice for instance, that public-house was called the Crow and Gate, and that the proprietor’s name was Walter Evins. No, I see you didn’t but I did, and that’s so much to the good. It’s practically impossible that there can be two Crows and Gates kept by men called Evins in the East End, a fact that narrows our search. What I suggest is that to-morrow morning you go round to the free library and look up the address of this man Evins in the London Directory. When you have found it, then we’re on the right track. It’s fairly obvious that Kent is hiding in that public-house. The fact that he is looking out of an upstairs window practically proves it. If everything turns out as I expect it will then we’ll go down east to-morrow night and interview Kent. What’s that? Rather dangerous? No, I don’t think so. We can make some sort of a change in our disguises, especially as Ennie is going to send me something that I can go golfing in and—”

“You’re never going on with that mad idea,” Somerset protested.

“Indeed, I am, my boy. I shall get softening of the brain if I stay here much longer. I must have a day’s exercise. But never mind that for the moment.”

“But I do mind it,” Somerset said. “That audacity of yours frightens me. And you never told me what was in that letter you wrote to the Secretary of the Sandmouth Golf Club a day or two ago.”

“Oh, that was to enter the name of Edwards from Lossie for the Gold Cup,” Quint said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. “It’s played for on Saturday, and I thought I might have a chance of getting even with Enderby. If I don’t turn up I shall be scratched, but I couldn’t resist the temptation of sending my name in. What a lark it would be!”

“Oh, you are absolutely hopeless,” Somerset said. “But hadn’t we better keep to the case in point? Would it be safe for both of us to leave the house to-morrow night? We might be away till morning, and if anything happened to the old gentleman—”

“Nothing will happen to the old gentleman,” Quint said. “But to make assurance doubly sure I’ll give him a sleeping draught which you can get made up at a local chemist’s. This won’t do him the slightest harm, and will keep him safe till the morning. And now let’s go to bed.”

It was about six o’clock the following evening when the two men set out on their errand. They had fed their patient and administered the sleeping draught which

took almost immediate effect, and after that, with a varied disguise which had come to hand from Ennie during the day, made their way gaily enough in the direction of the station. It was no blind errand they were going on either, because a search in the pages of the London Directory had given them the address they needed. Apparently there was only one "Crow and Gate" in the East End of London, kept by a man named Evins, and this was situated in Goldfinch Lane, Wapping. By eight o'clock they emerged from the district railway at Mark Lane, and, travelling by way of the Mint and the Tower, came at length to the somewhat unsavoury thoroughfare of which they were in search. It was a decidedly shady neighbourhood, full of mean little tenement houses and dingy beer shops, where the scum of the population had apparently collected. It was just as well perhaps that their disguises more or less fitted the place and Quint, for one, did not fail to notice that hereabouts the policemen hunted in couples. They came presently opposite the "Crow and Gate," a double fronted public-house a little more pretentious than its neighbours, with a tap room on one side, and what appeared to be the private bar on the other. Quint, pushing eagerly in front, opened the door of the private bar and looked in. Under the blazing electrics he could see a score or so of men lounging at the bar or seated drinking at little iron-topped tables. In the course of his impetuous career Quint had been in some strange places in his time, but never in a more sinister atmosphere than this. He was conscious of the suspicious glances turned in his direction, and felt the sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that his disguise was not inappropriate to the company. There was a palpable pause as he and Somerset entered the bar, and asked for something to drink. Then they sat down at one of the little tables, and gradually their presence seemed to be forgotten.

"What's the next move," Somerset whispered. "These chaps are decidedly hostile to us, and, I don't much like the look of the landlord. If you ask him anything about Kent, I am sure it will lead to trouble. What are you going to do?"

Quint was fain to confess that he was at the end of his tether. He quite saw the force of Somerset's argument, and, for a few minutes he sat there silently sipping the vile stuff which the landlord had surlily placed before him.

"Well you have me there, old chap," he said. "It would be a mistake to ask after Kent, more especially as he probably passes here under another name, and, moreover, this is just the sort of house where the landlord would hide fugitives from justice for a consideration. We'll wait for half an hour or so on the off chance of Kent himself turning up. Just sit down and pretend to take no notice, and luck may come our way after all."

It did come presently, but not in the way that Quint had expected. It took the form of a weedy youth, obviously in a suit of some sportsman's cast off clothes, who ordered a pot of beer, and came lounging across the bar with it in his hand in the direction of the next table to which Quint was sitting.

"Hello, Cogger," he whispered.

The nomad addressed as Cogger turned round and walked towards the table.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked.

"Then you don't remember me?" Quint asked. "Oh, perhaps you wouldn't, but I've seen you caddying many a time at Mid-Surrey. Generally carried for Mr. Quint, didn't you?"

“Well, I did, if you must know,” Cogger muttered. “An’ a rare fine gentleman ‘e was. The best player I ever carried for an’ sorry I am to ‘ear as ‘e’s got into trouble.”

“Would you like to help him?” Quint asked.

“Like to ‘elp ‘im? Should I like to drink this pot o’ beer at a go? Look ‘ere, no larks, guv’nor. He was a good friend to me, ‘e was, and if I thought as you’ve got anything agin ‘im, I’d raise all these boys on you, an’ you’d find yourself drownin’ in the canal basin afore you could think what your proper name was.”

“Cogger,” Quint whispered earnestly. “I’m one of Mr. Quint’s best friends. He’s got into trouble by no fault of his own, and I am here to help him out a bit. I can’t tell you who I am, and it doesn’t matter anyway. But I believe there’s a man staying in this public-house who could tell us enough to save Mr. Quint’s reputation. And you wouldn’t find him ungrateful.”

“And you won’t find me ungrateful, neither, if that’s the truth,” Cogger said. “Always treated me like a human being, ‘e did, an’ many a ‘arfcrown ‘e’s give me. You’re a rum-lookin’ lot, you are, but you sounds like a gentleman all the same. But you’ve got to prove it. Now tell me the nime o’ the cove wot you’re after.”

“Well, I don’t know what name he calls himself by down here,” Quint said. “But I know he’s hiding upstairs and in the place where he comes from he’s called Kent.”

Cogger’s face lighted up cheerfully.

“That’s right,” he said. “I knows the man you mean. Lor’ bless yer, I knows all the blokes wot comes ‘idin down ‘ere. ‘Ad a bash over the ‘ead, an’ comes back ‘ere a night or two ago, dotty like. But ‘e’s better now.”

“Can’t you take us to him?” Quint asked.

“I don’t want my bally neck broke,” Cogger said significantly. “But I ‘as the run o’ this ‘ouse, an’ I knows where to find ‘im. You wait ‘ere an’ I’ll bring ‘im down.”

Quint smiled as he turned to his companion.

“What a bit of rare good luck,” he said, “that I should hit upon my old caddie like this. We’re going to win through, old chap. Sit tight and say nothing.”

A moment or two later and Kent lounged into the bar. Cogger, it seemed, had disappeared, which in the circumstances might have been prudent. As Kent glanced about him Quint held up a forefinger and with that Kent came towards them.

“Sit down,” Quint whispered. “Sit down.”

“Oh, all right,” Kent muttered. “I don’t know who you are, but if there’s any money in this thing—”

His voice suddenly trailed off as two newcomers entered the bar. They both wore shabby bowlers and overcoats, with their collars turned up, but as Quint followed Kent’s gaze he saw enough to convince him who they were.

“Enderby and Claw,” he whispered. “Sit tight.”

Chapter XIX

A Fight for Freedom.

One glance at those two bitter enemies of his was sufficient to convince Quint that they were here on the same errand that had brought him down to Wapping. By some means or other they had got on the track of Kent, probably through an employee of Claw's and had at once set out to look for him. They were not disguised, as were Quint and Somerset, but from somewhere they had procured a couple of rough coats and tweed caps, in which they evidently hoped to pass for members of the working classes. Just for a moment Quint hesitated, but secure in his own disguise and that of Somerset, it seemed to him that with a little audacity he would be master of the situation. So far, at any rate, Claw and his companion had not noticed the advent of Kent, so that it was not very difficult for Quint to pull him down in a chair at the table where he was seated, and interpose himself between Kent and the others. Once this was done Quint began to feel easier in his mind.

He could see that Kent was still far from himself. The man was pale and ghastly and evidently exhausted by the sheer effort of walking downstairs. There was, too, a certain vacant look in his eyes, and, when he spoke, his words seemed to hang together as if they were uttered with the greatest difficulty.

"What do you want with me?" he asked. "I don't know you. Why did you send for me? Cogger said that I was wanted down-stairs, and I came, but I have done no harm."

He spoke the last few words in a whining sort of way that would have been contemptible enough had not there been something pathetic about it. The man was obviously frightened to death, and yet with it all he had sufficient native cunning left to be suspicious, and to feel his way up to what was coming.

"Oh, don't talk nonsense," Quint said. "You know who we are perfectly well."

"Never saw either of you in my life," Kent muttered.

"How can he recognize us?" Somerset suggested.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten," Quint laughed. "Look here, Kent my name is Quint and this is my friend, Mr. Somerset."

"Eh?" Kent said stupidly.

By dint of dwelling on the point Quint at length convinced Kent that he was speaking the truth. The latter was a long time grasping the fact, but as he did so, the vacant look left his eyes, and he almost grovelled before the others.

"I'm only a poor man," he whined. "And I've been badly treated. Never was a man worse treated than I have been. I ought to be well off. I ought to be on my way to America at the present moment with five hundred pounds in my pocket. With that on the other side I could do anything. Because I am no fool."

"Ah, we know that," Quint said grimly. "More knave than fool I take it. Now listen to me, Kent. Are you going to help us or not? We know all about that little conspiracy, and we know why you are not on your way to America now with a pocket full of money. You backed the wrong horse, my friend. If you had come to us, and told us what those two rascals, Claw and Enderby, were up to, it would have paid you far better in the long run."

