THE PASSING OF CHARLES LANSON

NOVELS BY

LOUIS TRACY

THE WOMEN IN THE CASE
THE THIRD MIRACLE
THE LAW OF THE TALON
THE GLEAVE MYSTERY
THE SECOND BARONET
THE MAN WITH THE SIXTH SENSE
THE TURNING POINT
THE PARK LANE MYSTERY
THE TOKEN
THE PASSING OF CHARLES LANSON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD.
PUBLISHERS LONDON, E.C.4

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Author of

"The Token," "The Turning-point," "No. 17," etc.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LIMITED LONDON

Made and Printed in Great Britain. Wyman & Sons Ltd., London, Reading and Fakenham

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"Now, then!" said the policeman. "You have no business there. Out you come!"

The night was dark, a clear still night, with a slight luminosity in the sky which told of a rising moon. Objects close at hand in the open were distinct enough, and Police-Constable Barker, of the Derbyshire County Constabulary, had seen a tall man standing motionless near a bay of the ruins of White Friars. Indeed, any possible element of uncertainty in that respect was dispelled when the figure vanished into the nearest niche of blackness as a sort of furtive reply to a gruff yet somewhat persuasive challenge that he should come out of it, and explain to the representative of the law "wot he was a-doin' of."

Barker, though not so agile as he had been twenty years earlier, was sturdy and stout-hearted withal. Feeling himself rebuffed, as it were, he opened a wicket-gate, climbed swiftly up a few yards of the mound on which certain fourteenth century Carmelites had built their monastery, and switched on his electric torch just before rounding the bay behind which the silent one might be lurking. He hardly expected to find anyone there. The ruins, though not spacious—being the remains of the once beautiful chancel and nave of a minor abbey—offered many more secluded nooks than a mere exterior angle. Barker was thoroughly familiar with each and every possible

hiding-place, and felt sure he would grab the trespasser promptly.

Greatly to his subsequent surprise and irritation, his belief was not well founded. A heavy cobble-stone, thrown with strength and precision, caught him on the chest, and knocked him flat on his back. In falling, his head missed the sharp edge of a dismantled finial by a fraction of an inch, but his lamp crashed against another grass-grown heap of masonry, so he was bereft of light altogether, and of his senses during some few seconds. Indeed, he hardly knew what had actually happened when he wriggled on to hands and knees in a subconscious effort to rise.

This was an undignified position for a self-respecting policeman. A gust of anger sent the blood coursing hotly through his veins, and the consequent reaction gave his startled senses an abnormal range. During a few more seconds, therefore, he remained absolutely motionless. He could hear his own heart beating. His faculties grew almost painfully acute. His eyes pierced the gloom until they distinguished the gap in the ruined wall through which his assailant had probably fled. His ears would have detected the rustle of a field-mouse among the grasses. He was crouched thus, with every nerve and sinew tense to repel further attack, when the parish church clock chimed the half-hour.

Somehow that familiar and homely sound helped to calm and even reassure him. The methodical habits of years resumed their sway, and he began to reason the mischance which had befallen him. He knew that barely half a minute had elapsed since he passed through the gate. The ruins of White Friars stood in a small square, perhaps an acre in extent, in the very centre of the town. Its north-east corner marked the junction of two main streets, a lane bounded the

west, and a row of working-class cottages faced the southern wall. He had come that way. The man who had not scrupled to try and kill him risked being seen if attempting to scale either of two six-foot walls abutting on fairly well-lighted thoroughfares. Like the valiant fellow that he was, Barker sprang upright, chanced another tumble by running over broken ground, and reached a smaller wall which overlooked the lane.

The straight, narrow road was empty. True, a dense hedge on the opposite side offered concealment, but it was quite impenetrable, not only for a good hundred yards to the left, but also until it touched the bricked-in garden of a house in the High Street on the right. The lighted gap at that end held a knot of men, shopkeepers and artisans, who, tempted by the fine weather, had halted for a farewell smoke and chat after leaving a neighbouring inn. In fact, Barker himself had seen them come out at closing time—ten o'clock. He climbed the wall, and became aware then of a sharp and rapidly increasing pain in his chest. It was an unpleasing discovery. Hitherto, by sheer chance, he had not twisted the upper part of his body. Now he knew that some bone in his breast was injured, broken perhaps, but certainly bruised. By holding himself stiffly he contrived to walk the forty yards of the lane, and hailed the loiterers.

"Boys!" he gasped, "some blighter—in the Abbey ruins—hit me—with a stone. Maybe—he hasn't got away. Watch the four roads. . . . Tell—the super . . ."

Then he collapsed, yielding at the knees; luckily two of the men caught him, and laid him on the pavement.

In the England of to-day it would be difficult to

find any gathering of adults in which there should not be one or more intelligent persons trained in the prompt and efficient action called for by a crisis of this sort. An ex-sergeant of engineers took charge at once. Sentries were sent at the double to the four corners of the enclosure which contained the ruins. Each man could see two of his mates; no fear, therefore, of anyone leaving the place undetected now. A fifth volunteer raced to the police-station. The ex-sapper and another man tried to lift Barker into a sitting posture, but he asked them, lucidly enough, to leave him prostrate.

"The pain—isn't so bad—this way," he murmured. "They'll send an ambulance. I'd best—lie still—till the doctor—runs the rule over me."

"Of course, you don't know who did it, Barker?" inquired the sergeant sympathetically.

"No. A stranger, I think. Tall, slim chap. But it was pitch dark. Damn 'im. I on'y asked wot he was up to. You know—tramps—sleep out there nights like this."

"All right. Don't talk any more. Shall I get you a tot of brandy?"

"No use. They'll—be here—soon."

"They" came on the run—a superintendent and two constables—all the available staff, indeed, since the busy little market-town of Sleaford mustered a police force of only a dozen all told, and would not have owned so many were it not the centre of a petty-sessional district.

Superintendent Wood, a capable officer, sized up the situation quickly. He dispatched one policeman and the ex-sergeant's assistant with Barker, now lying in a wheeled stretcher, to the latter's residence, with orders to summon the doctor who took police cases.