Kent's eyes were clear enough now. He looked like showing fight with his back to the wall. He glanced round the crowded bar as if looking for some friend who would rid him of these two troublesome opponents. The wish to harm them was so

plainly written in his eyes that Quint laid a hand upon his arm and held him down on his chair with a grip of steel.

“Now, none of that, Kent,” he said. “None of that. We have friends here as well as you. And we know all about it. We know that your employers sent you away to the Continent with no intention whatever of paying you the promised money. They would have done so probably, had they had it, but both those rascals are at the end of their tether. They never meant to pay you.”

Kent gave a queer sort of chuckle.

“Oh, I know that now,” he said. “But I was equal to them. You’ve got to be up pretty early in the morning to get the better of me. Never mind how I did it, but I bested them.”

He chuckled again and gave Quint a glance of the utmost cunning. Evidently he was not going to speak until he had felt that it was worth his while to do so.

“Yes, but you see, we do happen to know,” Quint said smoothly. “You fooled Enderby by giving him a lot of rubbish instead of Mr. Somerset’s drawings, and you told him so the other night at Barnes Place when he tried to kill you with a ruler. Where do you suppose we found you before we took you to that house on the river? We almost carried you there and by way of repaying us for all our kindness you ran away and left us to think the worst. But you can’t get away from us, Kent, you can’t, indeed.”

Kent looked as if he began to think so. He chuckled no longer and the cunning light died out of his eyes.

“Where did you find all this out?” he gasped.

“Never mind for the present.” Quint went on. “We know you have the original drawings and we know how those two ruffians fooled you. But tell me, how did you know that we were hiding at the little house on the river?”

“I didn’t know,” the mystified Kent said.

“You told Enderby you did the other night,” Quint persisted. “Don’t you remember it?”

Kent seemed to ponder the matter for a minute or two.

“Come to think of it,” he said, “I believe I did tell Enderby that. But it was all bluff, you know. Now look here, Mr. Quint. You evidently know everything. I am prepared to make a bargain with you. I ain’t ungrateful, though you may not believe it. It was very good of you gentlemen to take me to your hiding place, and I should never have left there if I had been quite in my own mind. That blow on the head affects me still. There are times when I don’t know what I am doing. I suppose I was like that when I left your house. I remember telling myself that there was something I had to find, something I had hidden that was of the greatest importance to me.”

“Ah, Mr. Somerset’s drawings,” Quint suggested drily.

“Well, perhaps so,” Kent said guardedly, “and perhaps not. I know there was something urging me to come down here and that’s why I gave you the slip. The fact of the matter is I was born in this house. My father used to keep it until he got into trouble and they put him away for five years. Then I went into the city as a clerk and I have been in the habit of coming down here at intervals ever since. You see, the present landlord is a relation of mine, and when I told him I was in trouble he offered to hide me. Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?”

"You can give us those drawings," Quint said promptly.

Kent shook his head.

"Ah, not so fast as all that," he said. "I want money and I want it badly. Give me the five hundred pounds that Enderby promised me and the drawings are yours to-morrow. But I am not going to trust anybody as far as that. Can you find the money? I don't believe you can."

Quint hesitated before he replied. Kent's suggestion was so opposite that Quint was nonplussed for the moment.

"Not at present," he said frankly. "Look here, Kent. As you know, we are quite safe where we are, and I am not without friends. Come along with us back to the house on the river and stay with us as our guest till I can raise the money. I would give five hundred pounds cheerfully to have those drawing in my possession, because, so long as they are with us, Enderby and Claw can do nothing. I don't want to have to make a bargain with those rascals if I can help it, but if the worst comes to the worst we can compromise with them, and I shall be able to appear before the world again as I used to. What do you say?"

"Done," Kent cried. "And double done."

In the excitement of the moment he would have jumped to his feet had not Quint held him in his place.

"Sit down, you fool," he whispered. "Sit down. Look across to the corner yonder. Look cautiously and tell me who you see sitting there."

"Good God," Kent whispered. "Enderby and Claw."

"Yes, precisely. They have followed you down here, the same as we have, only we were lucky enough to be a few minutes ahead. Is there no way of getting rid of them?"

Kent showed his teeth in a vicious grin.

"Get rid of 'em," he snarled. "Lord, yes. Here's Cogger. Give him a sign that we want him."

Cogger lounged across the bar and Kent whispered a few words in his ear. Then the nomad crossed over to the landlord and jerked his thumb over his right shoulder in the direction of the table where Enderby and Claw were seated. Then followed a series of remarkable happenings. Almost immediately a dispute arose in the far corner of the room, and at the same time a powerful looking ruffian reeled across the bar and nearly upset the table behind which Kent's foes were seated. Before Enderby could say a word the glass in front of him was snatched from the table and the contents dashed violently into his face. A second later and the whole bar was in an uproar. The whole thing was done as if by magic, and so sudden and unexpected was it that the two men seated at the table were carried off their legs and hustled outside none to gently. There they beat a rapid retreat, followed by a threat from the landlord as to what was likely to happen to them if ever they dared to appear in his bar again.

"That was rather neatly worked," Quint laughed. "How did you manage it, Kent?"

"Oh, that's easily done," Kent said. "I gave the landlord to understand that those two chaps were police spies, and the atmosphere of the 'Crow and Gate' ain't good for coppers's narks. Oh, they're far away by this time. Now, as we've got rid of 'em, Mr. Quint, what do you want me to do?"

“I want you to come with us,” Quint said. “I want you to stay at the house by the river, where we can give you everything that you need until we have had time to turn round. With any luck I can get that money from my friends and pay it over to you. You’ve got nothing to be afraid of. If there are any proceedings, then you can come forward and give evidence on our behalf. Of course, I could go to Enderby to-morrow and defy him. I could tell him that you had made a full confession to me and that I know where to put my hands upon you to give evidence. But that’s not good enough for Mr. Somerset and myself. We want the whole thing out in public in our own way and in our own good time. Hundreds of people know by this time that I am a fugitive from justice and I am not going to be satisfied until I am vindicated in an open court. Now please yourself as to whether you come or not.”

Kent thought it over a minute or two.

“I’ll come,” he said. “You can count on me.”

Chapter XX

The Gold Cup.

All the same, Quint was not trusting Kent an inch further than he could see him. He knew perfectly well that that slim individual would be ready to betray him to-morrow where it was to his advantage to do so. But the promise of five hundred pounds and free board and lodging until Kent was ready to cross the Atlantic would be a sufficient inducement to keep him loyal. So presently they went off together in a taxi and arrived in due course, quite unobserved, at the house on the river. There Kent was given a good supper and something to drink, after which he was escorted to the bedroom which he had previously occupied there. Once he was safe Quint and Somerset discussed the events of the evening over a cigarette downstairs in the dining-room.

“I don’t quite follow what’s in your mind,” Somerset said. “Of course, I see the advantage of having that chap under this roof again, but where on earth are we to get any money from?”

“Ah, there I am as much in the dark as you are,” Quint said, “but we must find it.”

“Oh, another thing,” Somerset said. “You never mentioned those drawings. Now it’s obvious that Kent has them somewhere, and if I was to hazard a guess I should say that they were hidden somewhere at the ‘Crow and Gate.’ Why didn’t you ask Kent the question and get him to bring them along with him to-night?”

“Oh, don’t be an ass, man,” Quint cried. “He would have been suspicious immediately. Don’t you understand that sort of man trusts nobody. I admit that he was more or less compelled to trust Enderby and Claw, and you can see how he has suffered from it. In his present state of mind he would hardly trust himself, and if I had made that suggestion whilst we were in the public house he would probably have had us thrown out. It’s rather a weak thing to do, but it’s up to us to make a good deal of fuss of Kent. I’ll mention it when the proper time comes.”

“And how about the money?” Somerset asked.

“Ah, that’s a different prospect altogether,” Quint replied. “I’ve got some sort of a notion in my head, but if you don’t mind I’ll think it out before I say much about it. Now let’s get to bed—I want to be up early in the morning because I’ve got rather a busy day before me to-morrow.”

When Somerset came down the following morning with a view to lighting the fires and taking his share in getting the breakfast, he found that Quint, contrary to his usual custom, had not appeared. Upstairs Quint’s bedroom was empty and he himself was not to be seen anywhere. But on the dressing-table was a note addressed to Somerset and this the latter opened with misgivings that Quint, acting on the impulse of the moment, had done something that might possibly lead to a great deal of trouble. The first glance at the letter confirmed Somerset’s worst misgivings.

“Dear old chap,” (it ran),

“I dare say you will think that I have taken leave of my senses, but unless I have a change of scenery and exercise I can’t be responsible for anything that will happen. So I have gone down to Sandmouth for the day to play for the Gold Cup. I am wearing the disguise that Ennie sent me, and in the shabby middle-aged man with the sandy hair and straggly beard nobody could possibly recognize that brilliant golfer Michel Quint. I haven’t been so keen on anything since I went over to America two years ago and won the big international tournament played over the links of the Apawamis Golf Club. And besides, I should hate the idea of Enderby winning that cup for the third time. Moreover, if I win, it will become my own property as it would have become Enderby’s had he been successful. So I’m going to do my best to put his nose out of joint. I sent in my entry a week ago in the name of Edwards, of Lossie, which you will remember was the name I assumed when I used to play golf in Edinburgh. Well, there you are, and you must make the best of it. I hope to be back by about nine to-night.

Yours
Michel.”