"Tell your scouts to stand fast, Mr. Fletcher," he went on. "Then join us at the wicket, and, if you care to come in—remaining in the rear, of course—you can help considerably by letting us know which way to head if one of the men outside sees anything suspicious."

It was eerie work searching the ruins. A colony of bats and a couple of owls were disturbed, so a chorus of squeaks was punctuated by a wild hoot or two. Barker's lamp was found at once, but the superintendent decided not to touch it.

"Unless we make an arrest we can examine the ground better by daylight," he explained. "Don't disturb a thing, even a stone. I shall be surprised if any ordinary tramp attacked a policeman so determinedly. It's not—reasonable."

Mr. Wood liked to use that word in connection with police affairs, and almost invariably heralded it by a deferential pause; it may be said now that it was often on his lips during the next two months, and seldom or never without ample justification.

"Tread lightly," he continued. "We've had no rain for a week, but there may be marks. . . . The devil take those owls! They make one look up at the wrong moment."

Being country bred, he put the case mildly. Anyone not inured to night-life in the open might well have fled in sudden panic from a startling apparition all beak and claws and fiery eyes surrounded by fluttering pinions. It did not matter, however, whether the superintendent looked up or not. Within five minutes he and the others were convinced that the ruins harboured no malefactor that night. Beyond the mute evidence of the shattered torch there was not the slightest visible sign that the placid dignity of White Friars had been outraged in any way since

the Reformation, let alone since the church clock chimed the half-hour. The same reliable chronicler announced that it was a quarter to eleven just before the three men decided that further search was not called for.

"You remain here, Jackson," said Mr. Wood, parting from his subordinate at the wicket. "I'll send Hopkins to join you. Stand fast till midnight. Of course, if you see or hear anything unusual, investigate it. Don't actually arrest anyone, unless you are resisted. Just make a civil request that he should accompany you to the police-station, as I am inquiring into something which happened here earlier in the evening. . . . Thank you, Mr. Fletcher. You can call off your sentries now. Perhaps I may have some news for you in the morning."

Never was prophet more modest. The news which Mr. Wood had for Mr. Fletcher next day set men's tongues wagging in the market-places of San Francisco and Calcutta, to say nothing of millions of people nearer home. As for quiet, easygoing Sleaford, its inhabitants were benumbed by the magnitude of the evil which had been done in their midst.

Castle Street, which intersected High Street at White Friars, made brave display of an Attic Town Hall, an Inigo Jones Parish Church, a number of mid-Victorian shops, and some placid Georgian buildings tenanted by a few lawyers, an architect and a dentist. It also contained the Crown Hotel, a picturesque, rambling inn of the coaching period. The police-station stood at the back of the Town Hall, and both its official and private entrances opened into a side-street. Mr. Wood had almost turned into the main doorway when a runabout car approached swiftly from the opposite direction. He halted on the pavement, and, when the car also stopped, cried cheerfully:

"I was just going to telephone you, doctor. How is Barker? But won't you come in for a minute? A friend sent me some pre-war whisky the other day——"

"What? Pre-war!" came the instant reply. "I ought to be in bed after fifteen hours of hard going, but I can certainly spare another five minutes now. What about leaving my car here?"

"No vehicle will pass at this time of night. In any case, the man on duty inside will call you if need be. Tell me about Barker. I must have the affair entered up in the report book."

By this time the two men were inside the charge-room of the police-station. A young constable, reading the racing news in an evening newspaper spread on a broad and high desk, hopped off a long-legged stool and stood to attention.

"Barker," began Dr. Macgregor, a tall, lanky Scot, with a weather-beaten face denoting much strength of character, and the hands and wrists of one who could be both a skilled surgeon and a sound golfer, "Barker is badly hurt. His injuries may or may not be serious. I've put him to sleep, and will overhaul him thoroughly in the morning. Who on earth could have——?"

The clamour of a telephone broke in on the obvious question.

"What's this, I wonder?" growled the superintendent, as he walked toward the desk, motioning the constable not to take the call. "It never rains but it pours. I'll try not to keep you waiting, doctor."

He lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Police-station, Sleaford," he said.

"That you, Superintendent Wood?" came a voice.

"Yes."

"I'm Mr. Pinkney, butler at the Castle. A terrible

thing has happened here. Mr. Lanson has been mum-mum-murdered!"

For a second or two even the case-hardened police-officer of twenty-five years' service doubted whether or not he had heard aright.

"Do you really know what you are saying?" he demanded, with a dry scepticism of tone he could hardly account for. Simultaneously, he crooked a finger at Macgregor, inviting the latter in dumb show to come and listen.

"Yes, sir. Why shouldn't I?" was the answer.

"But you imply that Mr. Lanson is dead, and that some person killed him wilfully?"

"Quite right, sir. The dagger is sticking in him now, just under the left shoulder-blade. I found him in the library at twenty minutes to eleven—at least, not exactly that. Oh, dear! It's hard to collect one's wits. You see, I was knocked downstairs."

"By the murderer?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Do you know who it was?"

"No, sir."

"A man?"

"Oh, yes, and a strong one at that."

"Can he have left the Castle?"

"No, sir. I'm sure of that, though the whole place is in an uproar. When I pulled myself together I telephoned for Dr. Macgregor, and was told——"

"Yes, he is here now. We'll come straight away. And, Mr. Pinkney, arm some of your men anyhow, and station them in the courtyard, the gardens—at all points, in fact, where there is the remotest chance of any person escaping."

"That's impossible, as you know, sir. But Bates, the night watchman, has seen to everything of that sort."

"Good for Bates! Well, try and calm down. Have someone meet us at the gate."

The superintendent walked to a cupboard, unlocked it, and produced two automatic pistols.

"Take one, doctor," he said. "We don't know what we may be in for up there." Then, glancing at a clock, he turned to the startled constable. "Run, you, and find Sergeant Phillips. He will be on the bridge at eleven. Tell him to come for my car, and round up at least four men, including Hopkins. Let each of them call here first, and get an automatic. Then they must hurry to the Castle. Jackson must stand fast. Be back yourself quickly, and warn the Exchange that the phone will soon be busy. Ask them to make a note of any unusual calls, or of any which may have gone through earlier this evening. Rush! It will be eleven in a minute."

The policeman grabbed his helmet and tore out. The church clock began to chime as Macgregor and the superintendent entered the doctor's car. The big hour-bell was still booming as they passed the Crown Hotel.

"Stop!" cried Wood suddenly. "There's a man here I want. Good Lord, I hope he's not out!"

Without further explanation he sprang from the car before Macgregor could bring it to the kerb. He hurried through an archway to the rear of the building, darted into a passage, and waylaid a waiter.

"Is Mr. Winter in the hotel?" he said, with a fine assumption of composure.

"Yes, sir—in the smoking-room," said the waiter.

"Tell him, as quietly as you can, that Superintendent Wood would like to see him. I shall probably detain him some time, so he may as well bring his hat. And, by the way, arrange for the Boots to sit up and let him in. I'll pilot him to the back door."

In less than half a minute a tall, heavily-built, well-dressed man appeared. He wore a sporting costume of tweeds and leggings, and looked—which happened to be the fact—as though he had been rousing partridges from the September stubble. He had a pleasant, almost benevolent, expression, with bright blue eyes set prominently beneath a rounded forehead. A straight, well-moulded nose and firm chin redeemed his face from a commonlpace chubbiness, while his huge frame seemed to be a well-proportioned blend of bone and muscle.

"Hallo, Mr. Wood!" he cried, in a strong, agreeable voice. "What's up? I missed some birds disgracefully to-day, but that's not against the statutes made and provided, I hope?"

"I want you to meet Dr. Macgregor," said the superintendent, mainly for the benefit of the waiter. "He's outside in his car. It's a late hour to disturb you, but the doctor is a busy man, so I thought——"

In so far as the waiter was concerned, the speaker's voice trailed into silence. Then he continued, in a murmur:

"Mr. Charles Lanson, the financial magnate who bought the Castle on top of the hill last year, was murdered not half an hour ago. I'm just going there. Do you mind giving me a hand? It's a big thing—a long way out of our line—and you will be brought into it in any event if we don't unravel the tangle to-night. . . . Dr. Macgregor, this is Chief Superintendent Winter, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard. I knew he was here on a holiday, so I've commandeered him, though I haven't given him a chance yet to say whether or not he is willing to help."

"A lamb led to the slaughter," agreed Winter,

tucking a cigar into the corner of his mouth after a pause of genuine amazement, which the others attributed to Wood's unnerving statement. "Go ahead, doctor! Mr. Wood will wise me up, as the Americans say, while we climb the hill."

Wood recited the available facts in a sentence. All the world was acquainted with the name and fame of the Anglo-Greek banker who had risen so speedily to an almost uncanny prominence in international finance. Son of an English father and Greek mother, and heir on the distaff side to a small but old-established banking business in Athens, by some mysterious but seemingly quite legitimate means he had amassed a fortune during the Great War. Afterwards, by the exercise of a sort of magic divination, he foresaw the probable course of the money market as between England and America on the one hand and the remaining great nations on the other. His millions were reputed to double their sum total every six months. The gossip of the mart probably far outran the truth, but there could be no doubt that he was immensely wealthy. He controlled seemingly inexhaustible funds in London, New York, Paris and Amsterdam. If he merely transferred some vast amount of money from one capital to another, what most men would regard as a competence for life would attach itself automatically to the original drafts or bills of exchange. Other men could never discover whether he was buying from them or from himself, selling to them or to himself. They tried to guess, and were wrong invariably. He was detested by rival financiers, courted by governments, and regarded with awe by the general public.

And this was the dynast, the modern Mammon, the new and startling individual force in a world of fantastic currency values, who, according to his

butler's story, lay dead in his library with a dagger thrust through his heart. It was incredible, yet apparently true. The local superintendent was well acquainted with Mr. Pinkney, a dean among butlers, and had recognised his voice. Mr. Pinkney might have enjoyed his half-bottle of port after dinner, but he could not have evolved such an imaginary tragedy out of a whole hogshead.

If Charles Lanson had really been murdered it was, at least, a dramatic turn of fortune's wheel which brought on the scene almost immediately the famous Chief of the executive staff of Scotland Yard. Winter, imperturbable and shrewd, never allowed himself to be flurried into impulsive action. If he were informed, on reliable authority, that the Day of Judgment would take place on the following morning at ten o'clock, he would light a fresh cigar, summon his most trusted assistants, and consider what special measures the Metropolitan Police could devise to cope with a quite unprecedented crowd. So he wasted no time now on idle broodings as to the political and social effects of Charles Lanson's death.

"Tell me something about the other inmates of the Castle," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I know little of them," admitted Wood. "Lean over, and ask the doctor. He has been called there several times professionally."

Dr. Macgregor had not much to relate. He had attended Miss Irene, Lanson's only daughter, for mild attacks of neurasthenia. The millionaire employed three private secretaries—Davidson, an Englishman, Trevor, an American, and a Greek, Sevastopolo. And, of course, there was Miss Dorothy Temple, whom the people of Sleaford persisted in calling "Lady Dorothy," a daughter of the late Sir John Temple, Baronet. She acted as companion to Miss Irene.

"Wasn't Sir John the previous owner of the Castle?" inquired Winter.

"Yes. The bankruptcy proceedings practically killed him. Lanson paid a big sum for the estate, but it all went in satisfying mortgagees and other creditors. Miss Dorothy's present job is a god-send."

"Anybody else worth mentioning?"

"A cousin, descended from Lanson's father's brother in the female line. He is an artist. His name, I am told, is Felix Glen. Lanson and he were 'uncle' and 'nephew' colloquially. For some reason he left the Castle to-night about nine o'clock, and is staying at your hotel."