Somerset read this mad missive with serious misgivings. But the thing was done now and there was no help for it. It was just the sort of wild scheme that would appeal to Quint in one of his most expansive moments, but there was nothing for it now but to sit quietly down and wait until Quint came back. Meanwhile, that erratic individual, secure in his disguise, was making his way towards Victoria Station rejoicing in his freedom and wildly exhilarated to find himself under the free air of Heaven again. At Victoria he picked up a golf bag which Ennie, who was in the secret, had deposited for him to wait in the cloakroom till called for, and then, with a goodly company of other golfers, made his way to the famous course on which the competition was to be played. With that reckless humour of his, Quint sat in the corner of the carriage cheek by jowl with three other golfers with whom he had played many a round, in the happy past. They were all men of wide reputation and Quint smiled to himself as he wondered what these individuals would say if they could only guess at the identity of the shabby man with that

straggly beard who sat there apparently deep in his paper, but who was listening keenly to all that was going on. Presently one of them addressed him in the spirit of comradeship that golf fosters all the world over.

“Going down to Sandmouth, Sir?” he asked.

“That’s the idea,” Quint said, in a deep voice. “I’m going down to have a shot at the cup.”

“Oh, indeed,” said the other man, interested at once. “My name is Gerald Morton. You might have heard of it?”

With an inward smile, Quint admitted that he had.

“And, my name, sir, is Edwards,” he said. “I don’t know much about your South of England links because most of my golf has been played in Scotland. Lossie is my home course. I don’t suppose you have ever heard of it, but it’s quite good.”

“So I’ve been told,” the other man said. “They’ve turned out some quite good men from there. And Edwards, oh yes, I know the name of Edwards. A man who once went round Lossie in sixty-eight. Won a lot of competitions round Edinburgh a year or two ago. A man at Westward Ho told me that this Edwards plays a very similar game to that of poor Old Michel Quint.”

“Oh, indeed,” Quint said. “And what’s the matter with Quint? You talk as if he were dead.”

“Almost as bad, poor old chap,” Morton muttered. “Perhaps you may know him?”

“I certainly have met him,” Quint confessed.

“The finest amateur golfer, bar two, I ever came across,” Morton went on. “And a rattling good chap, too. I haven’t heard the details, but I believe it is a case of forgery. At any rate, I know the police are after him. That’s the worst of being a magnificent sportsman and a poor man at the same time. But I’m sorry for Quint—I never met a man I liked better.”

Quint hastened to turn the conversation. He was pained and at the same time pleased to hear what the other man had to say about him. He was glad enough when the train eventually reached Sandmouth and he found himself alone in a rickety old cab, being driven across the marshes in the direction of the course. Once arrived there he found scores of friends of his, and men who in the past would have done anything for him. Apparently there was a big field out for the Gold Cup, and Quint was thankful to find himself drawn with a man whom he had never heard of before, and who was not in the least likely to be in the running. What he particularly feared, if he feared anything at all, was the fact that his partner might recognize his style, but the unknown opposed to him effectually did away with that idea.

He started shakily enough, but after playing the first three holes with a marvellous amount of luck, settled down to his game, and played as well as he had ever done in his life. It was a bright, fresh morning, with blue sky overhead, and the spring of the turf under his feet drove him almost mad with delight. He had clean forgotten the old house and all his troubles by the time he had holed out on the eighteenth green, and when his partner added up the card he realized that he had been round in seventy-three. This, with his plus handicap of three, represented a net score of seventy-six, which, considering that the course was on the slow side, probably represented the best effort of the morning round. And so,

when Quint went into the Club House to lunch he found himself the centre of a good deal of attention, for his indeed was the best score. Next behind him, strangely enough, came Enderby with a net seventy-seven, but, with a handicap of five, this was no phenomenal effort. Before Quint sat down to his cold meat and pint of beer he knew that he and his chief enemy led the field by three clear strokes. One or two men came up and congratulated him, but Enderby sat sullenly apart. He was not the kind of sportsman to appreciate the success of a fellow-golfer, especially as he had set his heart on taking the Gold Cup away with him. Quint smiled to himself as he noticed the scowl on the features of his deadliest enemy. It would be no fault of his if Enderby secured the great treasure, and he made up his mind if possible to do greater things next round.

Quint started even better than he had done in the morning. Hole after hole he reeled off in par scores until he turned for home, and then for the first time he realized that he was picking up a gallery. Some unsuccessful competitor who had torn up his card had carried the usual rumour to the club house, so that a score or more of men who had finished came out to see the performance of the man from some obscure Scotch course. But none of this worried Quint, who was quite used to that sort of thing, and when he had made his final putt he handed his club to his caddie with the calm assurance that he had won the cup, and that he had put another spoke into the wheel of that scoundrel, Enderby. And so it proved half-an-hour later when the cards were added up, and Quint was returned as the winner of the famous Gold Cup. He could not take it away with him, of course, though he had honestly won it for the third time in circumstances that could not be questioned. He smiled to himself as he thought what would happen if he could put in his claim later on when once he was free from the charge hanging over him.

He contrived to slip away presently and pick up a conveyance to take him to the station. As he was getting into the cab a youngish-looking man with a clear skin and a pair of blue eyes touched him on the shoulder and drew him aside.

"Might I have a few words with you?" he said, in a strong American accent. "You ever been in the States, Mr.—er—er—Edwards? I think you must have been. I never saw another man yet who could play a push shot with a wooden club like you can, with one exception, and that was a player called Quint, who carried off the big prize at Apawamis. He showed me his stroke, in fact, he spent an hour or two with me. Now, Mr.—er—er—Edwards, don't tell me that you have never been in the States."

Quint was on his guard in a moment.

"What may your name be sir?" he asked.

"Barr," the stranger said, with a queer twinkle in his eyes. "James P. Barr. Don't you remember me?"

Chapter XXI

The Dollar King.

It was a moment when it was up to Quint to do a little quick thinking. He had some sort of a grasp of the situation, but the full significance of it had not come home to him yet. He was fumbling about in the dark for a clue and asking himself more or less vainly where he had seen this man before. He had a vague sort of idea that they had met somewhere, but for the life of him he could not think where. His mind travelled rapidly back to the time when he had gone over to the States with the full intention of winning the great international tournament, and in the end he had done so handsomely enough. He had gone with a pretty big reputation, and, needless to say, that reputation was enhanced by his success, and to do him justice, his own sterling qualities.

But he could not remember where he had seen this American before. And, again, the man standing there smiling at him was not in the least like the typical Yankee business man. To begin with, his face was smooth and unwrinkled with a touch of healthy red in it, and the blue eyes were as clear as those of a child. His crisp hair was grey enough, and he was probably somewhere about fifty, though he did not in the least look it. But the clear eyes were shrewd, and the mouth and chin firm enough, relieved as they were by certain humorous lines around the lips.

Barr—Barr? Quint asked himself. Where on earth had he met a man named Barr? He had a vivid recollection of a sort of informal court which he had held after the tournament was decided, in which he expounded one or two pet strokes of his to an admiring gallery. The push shot with the wooden club had been one of them, but he could not call to mind any particular person who was interested in it. But then he had met so many scores of people in the States, men whose names were not known to him and were all blended now in a kind of mental flux, much as a man goes over certain things in his dreams.

And then it came home to him like a flash. Of course, this was Ennie Barr's father. She had told him he was coming to England and might arrive at any moment, and he knew that Barr was something of a sportsman.

"I don't recollect the time you speak of," he said, guardedly. "Certainly you have the advantage of me, sir."

"I guess I have," the other said, with a twinkle in his eye. "Now, look here, golf is my one relaxation. I'm keener on that than I am on business any day, and I flatter myself I'm a pretty good judge of the game. And now, Mr. Quint, because you are Mr. Quint, I'd like to have a few words with you."

"I give it up," Quint confessed. "I thought I was perfectly safe when I came down here."

"So you would have been if I hadn't happened to have spotted that particular stroke of yours," Barr said. "I have known a good many who have tried it but never one who has succeeded yet, and, I have practised it hundreds of time, but all to no good. But never mind about that for the moment. What I admire is your confounded impudence in coming down here like this to have a shot at the Gold Cup. Oh, I know all about that. You've won it three times now, so that it is your own property. Now, see here, Mr. Quint, I want to be your friend. I'd like to be the friend of any man who has your coolness and nerve."

"Upon my word, I couldn't help it," Quint smiled. "I just had to come, Mr. Barr, and I have enjoyed it. But it was devilish funny walking about the Club House,

talking to scores of men I know intimately and passing myself off all the time as a rawboned Scotsman. One might make a good story out of it."

"So we will, my boy, so we will," Barr said, good naturedly. "I suppose you know why I am in England. Ennie wrote and told me all about it and your friend, Somerset, and when she sent me a S.O.S. in the form of a marconigram, I hopped along without delay. But I thought I would like to have a week-end down here before going further with that business, and I had the surprise of my life when I saw you playing that fine shot of yours at the tenth hole this afternoon. Then I made a few enquiries and found that no one had ever heard of Mr. Edwards before, whereupon I came to the only logical conclusion. I think the best thing I can do is to pay my bill at the hotel and motor back to town. I want you to come with me and dine with me at my hotel. I'll telephone for Ennie to come along and we'll have the whole thing out."

"I don't know why you are so uncommonly good to me," Quint said, gratefully. "I am a fugitive from justice, and until my character is cleared I am not fit to shake any honest man by the hand. And here are you treating me like a personal friend."

"My dear boy," Barr said feelingly. "I think I understand. I know that you and your friend, Somerset, are the victims of a vile conspiracy, and all the more so because some of Mr. Claw's dealings are quite familiar to me. Moreover, I am exceedingly fond of my daughter. And I fancy she knows it, because there is nothing that I can deny her, and perhaps—but this is not in the least the way in which a business-like father ought to speak. I want to have a conference over this matter with you and Somerset, and if he has got what he claims to have, then you can count upon the backing of James P. Barr. Now, come along."