"Ah, yes," said Winter. "I saw him in the billiard-room, and later in the smoking-room. He went out with another man five minutes ago. . . . One more brief word. Neurasthenia—that covers a lot of ground. Any special feature?"

"Miss Lanson is subject to a species of trance—imagines she can converse with former occupants of the Castle, and even with the Carmelites who built White Friars—the four-hundred-years' ruined Abbey, you know. She used to amuse Miss Dorothy, who has the history of both places by heart, but her father was greatly worried, and insisted that I should administer strong doses of bromide to prevent attacks on particular occasions, such as the presence of important guests. Of course, each secretary has a secretary—so has Miss Irene—and there's a host of servants. . . . Well, here we are!"

The car had been mounting a fairly steep hill for nearly a quarter of a mile. From the Castle gates, the only entrance, its occupants could have gazed back on Sleaford two hundred feet beneath. During the last hundred yards they had climbed a broad

causeway, half masonry, half rock. They halted on a drawbridge over a deep fosse which, after following lofty, battlemented walls through a semicircle of another quarter of a mile, merged into a precipice at both ends. The ponderous Norman gateway, with its iron-studded door, portcullis, and machicolated towers, looked grim enough even when brilliantly lighted, as it was at the moment, by two clusters of electric lamps. Whether by day or night, its gloomy scowl suggested the portals of a jail.

Dr. Macgregor had hardly applied the hand-brake when the great oaken door swung wide with a clanking of chains and levers.

"Come in, gentlemen; I was on the look-out for you," said a stalwart man in a fireman's uniform.

"This the night-watchman?" murmured Winter, who had sunk back into his seat.

"Yes—name of Bates," said Wood.

"For a little while let no one know exactly who I am. Ask this chap if there is a stop on the path down the cliff on the north side."

At any other time the superintendent would have been puzzled by this display of a peculiarly local knowledge on Winter's part, but, after a warning word to the doctor, he put the question.

"Yes, sir," said Bates. "I sent my mate there, because he had a revolver handy. Not that a steeplejack could get in or out that way without ladders, even in broad daylight, let alone on a pitch-dark night."

An Italian garden, oval-shaped, and sunk below the level of the spacious, rectangular courtyard, was surrounded by a broad carriage-way. At the farther end, facing south like the gate, lay the main entrance. The architectural elevation there, as on both sides, was Elizabethan, so the tilting-ground of Norman

days had been adapted to more gracious uses. There was plenty of light. The great doors stood open. Winter, the stranger among the three men in the car, had a momentary glimpse of roughly-paved paths, graceful statues, a fountain, a low balustrade pierced by flights of steps, the brick and stone regularity of the buildings, before the car drew up finally, and he and his companions alighted.

A portly personage, attired in evening dress, hurried past two plum-coloured footmen stationed on the outer flight of steps.

"I'm glad you are here, gentlemen," was his flurried greeting, "though you come on a dreadful occasion. . . . I just want to warn you, doctor, that Miss Irene has had a series of—er—attacks——"

"No doubt," muttered Macgregor. "Why shouldn't she, in the conditions? Have you the powders, some water, and a glass handy, Pinkney?"

"Yes, sir. On the hall table, just inside, on the left."

The three entered. Beyond a dazzling black and white tessellated floor, a regal staircase of white marble led to the inner part of the Castle. Where the finely proportioned balusters curved to the ground level stood the armoured panoply of two gigantic knights, black iron veined with silver, each mailed right hand grasping a lance, with the left hand resting on the pommel of a sword. A similar pair guarded the half-landing, whence the stairs turned to right and left.

Scattered in groups throughout the hall were some thirty frightened people, but the eye dwelt at once on two women and two men, who had apparently just descended the stairs. Winter had no difficulty in establishing their identity at a glance. Irene Lanson resembled her Greek mother, and, in this

hour of torment, suggested, if not Niobe, Niobe's daughter. The brown-haired, blue-eyed girl by her side, with the smooth forehead, short upper lip, and exquisitely proportioned features which seem to be almost a prerogative of the inner circle of British aristocracy, could be none other than Dorothy Temple. Trevor, the American secretary, looked what he was—a capable New Yorker of the younger generation—while Davidson, the English secretary, bore the outward label of his degree.

It was he who came forward.

"Mr. Wood," he said, "your people want you urgently on the telephone. I knew you were *en route*, so kept the line open. The booth is here—the second door on the right."

Only the really great dare ignore telephone calls. Superintendent Wood swore under his breath, but hurried off. He swore again, not under his breath, when the voice of Sergeant Phillips reached him.

"Sorry, sir," said his subordinate, "but I cannot leave head-quarters before consulting you. The man you posted in White Friars has brought in two gentlemen, Mr. Felix Glen and his friend, Mr. Victor Denasch. They are here now. What am I to do with them?"

CHAPTER II

A Tragic Hour

"What's the matter with Jackson?" gasped Mr. Wood.

"Nothing, sir, that I'm aware of," said Phillips.

"But why should he arrest Mr. Glen and his friend?"

"He heard someone approaching, so took cover. They came in by the wicket gate, and seemed to be annoyed when tackled by a policeman."

The superintendent took thought. He knew that Phillips was probably speaking within earshot of the very persons under discussion.

"What were they doing there at such an hour?" was his guarded question.

"That's just what Jackson wanted to know. Mr. Glen says—will you let him have a word with you, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Look here, Mr. Wood," struck in a new voice, "some active and poisonous species of anopheles mosquito seems to have stung your gay lads to-night. Why, in the name of Sir Robert Peel, should the Sleaford bobbies object to Denasch and me making a few notes of a moonrise effect? Dash it all! Does no one read Scott nowadays?

> If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight.

If Melrose, why not White Friars? Is there to be no study of art after sunset south of the Tweed? Of course, if you were that canny Hielander, Dr. Macgregor——"

The flood of banter pouring in at one end of the wire had given the man at the other end time to collect his wits.

"Just a moment, Mr. Glen," he interrupted. "Any slight inconvenience Mr. Denasch and you may have suffered can be put right at once. Do you know that I am speaking from the Castle?"