It was about seven o'clock before the car pulled up outside Barr's hotel in Jermyn Street, and a little later when Ennie appeared in the private sitting room. She cried out when she saw Quint there, for she recognized him at once in the disguise that she herself had supplied to him.

"Michel," she exclaimed. "Has a miracle happened? How did you manage to come in contact with my father? And did you manage to win the Gold Cup?"

"Oh, that came off all right," Quint laughed. "But perhaps I had better explain."

He told Ennie in a few words exactly what had happened during the eventful day, and with that the dinner was announced. When the liqueurs and coffee arrived, and the party had the room to themselves, Ennie insisted upon Quint removing his red wig and straggly beard, and laughingly presented him to her father in his own particular personality. Barr, behind his cigar, watched the young people narrowly and saw enough in that quick way of his to realize exactly how matters stood.

"Guess I'm a queer sort of a parent," he said. "But I always was a bit sentimental. And why not? The British Empire was built on sentiment, and so was the United States. But, see here, there is a long row to hoe before we can get down to romance. Now you just sit over there, Quint, and listen to what I have to say. Tell me everything that has happened in the last month or two, and mind you don't leave out any details."

It was a different Barr that was speaking now and Quint fell in with his mood. He told him everything that had happened, to which Barr listened without

comment until Quint began to speak about the letter from Claw which had been addressed to Geere at the old house on the river.

“Ah, now we’re getting down to brass tacks,” he said. “Say, can you remember the name of any of the securities that Claw stated were paying no dividends?”

“Yes, I can remember a few of them,” Quint said.

With that he mentioned half a dozen names whilst Barr listened with a curiously dry smile on his face.

“Paying no dividends, eh?” he drawled. “Why, that group practically belongs to me. And there isn’t a lame dog amongst ‘em. Gilt edged every one, and paying anything from twenty to five and twenty per cent. My dear boy, it seems to me that we have got Claw and his friend Enderby by the short hairs. That letter is enough to damn Claw in any court of justice. We can make our own terms and get those warrants withdrawn to-morrow.”

“I dare say we could,” Quint said coolly. “But as a bit of a fighter myself that wouldn’t suit my book at all. We must have this out in open court. You are a man of the world, Mr. Barr, and you know that certain people will talk unless we deprive them of every excuse for scandal. We must proceed from our side, and have a case that will be reported in all the papers. Don’t forget that we’ve got hold of Kent, and that he will do anything for money. Besides, he has Somerset’s original drawings, not that we can’t do without them, but if they come into our possession again, Claw and Co. will have had all their trouble for nothing.”

“Spoken just as I like to hear a young man speak,” Barr said enthusiastically. “It was always my policy to take the war to the enemies’ camp, and if we don’t make those two skunks sit up, then my name isn’t Barr. We’ll have to lay a trap for them, a trap that they’ll walk into blindfold! I don’t think you’ll find there is much fight in Claw when he comes up against me. I’ll turn the thing over in my mind and before you go to-night it’s hard if I don’t hit on something. I think I’ll go and take a turn along the road and see how London looks by lamplight.”

With that Barr lighted a fresh cigar and strolled out of the room, leaving Ennie and Quint alone together.

“Isn’t he a dear old man,” Ennie said in a voice that was none too steady. “Now, is there another parent in the world who has behaved like that?”

“Oh, don’t ask me,” Quint said. “I don’t quite know where I am. This has been one of the maddest days in my life. The more I think of it the more amazing it all seems. When I set out this morning, like another Jason after the Golden Fleece, I never expected to run up against the American father of romance and be taken to his bosom quite like this. And you must be a very amazing person, Ennie, for him to trust you so implicitly. And I never thanked him for the way he treated me. At any rate, I expected that he would forbid me seeing you till everything was cleared up. And I suppose that he knows I haven’t a penny in the world and no likelihood of ever having one?”

“There is nobody like him,” Ennie said enthusiastically. “You see, he’s such a wonderful shrewd judge of a man and people say that he has never made a mistake. I don’t think he would be happy unless he thought you were doing something. That’s the American way, Michel. Even if he gave me half his money to-morrow he would be greatly disappointed if you didn’t go on with your profession.”

"I don't think he need worry about that," Quint said, earnestly. "I've had a lesson, Ennie. I am not going to idle any more. I don't say I am going to give up my sports, because I couldn't, but I'll take my degree next term and start practice in some neighbourhood where I can get my golf and the other outdoor exercises. But don't let's talk about myself."

Ennie laughed merrily.

"Always the same Michel," she said, "and always likely to be. But don't let us count our chickens before they're hatched. And Michel, you've forgotten something."

"I'm sorry," Quint said, as he kissed her.

Chapter XXII

The Trap.

Enderby turned his back upon the Sandmouth golf links with rage and bitterness in his heart. The possession of the Gold Cup had grown to be something of an obsession with him, and the loss of it at the hand of some obscure golfer from an out of the way Scotch course had wounded him deeply. He had had it almost within his grasp, he had never played better in his life, and but for the intrusion of this outsider everything would have gone his way. He turned his back upon his companions and drove in solitary state to the station. He would have taken a carriage to himself if possible, but just at the last moment a little knot of excited golfers got into his compartment, and all of them began talking at once. Evidently something had happened in the Club House after Enderby had left it, and it was some little time before he began to grasp the cause of all the turmoil.

"I tell you it's a fact," the man opposite him cried. "I had it from Maltby, who has played on every course in Scotland. He ain't much of a performer, but he knows more about clubs and players than any man in England. And he only spotted it quite by accident, he is prepared to take his oath that Edwards is an assumed name, and that the man who won the Gold Cup to-day is no other than our old friend, Michel Quint."

"What's that?" Enderby cried breathlessly.

"Oh, here's the runner up," the first speaker laughed. "I didn't notice you just for the moment, Enderby. After you left the Club House Maltby came in. You know Maltby, of course?"

"Everybody does," Enderby growled.

"Well Maltby says that Quint used to play at Lossie under the name of Edwards. He did that because he didn't want the University authorities to know how much golf he was playing. Maltby is quite sure of this, because he turned out in a tournament at Lossie that Quint won, calling himself Edwards. Maltby says that he saw Quint play a few strokes to-day and recognized his style. When he found that Quint called himself Edwards of Lossie, he knew beyond a doubt what was going on. It's the finest joke I've heard for years."

"A joke," Enderby cried. "You call it a joke, do you? I've been swindled out of that cup."

"Upon my word, I can't see it," the other man said. "Quint has won it twice, and to-day he won it for the third time. He's done nothing wrong. It's quite a recognized thing for a man to play under an assumed name, and, moreover, he played as a member of a recognized club. Of course, I know all about the trouble hanging over the poor old chap, but whatever his morals may be, you can't deny that he's a dandy golfer, and that he has won the cup honestly enough. But lord, just think of the cheek of the man! Coming down here in disguise and playing under the eyes of a score of men who know him intimately."

But Enderby was not disposed to carry the conversation any further. He buried himself behind the paper, and resigned himself to his own bitter and humiliating thoughts. They were with him all the evening, he took them to bed with him, and they were with him all the next day. Once more Quint had got the better of him, and though it seemed that he held Quint's future in the hollow of his hand, he was getting nervous and frightened. So that soon after eleven o'clock the following morning he presented himself at Claw's office, and told the story of the Golf Cup to Claw's secret delight, though he was free enough with his condolences.

"But what on earth are we to do with a fellow like that?" Enderby growled. "I begin to think that he'll slip through our fingers after all. And he will if you don't get hold of Kent. By the way, have you heard anything about him?"

"I'm afraid I haven't," Claw confessed. "After that fiasco the other night, I put the matter into the hands of Roberts, who is by way of being a sort of private detective. He has done other work of the sort for me, and a year or so ago, when I began to suspect that Kent was playing me false, I put Roberts on to him, and he did his work excellently. I am expecting him round at any moment, and if you like to wait you will hear what he has to say. It was Roberts who found out that Kent was in the habit of frequenting that public house in Wapping."

A quarter of an hour later, the man called Roberts presented himself to make his report.

"I am sorry to say I haven't been able to do anything, sir," he said. "I am afraid that when you gentlemen went down to Wapping the other night you were spotted. If you remember, Mr. Claw, I warned you not to go."

"Never mind about that," Claw said impatiently. "Have you got anything to report?"

"Nothing of any practical use, I am sorry to say. I have been hanging about the 'Crow and Gate' for the last day or two, but I have seen nothing of Kent. I managed to get into the bedrooms at the risk of my life, and I am quite sure that there is no one hiding there now. It's my opinion, gentlemen, that Kent has been got out of the way. There is somebody working against you and until I know all the circumstances of the case I am powerless. Perhaps you might be disposed to tell me something about the people whose interest it is to get Kent out of the way."

Claw and Enderby exchanged glances. It would have been anything but wise in the circumstances to enlighten Roberts as to the real state of affairs. He was no creature of Claw's, but a little ferret of a man working on his own account, and extremely unlikely to mix himself up in anything that resembled conspiracy.

"I am afraid I can't give you that information," Claw said, "because I am to a certain extent in the dark myself. Besides, you are wasting your time here. Get down to Wapping again and spend another day or so there, you might possibly hit upon something in the nature of a clue."

With that, the private detective departed, leaving something like consternation behind him.

"What on earth's to be done?" Enderby asked.

"Well, I confess myself beaten," Claw said. "I don't know what to do. It's quite evident to me that the other side has got hold of Kent and they are keeping him in hiding somewhere. Remember, he is no friend of ours now, though I don't suppose he'll move a yard unless he is well paid for it. That's our one chance Enderby. Neither Quint nor Somerset has a penny to bless himself with, and that's all to the good."

"But they may have friends, perhaps."

"My dear fellow, men in their position, with the police looking for them everywhere, never have any friends."

"Yes, I know that's the cynical worldly way of looking at it," Enderby said. "But don't forget that Quint is exceedingly popular. A more popular man never handled a golf club or turned out on a football field. People might be ready to believe that he is guilty, and I dare say most of them do, but that does not prevent a man from putting his hand in his pocket. Besides, look what happened on Saturday. That fellow turned up, apparently out of nowhere, disguised as a shabby Scotsman, and, after winning the cup, goes back to London as cool as you please. Now, unless he had powerful friends who knew where to hide him, he would never have dared to have done that. Even with his cheek and audacity he wouldn't play the fool like that, unless he felt sure on his ground. I tell you, Claw, I'm getting confoundedly nervous about the whole thing. Our best policy would be to get in touch with Quint and come to some sort of an arrangement. What do you say?"

"I've already tried it," Claw replied. "Put an advertisement in the 'Times' some days ago, telling Somerset that if he called here he would hear of something greatly to his advantage. But I had no reply, possibly he suspected a trap."

"He would," Enderby said bitterly. "But that's not the only thing. We can do nothing without money, and as far as I can see, you are as hard up as I am."

An ugly look crossed Claw's face.

"I don't want to be reminded of that," he growled. "I know how necessary the money is. Now look here, I'm going to show you something, something you must never mention to a soul."

With that Claw opened a safe in the corner of the room and produced a mass of documents which he laid on the table.

"Securities," Enderby cried. "Who have you been robbing?"

"It's not a nice word," Claw grinned. "But in this connexion it happens to be true. Those are Geere's securities—the ones I told him that had produced no dividends this year. As a matter of fact, they produced over five thousand pounds, and devilish useful I found them."

"Do you mean to say he allows you to keep his securities?" Enderby cried. "The man must be mad."

“Well I believe he is more or less mad,” Claw laughed. “But he’s not quite so mad as all that, Enderby. Those securities were deposited in the United Counties head office by Geere himself, and I forged an order for their delivery to myself. It wasn’t a difficult matter, because the manager of the Bank knew that I have been collecting dividends and debentures on Geere’s stock for some considerable time.”

Enderby wiped his heated forehead. His lips were twitching and the hands on the papers trembled.

“This is a devil of a business,” he said hoarsely. “If anything happens, you’re done for.”

“Well, I must take the risk of that,” Claw said. “I am bound to have money. I’ve got a big thing on now that may turn up trumps any day, and directly it does those securities go back again. I must have money within the next few days. I must. If I don’t, then I’m a ruined man. I’ll hold those things as long as possible, but I’m afraid they’ll have to go.”

Before Enderby could reply, a clerk came in and laid a handful of letters on Claw’s desk. He turned them over idly in his hand, and, with a nod in Enderby’s direction began to read them. They were ordinary business letters for the most part that Claw glanced over without comment until he came to one which he read twice and then, with something like an oath tossed it across the table for Enderby’s consideration.

“What do you think of that?” he asked hoarsely. “I should like to know what it means.”

Enderby read the letter as follows:

Dear Sir,

I am obliged for the accounts which reached me a few days ago, and I may say that I am utterly at a loss to understand your statement with regard to my securities. I am out of the world here, but I see a paper occasionally and I should be greatly obliged if you would come down here any time after seven to-morrow evening to discuss the situation with me. I cannot come to you for various reasons, but I shall expect you at the time I mention. I think you will see for yourself that you had better comply with my suggestion.

Yours truly,

Everard Geere.

Chapter XXIII

The Boat Express.

It had always been one of Claw’s boasts that nothing disturbed him or upset the balance of his equanimity, but he was frightened now and Enderby took a certain malicious pleasure in the contemplation of it. He saw the putty hue spreading under the crimson of Claw’s cheeks and noticed that the muscles about the corners of his mouth had grown weak and flabby.

“Well, what’s the matter?” Enderby asked. “You are not going to be frightened by a little thing like that.”

“I don’t know,” Claw muttered. “It’s so vaguely mysterious, especially coming from an eccentric invalid like Geere. Can’t you see the threat in it? Can’t you see that it is written by a man who knows his mind?”

“Oh, don’t talk rot,” Enderby cried. “Why, the man is next door to a paralytic. He may have got a bit nervous about something but you are never going to funk it.”

Claw debated the matter swiftly in his mind. He had played for an enormous stake, and at the very moment when he wanted every ounce of his nerve, that dogged courage of his deserted him. He knew only too well what was the value of Somerset’s invention and if he could only get that in his own hands now, then he was a made man for life. And yet, just at the moment when everything appeared to be going smoothly, these baffling complications had arisen. It looked very much to Claw as if powerful influences were working in the background on behalf of the two men he had tried to ruin. A few days back, apparently, he had held them in the hollow of his hand, but now he could literally feel the firm ground crumbling away beneath his feet. And it was this fighting in the dark that so shook him. He was a good enough man with an antagonist in the open, but these thrusts from behind a screen shook him and grappled his nerve centres.

“I suppose I had better go,” he said. “And you had best come along. If there is anything wrong, we ought to be able to put it right between the two of us. Perhaps it would be as well if I represented you as a big City capitalist whose advice I am pleased to follow. You meet me at my club about seven, and we will go down to Barnes Common together.”

“Oh, all right,” Enderby said grudgingly. “Perhaps it would be safer if we both went. I’ll come around to the club and meet you, or if you prefer it, can call at your rooms.”

Claw jumped to his feet and swore under his breath.

“I had almost forgotten,” he said. “Isn’t Barr coming to see me this morning at eleven o’clock? Had I better put him off? I don’t feel up to meeting him, somehow.”

“Put him off, you fool,” Enderby cried. “Are you mad? Why Barr is the very man you want to see! His coming is almost providential. If he has been down to the house on the river, and if he was the man who inspired that letter, then it’s almost vital that we should know it. We can shape our plans accordingly. You meet Barr with a bold front and pick his brains. But you understand all about that sort of thing. Meanwhile, I’ll get along before he comes. See you to-night, as arranged.”

With that Enderby took his leave and Claw was left to his own disturbed thoughts. If the worst came to the worst, he knew what to do, and in that case he would have no hesitation in leaving Enderby in the lurch. He had all Geere’s securities in his possession, and when the time came to raise money on them, he would run over to Paris and do it there. Yes, it would be far safer than dealing with them in London. Then, by way of a cargo boat from Genoa, he could work a passage to East Africa, and there start again with many thousands of pounds to his credit. He was just settling this scheme in his mind when Barr came in.

“I am not going to detain you very long, Mr. Claw,” he said. “I have a good deal of business to see to and I should have been wiser, perhaps, if I had not begun my visit to England with a day or two’s golf. But it was a lure I could not resist. Golf is

my one amusement, and I am as keen on it as a boy. So we'll get to business, if you don't mind. Now, about that unfortunate relative of mine. I understand that you have been doing all his business for him ever since he took it out of my hands."

"That is so," Claw said, as amiably as possible.

"Ah, well, that simplifies matters considerably. What I want to know is where my relative's securities are kept. Has he got them or are they in your possession?"

Claw hesitated just for the fraction of a second. He knew that a good deal depended upon his answer.

"I know very little about them," he said. "It is my business to collect the interest and look after affairs generally. But I believe that the securities themselves are deposited with the manager of the United Counties Bank. But perhaps you have already seen Mr. Geere?"

It was a tentative suggestion, with the idea of giving Claw some notion of where he stood, but Barr waved it aside as if it were a matter of no importance.

"I told you we had quarrelled," he said. "At least there was a quarrel on one side. No good purpose would be served by my seeing Mr. Geere, and in any case he would probably decline to see me. Mind you, I am exceedingly sorry for him, and I want to do all I can to help him. It's like this, Mr. Claw. I am going out of business altogether. I have made more money than I can possibly spend and I have a good twenty years of active life before me. Those years I propose to spend more or less out of doors. So I am amalgamating all my concerns into one huge company and I am going to allow the public to come in, if they like. Certain securities will be exchanged for others of equal value, which are certain to appreciate in price. That's why I should like to get hold of Mr. Geere's shares and exchange them for the new ones. I am perfectly certain that it will be to Geere's benefit. If he declines to see me, I shall write him a letter to that effect."

Claw drew a long, deep breath. He was thankful now that he had screwed his courage up to the point of meeting Barr, because it had given him the opportunity of learning something that was very vital to him. The danger was nearer than he had expected. Within the next day or two at the outside it was a practical certainty that Geere would write to his bankers for those securities, and if Barr had not given this information he would have found himself between four walls of a prison before he was aware that the blow had fallen. He listened more or less vaguely as Barr talked, but all the while his mind was busily engaged upon the subject of his own safety. He was glad enough presently to find himself alone, so that he could devote the rest of the morning to the plan which was already half shaped in his mind.

"Ah, that was a near thing," he muttered to himself. "If that man had not come here this morning, I should have gone calmly on here until the police were ready to fetch me. It's all right now, and I must look to myself. Now, shall I tell Enderby or not? Why should I? I owe him nothing, and if he were in my place he would do just as I am doing."

To all outward appearances Claw was going on with his work. His clerks came and went, business acquaintances dropped in, but on the whole it was a quiet morning, and by the time that Claw went out for his lunch he had everything clear.

He would take the boat express from Victoria at eight o'clock. He would quietly fade out of London and be seen there no more. It would not be difficult to procure something in the way of a slight disguise, so that he could reach Paris without a soul being aware of the fact that he had left England. With those securities in his pocket he could call upon a firm of brokers in Paris and turn the whole thing into cash in the course of an hour or two. Yes, that was the scheme, and with any luck Claw would get away with the whole of his ill-gotten gains, and be somewhere safe in the Mediterranean before his flight was known.