"You don't say! What's up? What have *I* done *now*?"

"You have no notion of what has happened here?"

"Not an earthly, unless that money-mad uncle of mine has gone crazy with the heat. He was very hot under the collar about nine o'clock."

"Mr. Glen, your uncle—that is, Mr. Lanson—is dead."

There was a marked pause. Then, in words from which all trace of mystified amusement had fled, came the broken demand:

"Do you really—mean—that?"

"I do, unfortunately. Mr. Lanson is not only dead, but—you must endure a shock—he was murdered. That is why I am here. Will you sit down one moment, and let Sergeant Phillips have the wire? . . . That you, Phillips? Bring Mr. Glen and his friend here in the car. Ask them to oblige me by not communicating with anyone, in any way whatsoever, till I meet them. See that this is so."

Within a few seconds he was assured that the two young men, with Phillips and three constables, would start immediately. Jackson was in the police-station, of course. After a moment's hesitation the superintendent directed that he should return to his post at the ruins. He could assign no clear reason for this decision. Somehow, in the nebulous state of his mind just then, the tragic occurrences of the night seemed to have their origin in the ruins of White Friars rather than in the Castle on the hill. Besides, he would soon have sufficient men at command for the yet indefinite purposes of the hour.

The unforeseen absence of Superintendent Wood at a critical moment defeated Winter's intent to keep

in the background for the time being. Miss Lanson, sweeping forward with a grace of movement suggestive of some actress famed on the tragic stage, stretched out both hands to Dr. Macgregor."

"Oh, doctor," she wailed, "they won't let me touch my father—my darling father, who is seated all alone there in his library. Can you save him? Perhaps there is time yet. They said—they said—it would be fatal to—to remove the——"

The words on her lips fluttered into the silence of fear. The pupils of her eyes showed an unnatural dilatation. She gazed at Winter with a sort of fascinated stare.

"Who is this man?" she gasped, after a pause that was painful to her hearers. "I have seen him—in my dreams. He was the warden—of the outer court——"

Macgregor caught her by the left arm. He seemed almost to shake her, and in short sentences that were sharp and incisive tried to restore her normal senses.

"You must not yield to fancies to-night, Miss Lanson," he said. "This gentleman is a detective from Scotland Yard. He is here to assist in the search for your father's murderer. Come, now. Make a supreme effort. . . . Pinkney, bring one of those powders. . . . Please oblige me, and all of us, Miss Lanson, by drinking this. Then you, Miss Temple, can take Miss Irene to the morning-room. She will be all right in a few minutes. We will come to you there after a preliminary investigation of the facts. . . . That's splendid, Miss Irene. You will help us immensely by remaining calm. Don't try to repress your tears. Lord save us, that would be unnatural in this dreadful hour!"

Thus the doctor, commanding and coaxing in the

same breath, issuing reasonable orders and giving good advice—a man altogether after Winter's own heart.

The two girls were mounting the stairs to the left, and the secretaries and butler were about to lead Winter and Macgregor to the library, on the right, when Wood reappeared.

Winter, who had sensed the urgency of that telephone call, muttered in his colleague's ear:

"Anything bearing on this case?"

"I really cannot say, yet," admitted the flustered superintendent, speaking so that none other than Winter could hear. "A man I stationed in the White Friars ruins because of a mysterious attack made there on another constable at half-past ten—less than an hour ago—has arrested Mr. Glen and a stranger, a Mr. Victor Denasch. Sergeant Phillips is bringing them here."

Winter was suddenly aware of a sensation which he had almost forgotten—a fading memory of the war years. One night in 1917 he had stood on the roof of New Scotland Yard and peered at a bedimmed London in the throes of an air raid. Incendiary bombs were falling in many directions. Some came close, others were miles distant. It was quite impossible to guess whether the next would crash on top of the small group of watchers at police headquarters or in a remote suburban garden. In such conditions the man is not human who is unaware of a quickening of the pulse, a slight tingling at the roots of the hair, a quite artificial accuracy of speech. Something of the kind was affecting him now. The Lanson tragedy seemed to offer many unforeseen developments, and this latest spectacular incident was near enough to Sleaford Castle that it should be positively startling.

However, the butler was already on the upper landing, from which a long corridor, with windows on the left and doors on the right, evidently led to the extremity of the central block. He was making for the first door when Winter hurried after him.

"Just one moment, Mr. Pinkney," he said. "To your knowledge, has anyone touched the handle of the dagger since Mr. Lanson was stabbed?"

"Yes, sir," came the hesitating answer. "Miss Irene——"

A new voice broke in, the staccato, slightly nasal utterance of a man sure of himself and convinced that any action of his in an emergency would be a sensible one.

"She ran to her father when we four hurried from the drawing-room at the first alarm," said Trevor, the American secretary. "We were playing bridge, and Miss Lanson was seated nearest the door. When she, like the rest of us, saw what had happened, she seized the weapon and was about to pull it out, but I stopped her. I had some definite belief that one should be ready to treat a wound before the cause of it, whether lead or steel, is removed. And, of course, there was the chance of finger-prints. I'm sorry. If only I had guessed what she meant doing!"

Winter nodded, and turned to Macgregor, who read his unspoken request.

"I'll not disturb any evidence which may still exist," said the doctor quietly.

"All right, Mr. Pinkney," said Winter, and the butler threw wide a heavy door, deeply recessed in an archway, which ran on for some twenty feet or more. The room was lighted brilliantly. It was a very large and lofty apartment, suggestive of some imposing salon in an imperial residence. Six tall and

narrow windows on the north faced six on the south, and there were three in the east wall. Directly overhead was a spacious gallery, obviously provided for an orchestra. In the centre, on each side, was a magnificent fire-place, surmounted by a Watteau panel. Bookshelves, almost packed with volumes, occupied all the remaining wall space to a height of ten feet. In every window recess stood a suit of knightly armour, of different periods, but still most ornate, and of a quality which, at one time, would have ransomed fifteen of the proudest warriors in Europe. Each stood on a low, square, marble block, and, with vizor lowered, carried lance and sword in fashion similar to the quartet on the staircase. The fire-places were seldom used, it would appear, as the grates were hidden by exotic plants arranged in three tiers, and the immense room was heated through gratings in the parquet floor. The austere, indeed, almost too perfect, symmetry of this semi-royal chamber was lightened by the flowers and by two Oriental screens at the farther end, and hardly broken by a slight handrail guarding an unobtrusive stairway on the right, leading to the floor beneath.