He came back to his office after lunch and worked on quietly enough till about five, which was his usual hour for leaving. Then he sent for his manager, and told him that possibly he might not be at the office on the next day.

"Look here, Walton," he said, carelessly. "I've got a bit of business on that rather worries me. There is a good deal of money in it if matters go right, and I am not disposed to leave things to other people. So in the morning I am going to Manchester. I shall be there all day to-morrow, and just possibly all Thursday as well, and I don't want anybody to know I'm out of town. You'll see to that, please. By the way, are you working late to-night?"

"Not particularly," the manager said. "I shall be here till about six, and the office will close then."

A little later and Claw was on his way to his rooms. He packed his kit bag himself and told his man to have a taxi at the door a few minutes after seven. So far as his slight disguise was concerned, he meant to assume that when he reached Victoria. To his man he proclaimed the fact that he was dining out somewhere in the country, and that he might be back home about midnight.

But a few minutes past seven he was on his way to Victoria. He gave the taxi cab driver his directions in the hearing of his man, and just for an instant or two he regretted that he had mentioned Victoria. It would have been just as easy to have said Euston, and afterwards have changed his mind. But it was a very small point after all, and really not worth worrying about. He reached his destination presently, and, watching his opportunity, slipped into a lavatory and adjusted his moustache and beard, which he took for that purpose from his kitbag. Then he took his ticket and went boldly down the platform in the direction of the train. But before he reached the barrier a rude hand grasped his arm and a familiar voice—the voice of Enderby—hissed in his ear:

"No, none of this, you rascal; I had half expected something of this sort, so I got ready for you. On to Paris are you? We'll see all about that. The game is quite plain. Your idea was to clear out with all Geere's securities in your possession and leave me in the lurch. Now come along back and see the thing through."

Claw had no word to say. He was full of baffled rage and spite; he would have given anything to have had Enderby by the throat, but there was no chance of that on a public platform crowded with people, so that he gave way with a bad grace and allowed Enderby to lead the way to a quiet corner of the refreshment room.

"How did you find out?" Claw asked weakly.

"Oh, that was easy," Enderby sneered. "I didn't trust you to begin with. After I had waited at the club for a quarter of an hour I began to feel that something was wrong, so I telephoned to your rooms and got hold of your man. When he said you were going out of town for the night I knew that you were betraying me, and when

I found out that Victoria was your destination it didn't take very long to guess what was in your mind. You dirty rat, what do you mean by leaving me to face the music like this. 'Pon my word, I'm a better man than you are, after all."

Chapter XXIV

The Weasel's Teeth.

Claw resigned himself to the inevitable. It needed a man with far more courage than his to rise to a situation like that and emerge from it victoriously. He had been going to betray his confederate and the other had turned the tables on him. Moreover, Enderby knew that Claw had those valuable securities in his pocket, and he told himself grimly enough that when the time came he was going to share in the proceeds.

"Now, look here," he said. "It's no use you and me quarrelling. That means that we shall both be in the soup together and Geere will get his own back again. Oh, you needn't put your hand in your breast pocket. I know exactly what's in there. Now suppose we talk the matter over. We shall gain nothing by squabbling. You may depend upon it that we have been watched. There is some force moving behind Quint and Somerset and Kent that we know nothing about, and we can do nothing till we find it out. I propose that we go down to the house on the river and see Geere as arranged. We can get anything we like out of a simple old fool like that. And what's more to the point we shall be able to ascertain whether Barr has seen his relative or not. I suppose you can see how vital that is to us?"

Claw looked at his companion with something like admiration in his eyes.

"That's true enough," he admitted grudgingly. "Personally, I don't believe that Barr has seen Geere. But perhaps I had better tell you everything that happened in my office this morning. I mean about my interview with Barr."

Enderby listened with flattering interest to all that Claw had to say. Just for the moment, he appeared to be the better of the two, and Claw was prepared to acknowledge it.

"Ah," Enderby said. "It's just as bad as I thought. Barr will write to his relative, who, in his turn, will write to his bankers. Lord, what a fool you were to try and get away, knowing what you do. Can't you see what our game is? No? Why, it's as plain as that ugly old nose on your face. We must go and see Geere to-night. His invitation for you to do so was absolutely providential. See the man, and warn him that Barr is up to some dirty work. He'll be half inclined to believe us, because he's quarrelled with Barr already. Tell him that Barr has achieved a nasty reputation in the States and that he has a big ramp on over those companies of his. That should explain why the old man has never had any dividends. You must advise him, as a disinterested friend, to realize all his American securities at once. Get him to give you an order on the United Bank people to hand them over to you. You've got them already, but there's no reason why Geere should know that. Then you'll be safe, my friend, safe. Then we can make our plans accordingly and get away to

some place where we are beyond the reach of extradition laws. We shall have plenty of time. But before we do that, you've got to hand half those shares over to me. I am ready to work with you because I must, but in future I am not going to trust you a single yard."

"Oh, all right," Claw muttered. "All the same, I didn't like that letter of Geere's, and I don't like it now."

"Well, I wasn't particularly pleased with it," Enderby said. "But we've got to risk it. Damn it, we must. Now chuck your kit bag in the luggage office and let's get off to Barnes at once."

In due course the pair of them reached the house on the river and rang the bell. So far as they could see, the place was all in darkness, but after the interval of a few minutes a light went up in the hall and the door was opened by a tall, thin figure in a flannel dressing-gown and a deerstalker hat that only half covered the wearer's straggling grey hair. His face was partly hidden in a wisp of whisker, and his eyes were practically unseen behind a pair of blue spectacles. It was Geere right enough as Claw recognized, though he had only seen his client once before.

"Come in, Mr. Claw, come in," Geere said, in his quavering falsetto voice. "You have brought a friend, I see."

"Yes," said Claw. "This is Mr. Enderby, one of our great financiers. I thought you wouldn't mind my bringing him down here because I never do anything without his advice, and thought you might be disposed to listen to him. He knows as much about the money market as Rothschild himself, indeed, it is no secret that the head of that great firm does very little without asking Mr. Enderby's opinion. A most valuable man."

Enderby grinned under the cover of the darkness, and a little easier in his mind, followed Geere and Claw into the dining-room at the back of the house. A fire burnt cheerfully in the hearth and when the lights were turned up, the banks of flowers in the little conservatory gave almost a tropical flavour to the room. The double windows leading into the conservatory were open, so that the scent of flowers was almost overpowering. They could be seen glowing in the half light with the feathery dusk of a lofty bank of ferns behind them.

"My only hobby, gentlemen, my hobby," Geere croaked, indicating the blooms with a wave of his hand. "I grew and tended all those myself. You see, I live quite alone here. I haven't even a servant and until lately I never left the house, though I have just invested in a bath-chair and an attendant. Now, sit down, gentlemen, sit down and help yourselves to a whisky and soda. I never touch it myself, but I know that it is good because I have had it in the house for many years. We are absolutely alone here as you see, so that we can talk freely."

Enderby and Claw exchanged glances. Things were turning out a great deal better than they had expected. To all appearance they had the old man entirely to themselves, and it would go hard indeed if they could not twist him to their purpose.

"Ah, that's right, that's right," Geere said, as the others filled their glasses and made themselves comfortable. "I want you to feel quite at home. This is the first time I've entertained anybody for goodness knows how many years, and now as you are busy men, let us get to business."

“Certainly, Mr. Geere,” Claw said. “As a matter of fact, if you hadn’t written to me I intended to come to see you about those American securities of yours. It seems a thousand pities that you should have all your money locked up in concerns that don’t pay you a penny. I could sell them to-morrow for their face value and I am sure that my friend Mr. Enderby would invest the proceeds into something superlatively good.”

“Anything for a friend of yours,” Enderby said magnanimously.

“I’m sure I’m very grateful,” Geere murmured.

“Please don’t mention it,” Claw went on. “Do you know, Mr. Geere, I hear some very alarming reports about those shares. Of course, I am on rather delicate ground, seeing that Mr. Barr is a very old friend, not to say relation, of yours.”

“A relation, yes,” Geere piped. “But a friend, never. We quarrelled years ago.”

“Ah, so you did,” Claw said, as if the matter was an after-thought. “I had quite forgotten. I suppose you are not aware of the fact that Mr. Barr is at present in England?”

“In England, really?” Geere asked. “Well, it doesn’t matter. I don’t suppose he will venture to come near me.”

Once more Claw and Enderby exchanged glances. They began to feel now that they were treading firm ground.

“Ah, that makes my task a little easier,” Claw went on. “Mr. Geere, you must get rid of those securities at once. You must give me a Power of Attorney or some sort of undertaking that will enable me to deal with them. I am powerless without it. If you give me just a few words with your signature, I can go to the bank and get the papers. These I will hand over to Mr. Enderby and by to-morrow night they will be disposed of at their face value. You will never have such another opportunity.”

Enderby smiled behind his hand. It was a characteristic piece of trickery just after his own heart. Moreover, there was something decidedly humorous in hearing Claw talking like this, with those securities actually in the room, and in his own pocket. But Geere did not appear to be listening. He sat there, half huddled up in his chair muttering something almost incoherent, as if those rambling thoughts of his were very far away.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” he moaned. “I feel it coming on me again. I am a very old man, gentlemen, and I am not fit to talk business with you. I ought to have someone to look after me. I ought not to be in this house alone like this. There are some days when I can’t get up at all, and then I lie in bed thinking about the past till my head gets in such a state I don’t know what I am doing. It’s dreadful, dreadful. You see, Barr married my sister and he knew the girl I should have married—but I mustn’t think about that. Give me just a drop of whisky.”