The circlets of lights sparkling from the depths of six glorious Louis Seize lustres, suspended in pairs from the panelled ceiling, rendered incongruous the rays of an electric reading lamp on one side of a large and handsome table, whose sixteen feet of length ran back from a point well beyond the centre of the floor. The nearer half, or more, of its surface was bare. The remaining space held two telephones, with a medley of books, newspapers, documents and writing materials scattered in the disorder which itself suggests orderly use. Among these, and in the circle of light cast by the lamp, stood a small and exquisite statue of Minerva, and the bland marble eyes of the Goddess of

Wisdom were staring at the head and shoulders of a man sprawled across a writing-pad. The arms, with clenched fists, were flung out awkwardly. A mass of iron-grey hair was ruffled. The oblong rectangle of several layers of blotting-paper showed a dark stain of blood which had welled from mouth and nostrils. Behind that tragic figure rose the graceful outlines of a Chippendale arm-chair. Two similar chairs occupied the most distant corners, beyond the screens. Two smaller chairs were tucked close to the table on the left; of two others, on the opposite side, one had been displaced, apparently by a recent occupant. There was no more furniture. Despite its splendour as a library, the huge place looked desolate and unhomelike. It was evident that any visitor would have to pace nearly forty feet before he reached the man seated at the end of the table—forty feet of emptiness and creaking, uncarpeted parquet. The mere passage across that void was enough to unnerve a Prime Minister, while any ordinary person would forget what he had to say long ere the man he had come to see demanded his business!

Winter took in nearly all these details with one sweep of his prominent eyes. His first definite impression was given by the parquet, laid in flawless sections of Austrian oak. It was so badly adjusted that it groaned under every step. Somehow, he sensed that this defect had its purpose. Certain leaders in finance and world politics adopt these tricks, of which the most common is to seat a stranger in suchwise that the light from window or lamp falls directly on his or her face.

Dr. Macgregor stooped over the crumpled form in the chair, raised the unresisting head, and lifted an eyelid. A glance sufficed.

"Mr. Lanson has been dead this half-hour and more," he announced with professional restraint of voice and manner. "Of course, I shall make further tests, but he is unquestionably dead. I may as well remove this."

Inserting two fingers under the guard of the dagger, he drew it out without touching the hilt, laying it on the blotting-pad. Then he moved the limp body back into the chair, and produced a stethoscope. Meanwhile, Winter and the others were looking at the weapon, which, soiled though it was, had a sinister beauty of shape, the grip, appropriately enough, being moulded to resemble a coiled snake poised to strike.

"Does anyone recognise this dagger?" said Winter, addressing the three inmates of the Castle collectively.

"Yes," said Davidson, the English secretary. "It is part of that Venetian suit there," and he pointed to the left figure of the three in the west windows. "I think I know a good deal about armour, and I bought every piece in Mr. Lanson's collection. You can see from here that the sheath is empty."

The speaker's public school-cum-university accent sounded oddly at variance with the crisp, strident tones of the American. It was really a tribute to the flexibility of the English tongue that two highly-educated young men could differ so markedly in their use of it.

"Who is in authority in this house now?" demanded Winter suddenly.

Again Davidson answered.

"I should imagine that Mr. Trevor and I have failed to solve that problem already," he said. "We have not discussed the point, though it must have occurred to him as it did to me. Miss Lanson, of course, represents her father's interests, but she is

quite incapable of taking charge of affairs at present. Mr. Sevastopolo, who is in London, is the senior secretary, and Mr. Trevor the junior, but none of us, I am sure, would care to assume entire responsibility. Probably we shall act as a triumvirate, because our duties are sectional, and regional, and quite distinct. Mr. Pinkney, of course, has charge of all household affairs, mainly under the supervision of Miss Temple."

"That will suffice for the hour," said Winter. "Mr. Pinkney, I want you to go at once and request the Telephone Exchange not to accept any calls from or to the Castle until you personally give permission for the line to be opened. Is there a switchboard in the Castle itself?"

The butler could be lucid enough in a matter of this sort.

"Yes, sir," he said. "It is operated by the footman on duty in the hall until midnight. Then the night watchman takes control. But one of these two phones on the table connects direct with the Exchange."

"The embargo applies to both the private and the general lines. Will you kindly give the necessary instructions, and return straight away? . . . Mr. Wood, those people will be here any minute. Please detain them in the hall till I join you, which will be quite soon."

The superintendent and the butler hurried out. Though Wood was nominally the principal official present, he understood instantly that his immediate work lay with Felix Glen and Victor Denasch, whoever the gentleman with the foreign-sounding name might be.

The doctor, who had completed a rapid examination, took the dead man's handkerchief, and spread

it over the waxen-hued features, now, to all appearance, gazing fixedly at the ceiling.

"Rigor mortis will soon set in," he said, as though explaining his diagnosis.

"Do you think the murderer reached Mr. Lanson's heart?" inquired Winter.

"Undoubtedly."

"Then the crime was committed by a skilled hand, because, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the average assassin cannot locate his victim's heart, especially from the back. He almost invariably strikes too high and too much to the left. The question is—how has this expert murderer escaped? I am assuming that there is no practical way out from the Castle except through the main gate. From what the butler told Mr. Wood the scoundrel should still be inside the building. Has any systematic search been undertaken?"

"No," said Davidson. "There are over a hundred and fifty rooms. We thought it best to guard the gate, place patrols around the walls, and await the arrival of the police."