Claw and Enderby exchanged glances again, but this time there was no particular satisfaction in them. Claw clenched his teeth and muttered under his breath. He was wondering if this senile old man was going to break down just at the very moment when they had the whole thing in their own hands.

“Come, pull yourself together, Mr. Geere,” he said impatiently. “Recollect what we came here for.”

“What did you come here for?” Geere asked, absently.

"In your own interests," Claw almost shouted. "About your securities. You must sell them, sell them, don't you hear? Only half a sheet of notepaper with your name on."

Geere looked up absently.

"I was very fond of Barr once," he said, in a quavering voice. "He used to write me letters, such nice letters. I would like to show you one or two of them. They are up in my bedroom. Perhaps if I fetch them down they will refresh my memory."

Claw restrained himself with an effort. Enderby would have dragged the old man back, but Claw preferred to humour him.

"It can do no harm," he said, when Geere left the room. "Poor old fool, he is certainly in a dreadful state. But so long as we can keep him in a condition to sign that document, the rest matters nothing. Humour him, humour him."

"Oh, I don't mind," Enderby said. "I wonder what he'd say if he knew that you had got his securities in your pocket at the present moment. What a joke it is."

"Here, drop that, you idiot," Claw hissed. "You never know who might be listening."

"Who on earth is likely to listen here?" Enderby demanded. "The old man is evidently alone in the house. A little patience and we shall get all that we need."

"I'm not so sure of that," Claw said. "At any rate—hush, he's coming down the stairs."

Surely enough, someone was coming slowly down the stairs in the direction of the dining room. Then the door was opened and there entered, not Geere, but Kent, with a broad grin on his face.

Chapter XXV

Click!

Kent, standing there entirely at his ease and obviously enjoying the situation, was a different Kent altogether to the man that Enderby and Claw had been in the habit, all these years, of treating in a way that either of them would have hesitated to treat a dog. He was just as furtive as ever, with those cunning little eyes of his glittering under his red brows, but there was a suggestion of easy familiarity about him that robbed the other two men of a good deal of their newly acquired confidence. He was obviously enjoying the situation.

"Well," he said. "Who would have thought of seeing me here? Rather a joke, gentlemen, isn't it?"

"What the devil do you mean by speaking to me like that?" Claw asked furiously. "And what are you doing here, anyway?"

"We'll come to that presently," Kent said coolly. "Sit down and make yourself at home, and, whatever happens, don't lose your nerve. Try another whisky and soda, and then we'll talk the matter over quietly."

Claw held himself in with an effort. Obviously there was nothing to be gained by forcing a quarrel upon Kent, who showed no signs of fear. The thing to do now was

to find out exactly how much he knew and what strange chain of circumstance had placed him on such an easy footing in the house on the river.

“Where is the old gentleman?” Enderby asked suspiciously.

“Oh, you needn’t worry about him for the present,” Kent laughed. “Fact is, he’s rather upset. You see, he doesn’t see visitors often, and any conversation out of the ordinary is a dead strain on him. He told you just now that he had employed a bath-chair man. What do you think of me as a bath-chair man?”

“Oh, stop all that rubbish!” Claw snarled. “Is the old gentleman coming downstairs again?”

“That you can rely upon,” Kent said, drily. “He’s looking for some letter’s that he can’t find, and he’s just had a dose of his medicine. When he has rested himself for a quarter of an hour or so, you can reckon on seeing him again. But never mind Mr. Geere. What are you going to do about me?”

Claw looked at Enderby and the latter glanced back helplessly. But obviously if they meant to get any further it would be necessary to bring Kent to their side again. Therefore, Claw made a determined effort to be conciliatory.

“Look here, Kent,” he said, “I am not going to deny that we have behaved badly to you, because we did. But, honestly, when you went abroad I had every intention that you should receive that money. But things have gone wrong lately, and I don’t know where to turn for a few hundreds of ready money. But if you had waited a few days longer the draft would have turned up.”

“I am a bit of a liar myself,” Kent said, with offensive pleasantness. “But I can’t hope to cope with an artiste like you. You sent me abroad, knowing that I had only a few shillings, except my fare, and you thought to get rid of me without any expense to yourself. You never anticipated my coming back again. But I am back, as you see, and unless you agree to my terms you will find that I am master of the situation. Never mind how I got here, or what the connexion is between Mr. Geere and myself—the fact remains that I am here, and I am in a position to dictate terms.”

“I am quite prepared to listen,” Enderby said.

“Very well, then; in that case I don’t want five hundred pounds but two thousand. Oh, I am in no hurry—I can wait for a week or two if necessary. I am quite comfortable here, with plenty to eat and drink, and if I want a pound or two to go on with I can have it. Just let me explain the position of affairs. When Mr. Somerset came to you for money to work his invention, our friend Enderby, turned him over to me. I was to pose as a man who had capital to invest in new patents. And I agreed to find the preliminary expenses. I posed as being a bit short at the time, and introduced the name of Claw as a man who would discount a bill.”

“Quite right!” Enderby said. “Quite right.”

“Very well. After that I backed the bill drawn on me by Quint and Somerset, and made it appear to them that Mr. Claw had discounted the paper.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” Claw said, fussily. “Why go over that old ground again? The old gentleman upstairs may be down at any time, and then it may be too late——”

“I’m going to run this thing in my own way,” Kent said, doggedly. “It won’t pay you to interrupt. Well, the money was handed over, and when the time was ripe for that precious little scheme of yours, I made the discovery that my signature on the back of the bill was a forgery. It was nothing of the kind as you both precious well

know, but it served the purpose, and that was the main thing. For telling that infernal lie and laying information with the police I was to have had five hundred pounds. I was to find the money waiting for me on the Continent, and I was to leave the boat in such a manner as to convince everybody that I had fallen overboard. Well, I managed that all right, with the aid of a friend, and the circumstances were reported in the papers. Your idea was for me to disappear so that I could not give evidence, although I had sworn the necessary affidavit. So long as I was out of the way and presumed dead then your course was quite clear. With any luck those two unfortunate young men would have been sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and no one would have taken their word for anything in the future. They would be ruined, body and soul, and, moreover, you had all the necessary information as to the new invention. At least, you thought you had, but, I knew too much about both of you to place myself in your hands implicitly, and that's why I kept the genuine drawings and foisted all that rubbish off on Enderby. Now, please contradict me if I am wrong."

"Who wants to contradict you?" Claw retorted. "If it's any comfort to you, I am quite prepared to admit that the facts are exactly as you state. You've got us more or less in a cleft stick, and we can do nothing until the genuine documents are in our hands. Are you prepared to hand them over to us in exchange for cash to the extent of two thousand pounds?"

"Ah, now you are talking," Kent cried. "That's just what I do mean. Those papers are hidden where you cannot possibly find them and until I produce them all your trouble goes for nothing. And I am in no hurry either. But I'm going to have that money, and whenever you are ready to hand it over—"

"You will come and fetch it?" Enderby asked.

Kent turned with an ugly grin on his face.

"Oh, come and fetch it, will I?" he sneered. "Bring the papers with me to Barnes Place, I suppose? Come late at night to meet you two honourable gentlemen, and trust you to do the fair thing by me. Not much. I have had one experience of Barnes Place, and I don't want another. If I did, I should be murdered to a dead certainty. No, no, my kind friends. You bring that money here. Bring it in Bank of England notes, and we can have a fair exchange across that table. And none of your tricks, mind. I shall be prepared for you."

Claw shrugged his shoulders helplessly. For perhaps the first time in his life he was bound to admit that a bigger rascal than himself had got the better of him. There was no shame or confusion about him, nothing but a sullen rage which was taking him all his time to smooth over with a smile. Enderby, on the other hand, wriggled about in his chair, anxious to get away, and fearful that at any moment something unforeseen was about to happen.

"Very well," Claw said. "It shall be as you say. I have it in my power at the present moment to raise a considerable sum of money, and if you like, we'll come down here to-morrow night and exchange documents. Will that do?"

"Yes, I should say that will do very well!" Kent said. "For once in a way I happen to believe you. And I might tell you something more than that. I might go out of my way to guess the method by which you are going to raise the money."

"That's very clever of you," Claw sneered.

“Not at all, my dear sir, not at all. I wasn’t knocking about your office all that time for nothing when I was working overtime. It was no difficult matter for me to get a look at your private letter-book. My word, I envy your impudence. Fancy writing to the poor old gentleman upstairs and telling him that you are drawing nothing in the way of interest from his American securities, whilst all the time you were pocketing some thousands a year. A dangerous game, my friend, a dangerous game. But I suppose you thought it would be safe enough with a man whom you regarded as next door to an imbecile.”

“Not so loud!” Claw said. “Not so loud. Suppose anybody was to overhear you?”

Claw was shaken now, and he made no effort to disguise it. His face assumed a curious leaden hue under its brilliant colouring, and a bead or two of moisture trickled down his cheeks. A few minutes ago everything seemed to be on firm ground, and now everything was crumbling away under his feet.

“Who is likely to hear us?” Kent asked. “Don’t you worry about that. To resume. You robbed the old gentleman of all his dividends, and now to make the thing complete, you have got hold of his securities and intend to realize them. My dear sir, you could not possibly realize that money any other way. And upon my word, I shouldn’t be surprised to find out that you’ve got those securities in your pocket at this very moment.”

Quite involuntarily Claw’s hand went to his breast pocket. With anger in his heart he watched the knowing grin on Kent’s face.

“Ah, then I am right,” the latter remarked. “Now, some of those negotiable securities I know. What do you say to handing me over a couple of thousands worth now in return for the papers which are of such vital importance to you?”

“Can you produce them now?” Claw asked hoarsely.

“Put your stuff on the table and we’ll see,” Kent challenged. “Show them to me so that I can see you haven’t another ramp on. What are you hesitating about? There are only the three of us here, and I think that we understand one another.”