"Do you know what exactly happened to Mr. Pinkney?"

"At half-past ten the butler's invariable custom was to bring Mr. Lanson a glass of hot milk and some dry toast. Then Mr. Lanson would join us in the drawing-room, and, if so inclined, play a rubber of Bridge. He was seldom out of bed after eleven. To-night, owing to a mishap in the kitchen, the jug of milk was not ready until 10.35. By Mr. Lanson's order, when anyone entered the room at night the lights were to be turned on by a switch near the door. When working, he preferred to use the table-lamp only. Pinkney had opened the door, and, with the tray in his left hand, had extended his right hand to

touch the switch, when he was driven backwards by someone whom he describes as a tall man wearing a mask, and flung sideways down the stairs."

"But the stairs are thirty feet or more away from the arch."

"Yes. Still, there would seem to be no doubt as to the fact, because some of the men in the hall actually saw him falling, and noticed that his assailant wore a black mask."

Davidson paused, expecting a question, perhaps, but Winter said no word.

"Luckily, Pinkney collapsed rather than fell, so he sustained no injuries, as the edges of the marble steps are rounded," went on the other. "He called for help, which was forthcoming within a few seconds. Two footmen, indeed, picked him up before he could rise. He and they, together with Bates, the senior watchman, and a chamber-maid who was coming upstairs, ran to the library and turned on the lights. They soon discovered the crime, and Pinkney came to us in the drawing-room."

"Leaving the others here?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Trevor and I cleared them out when we arrived."

"Could the murderer have got away unseen in the confusion?"

"Impossible. I dislike the word, but it is the only one that serves. The front door was closed and locked. The main gate was closed. No stranger went down the stairs, masked or unmasked, because Bates told his deputy to stand fast and have his revolver ready."

"How about the rooms beneath this one?"

"My job," broke in Trevor. "New York Stock Exchange prices turn up late, so I file them in my office, and lock the door at the foot of the stairs. I

did so to-night at 9.30. The key is, or should be, in Mr. Lanson's right hand waistcoat pocket. I saw him put it there."

Winter walked to the body and extracted a key from the pocket indicated.

"This it?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"It must be a small lock."

"I used to think so, but now know better. You see, Mr. Lanson had his own ways of doing things. He never told any of us—never told me, at any rate—more than he believed I ought to know. But my hobby is mechanics, and I am sure, from what I have noticed, that the key merely operates an electrical device which seals not only that door, but the doors of the six rooms it leads to."

A slight click came from the side of one of the book-cases. It sounded like a warning or a signal. Winter turned instantly, but Trevor anticipated his query.

"That announces in all the principal living-rooms that the main gate has been opened to permit a vehicle to pass in or out. We pay little heed to it ordinarily. Its prime object is to tell us that some expected visitor has probably arrived. What I mean is that it is in no sense a check on people's comings and goings."

Curious, thought Winter, though he passed no comment. Instead he broke off the inquiry almost abruptly. At least, such was his intent, but fate, before whose decrees even Scotland Yard must bow, defeated him. He alone of those in the room knew why the main gate had been opened just then, and he wanted one bit of information most urgently.

"Who is Mr. Victor Denasch?" he said.

Both the Englishman and the American were

startled, it would appear. Their eyes met almost furtively, but, after a hardly noticeable pause, Davidson replied :

"He represents a Hamburg financial group," he said, evidently choosing his words carefully. "Mr. Sevastopolo introduced him to Mr. Lanson, but our chief did not like him, and would not listen to him in any business matters. He called here yesterday, and was not received."

"Ah ! Is he friendly with Mr. Felix Glen ? "

"Not to my knowledge."

"Yet they were together to-night in the Crown Hotel, and have now been brought to the Castle by the police."

"Gee ! " said Trevor.

"By the police ? " repeated Davidson.

"Yes, literally. I cannot tell you why because I do not know. This affair has too many features. Everything seems to happen at once. I am now going to meet the two of them in the hall. Will you gentlemen oblige me by remaining here ? Please disturb nothing, not even a book or a newspaper. I want to examine——"

The door opened, and Mr. Pinkney came in.

"I have arranged matters with the telephone people, sir," he said. "They tell me that Mr. Lanson spoke to Mr. Sevastopolo at 10.15—very briefly—a three-minute call."

"How did they come to mention that fact ? " cried Winter, almost angrily.

"Because Mr. Sevastopolo is now trying to get through again, and I have stopped him, by your orders, sir."

Any well-trained butler can disconcert much greater men than the Chief of the C.I.D. Winter swallowed his annoyance.

"Use that private phone," he said, "and let Mr. Sevastopolo get in touch with either Mr. Davidson or Mr. Trevor. I am sorry it should be necessary to speak from this room, but, in the circumstances, it cannot be helped. Take care not to move any article on the table."

He walked out, the parquet complaining under his bulk at each stride. He had lost little time since he heard that premonitory click—just enough, in fact, to permit Irene Lanson and Dorothy Temple to descend the stairs in front of him. They, too, had heard the signal from the gate, and wanted to know what it meant.

Below, in the hall, Superintendent Wood was detaining nearly by force a tall young man in a dinner-jacket suit—a young man, to all appearance, destined for the arts from birth but made a soldier for some years by dynamic forces more potent than any Muses. That is to say, he had the eyes, the mouth, the eager and animated expression of the painter or poet, but the parade-ground and battle-field had squared his shoulders and strengthened his chin and jaws as well as his muscles.

With him was an equally tall man, gracefully slender, whose shining black hair seemed to have been brushed carefully close to his skull just before he entered the Castle. That smooth covering of hair, so sedulously tended, seemed to indicate the stranger's whole personality. His features had the almost absurd perfection of a wax figure in a clothier's window. His complexion was an admirable blend of red and cream. His lips were full and highly coloured. He wore his evening dress clothes well, and carried himself with languid elegance. Externally, there would be no doubt that Mr. Victor Denasch was a model young man. But he had shrewd and wary eyes, which were

now giving the lie by incessant activity to the slightly bored aspect of his face.