Claw thought the matter over rapidly. His hand went to his breast pocket, but before he could produce the papers the door of the dining-room opened, and Everard Geere crept in. With that same senile smile on his face he tottered across the room and stood beaming on the others through his blue spectacles. The fact that Kent was there did not seem to trouble him in the least. Then he suddenly drew himself up and all sign of weakness fell from him as if it were a garment. The expression of his face changed as he pulled off the tweed cap and spectacles and cast his wig on the floor. And there, before the astonished eyes of Claw and Enderby, stood, not the bent and broken form of Everard Geere, but the vigorous, muscular personality known to men as Michel Quint.

“Now, you poisonous devils!” he cried. “Now then, I think you will find that it is my turn.”

Chapter XXVI

The Open Door.

For a few minutes an intense silence reigned in the little room. Each man there was busy with his own thoughts, and so far as Claw and Enderby were concerned, looking for some way out. The sudden appearance of Michel Quint and the rapid way in which he had thrown off his disguise came almost as a paralysing surprise to the two chief scoundrels of the drama. Claw, at any rate, had made up his mind to put some sort of a fight, and he glanced with undisguised contempt at Enderby, collapsed, white and almost despairing, in a chair. With a rapid movement Quint crossed the room and locked the door behind him. He appeared to regard himself as master of the situation, and so, to a certain extent, he was. Almost instinctively he turned to Claw.

“What are you going to do about it?” he asked.

“Here, not quite so fast!” Claw said, pulling himself together a little. “Through some extraordinary juggling you seem to have gained the run of the house. Perhaps a little later on it will be necessary to inquire what has become of Mr. Everard Geere, and how you come to be here at all?”

“That’s easily answered,” Quint smiled. “Mr. Geere is lying upstairs, having had a paralytic seizure some time ago. He has been well looked after, so you need not worry about him. The point is, what are you going to do?”

“Oh, you can take that tone if you like,” Claw went on. “I suppose you think you’ve got us in a tight place, but we don’t admit that by a long chalk. By some means or another you have got hold of that rascal, Kent, and I dare say you flatter yourself that you have bought him over to your side, but you’ll find that you haven’t. It’s all a question of money with Kent, and I think we can beat you at that game.”

“Quite right,” Kent said cheerfully. “It is all a matter of money. So far as I am concerned it has been money from the first, and when you two played me false, quite naturally I went over to the other side. Oh, I am not a bit ashamed of it. Give me what I want and let me get out of the country and you won’t hear another word from me. Two thousand pounds is my price.”

“I know it,” Claw said, curtly. “And a little time ago I promised to give it you. You are aware that we are in a position to carry out our promise, and with that there is no more to be said. Unless, perhaps Mr. Quint can make you a better offer?”

Claw spoke with a sneer, but it passed lightly over the head of the man who was confronting him.

“I think we can,” Quint said. “What then?”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” Claw cried. “You couldn’t find a thousand pounds to save your soul alive. We can, and Kent knows that he can have it to-morrow. Now, look here, Quint, I am prepared to admit that you have played the game very cleverly but you have come to the end of your resources now. You can’t find that money and you know it. Now let us compromise. Nobody knows what has taken place, except us four, and I suggest that we forget all our differences and go into partnership. There’s a big fortune before that invention of Somerset’s and it won’t be long before we are touching a lot of money. We can’t very well get on without Somerset, and you are just the man to make for success in big business. Kent has all the documents we require and because of that we must take him in. Now what’s the use of quarrelling? Suppose you can expose Enderby and myself. I

merely say, suppose you can. Not that I admit it for a moment. Very well, don't forget that the police are after you, and that if they lay you by the heels you two will find yourselves in a precious tight place. As to Kent, there is no relying upon him at all. He will go with the highest bidder and circumstances have made me that. Why not shake hands and call it a deal?"

"Very plausible," Quint said coolly. "And no doubt very tempting to the average man, but you see, Mr. Somerset and myself have some sort of a character to lose. There are thousands of people in England at the present moment who know that Michel Quint is under a cloud and that he is hiding from the police. Even if we make up our quarrel with you and walk out to-morrow free men there will always be plenty of people who will shake their heads and say there was something in it after all. I am a young man, and I am not disposed to go through the world for the rest of my life under the shadow of that disgrace. I don't want to be cold-shouldered in golf clubs and find the selection committee of the Rugby Union looking askance when my name is mentioned. I am not going to live that scandal down. I am going to have it lifted off my back."

"Very well, then," Claw said, speaking under the impression that Quint was weakening. "Perhaps you would like to tell the police your own story."

"Well, I rather think I should," Quint went on, in the same cool fashion. "You see, I have such a lot to say. I can tell them how Mr. Somerset and myself were robbed of our property by a trick, and we can put Kent in the witness box to make a full confession of the part he played in the scheme. By doing that he would save his skin and escape a prosecution. Moreover, this would enable him to cross the Atlantic with enough money in his pocket to start afresh in America. A man with his talents and utter unscrupulousness should do very well over there with a little capital. And besides, I could tell the police how, on a certain occasion, Enderby tried to murder his accomplice. Oh, you needn't shake your head Enderby—Somerset and myself saw it done. We were hiding behind the curtains in your library at the time. Perhaps you wonder what for. Well, I'll tell you. I was after those papers which I thought were in your safe. When you two were out of the library consulting with the police, no doubt over my case, we got Kent away, and beyond question saved his life. We could tell the police all that. We could also tell them how Kent confessed to us—"

"Here, stop a bit," Claw cried eagerly. "That's all very well, but would you be believed? Kent is a discredited man. He has already committed perjury, and in the witness box his evidence would be cut into rags."

"Very possible," Quint said. "But suppose we go a bit further. Suppose we tell the court about what has happened here to-night? Suppose we could prove that you came down here with a lot of stolen securities in your pocket, out of which you intended to bribe Kent heavily and get him out of the way. Oh, you needn't shake your head. I am speaking about Mr. Geere's securities and I know that they are in your pocket at the present moment."

It was a shrewd blow for Claw, but he kept his head.

"Very well," he said. "You think you know a lot, and perhaps it would be better if the police did hear your story."

Quint glanced at the speaker with a keen light in his eyes.

"They already know it," he said, crisply. "Ah, you may smile, but it's no more than the truth."

The words had hardly died away from Quint's lips when there came the sound of something moving amongst the rustling ferns in the darkened conservatory, and immediately afterwards three figures came through the open glass doors into the room. First came Barr, smiling, and at ease, in immaculate dress clothes, followed close behind by two inspectors of police in uniform. With a full enjoyment of the situation Barr lighted a cigarette and turned to Claw, who was looking at him open-mouthed. Enderby was in too great a state of collapse to take any part in the proceedings.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Barr said, pleasantly. "Really, I don't think there is any occasion to go into explanations, because the situation speaks for itself. I need not tell you that we have lured you deliberately into the trap. For the last hour, myself and these legal representatives have been hiding in the conservatory. We know everything, and what's more, we know it from your own lips. And we shan't lack witnesses. We shall have these two gentlemen, high up in the police force, and that interesting specimen of rascality, Kent, doing penance in a white sheet to save his own miserable skin. But really, inspector, we are wasting our time. Before you take these two men away, it would be just as well to search Mr. Claw and relieve him of the valuables which he has stolen from my unfortunate relative. On the whole, a most interesting evening and well worth crossing the Atlantic to take part in."

A few minutes later and the two baffled conspirators left the house in the charge of the men from Scotland Yard, and Kent, more than satisfied with what he had done, had been dismissed to his bedroom. Then, sitting round the fireside, Barr and Quint, joined a moment later by Somerset, discussed the events of the last few days far into the night. A day or two later there was something of a sensation in the City when Claw and Enderby stood in the dock, and the powerful array of witnesses against them told their story. In the end, the two chief conspirators in the drama were committed for trial and the charges against Quint and Somerset were withdrawn. By the time the second day's proceedings were finished and the magistrate had done with the case, it was possible for Michel Quint and his friend to face the world without a single stain upon their characters. They had disposed, or rather Mr. Barr had disposed, of Kent, and the missing documents had been restored. It was not possible in the circumstances to pay Kent for the evidence he had given, but it was possible, after the conviction of the two chief criminals, to make things easier for him on the other side of the water. And so, in the course of time, Claw and Enderby disappeared into the obscurity of a gaol, where they were to remain for the next seven years, and Kent crossed over to America, congratulating himself that he had been on the right side after all.

The unfortunate Everard Geere lingered on in the house on the river for the next few months with every attention bestowed upon him, though he never recovered sufficiently to grasp the exciting events which had taken place in that lonely residence of his. Meanwhile, events were marching rapidly. With Barr's influence and money behind them, Somerset and Quint launched the invention which was marvelously successful from the first. Beyond the shadow of a doubt they would both be rich men in the course of a few years, so that there was nothing now to

prevent Somerset marrying Margaret, and for Quint to follow suit as soon as he had won the consent of his future father-in-law.

“Oh, don’t ask me,” Barr said whimsically. “When Ennie sets her mind to a thing I am as wax in her hands. All I stipulated was that she should be marrying a man who did something, and as you are going to take an active interest in this new business, you will have your hands full for some time. And if you want money, well—don’t forget to come to me.”

“Isn’t he an ideal father?” Ennie asked, when Barr had discreetly disappeared. “What should I do without him?”

“And what should I have done without you?” Quint said fondly. “I am almost afraid to think what would have happened if you hadn’t played so splendid a part in the early days of the house on the river.”

“I couldn’t help it, Michel,” Ennie whispered. “How could anybody hold back when a man like you was in trouble?”

Quint said nothing, for it seemed there was nothing to say.