Winter had barely sufficient time to take in some of the details of the aspect of two men whom he had seen half an hour earlier under vastly different conditions when a woman's voice, shrill, piercing, vehemently accusing, silenced Felix Glen's unavailing demands that he should be allowed to pass.

"Felix! Felix!" almost screamed Irene Lanson, "was it you who killed my darling father?"

That startling question was evidently quite unexpected by the man at whom it was thrown like a veritable missile. He flinched as though he had actually been struck.

"Irene!" was the only word he could gasp in anguished protest.

"Rene!" murmured another voice, that of Dorothy Temple. Few heard, but Winter did not miss that subdued cry of horror. He glanced at the girl, and saw that she had blanched to an extreme pallor, and that her terrified gaze darted back and forth at the cousins as though they alone existed in the spacious hall at that moment.

With a marked effort Glen appeared to regain his self-control.

"Irene!" he said with a sternly reproachful glance, "even in your sorrow you should not speak so wildly."

"But," she persisted, "you quarrelled with father. Everyone knows that. You made no secret of it. You flung out of the house without a word of explanation. None of us has seen him alive since. Why did you part from him in anger, and why, oh, why, is he now dead?"

"You ask me that which I cannot answer," said Glen, with a sudden composure that was admirable

in the circumstances. "Mr. Lanson was alive—very much alive—when I left him. I know nothing whatsoever as to how he died, or when. From any other person on earth I should bitterly resent the form your words have taken. You, of course, I must forgive, believing, as I do in my heart, that you will be overwhelmed with regret when you come to realise what you have said."

CHAPTER III

A Night of Terror

Winter was well aware of the folly of allowing a distraught woman to voice a vague accusation which, in the conditions, could not possibly bear any direct relation to the actual facts.

"Miss Lanson," he broke in, speaking distinctly that all present might hear, "your cousin, Mr. Glen, was in the Crown Hotel in the town between 9.30 and 10.45 this evening. I saw him there myself. At 10.15, I am informed, Mr. Sevastopolo spoke to your father by telephone from London——"

"Then he, at least, can have had no hand in my father's death!" cried the girl, while a strange gleam shone from her tear-dimmed eyes. It was almost as though she found comfort in such prompt testimony to the Greek secretary's absence from the scene of the crime.

Winter was not disconcerted by the feminine trick of evading one issue by raising another.

"Exactly," he agreed. "Won't you help us now

by retiring to your room for the night, and leave us free to try and find the person or persons really responsible?"

"Who are you?" she demanded, being obviously resentful of the quietly authoritative air which lay behind this stranger's soothing words.

"You have forgotten, of course, that Dr. Macgregor has told you already. But it is as well that every inmate of the Castle should know now that I am Superintendent Winter, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. I happened to be in Sleaford to-night, and Mr. Wood, your local superintendent of police, having met me, sought such help as I may be able to give. Our first task is to search every inch of the Castle, and I am told that this means a careful examination of over a hundred and fifty rooms, to say nothing of disused attics and out-buildings. That alone will occupy several hours. The greatest immediate service you and Miss Temple can render is to let Mr. Wood, and the butler, and me go through your apartments. Then you can lock yourselves in, while Mr. Pinkney will station trustworthy guards outside your respective doors until we are certain that no unauthorised person can possibly be still at large within the building. Perhaps you young ladies may wish to pass the night together, or you may prefer to have the company of maids. But please decide quickly. We are losing precious minutes."

"Surely, Mr. Winter, I may be allowed to help?" said a new voice. "No one in the Castle is so well acquainted with its intricacies as I."

Beyond that strangled cry when Irene Lanson had almost accused Felix Glen of complicity in the crime, Dorothy Temple had not spoken before in Winter's presence. Her emotions were under control now,

and her accents were those of an aristocratic Englishwoman—unaffected, well modulated, free from precision, yet so clear and sweet that they reached every ear.

"We would gladly avail ourselves of your knowledge if it were not for the serious drawback that if we find any intruder he will probably be armed, and fight when cornered," said Winter. "No. This is a job for men. Not only you two ladies, but every other woman in the place must go to her room and remain there till morning behind locked doors. . . . Mr. Glen and Mr. Denasch, kindly take a seat in the hall for a few minutes. I shall not detain you long. . . . Mr. Wood, will you ask those in the library to come out, and tell Mr. Pinkney to turn the key in the lock and bring it to me?"

"But, Mr. Winter," cried Glen, "mayn't I have a few words with my cousin and Miss Temple?"

Winter was glad of the opportunity to spring on one of his own sex and rend him.

"No, you may not," he said with a severity that sounded out of place in replying to a quite reasonable request. "I want my orders to be obeyed literally and in silence. Action, not conversation, is imperative at this moment. Everyone will assist best by doing exactly what he or she is told to do."

It is good for an artist that he should have been a soldier. Felix Glen sank into a chair without further protest. Denasch uttered no word, but followed his example. Irene Lanson, a prey to the ever-varying moods of the neurotic temperament, seemed to be on the verge of another outburst, but yielded to the whispered advice of her friend, Dorothy. There was an almost uncanny silence while Mr. Wood's footsteps sounded loudly on the marble stairs. The occupants of the library soon appeared, and the

butler handed Winter a key. When he heard what the detective had planned he led the way up the opposite half-flight, and the two girls followed him. The police-officers brought up the rear, but not before Winter had audibly requested Dr. Macgregor and the secretaries to assist Sergeant Phillips in preventing any person whatsoever from leaving the hall on any pretext until he, Winter, returned.

Phillips, a first-class man in a fight with poachers, was altogether out of his depth in an affair of this magnitude.

"Beg pardon, sir," he wheezed, "but should they talk?"

"Yes, though I shall be glad if there is no discussion of the circumstances attending Mr. Lanson's death," said Winter. "I am not imposing any unreasonable restrictions. All I ask is that everyone shall stand fast for a little while."

"Good job you said that," murmured Wood, in so low a tone that no other ear could distinguish his words. "If Glen and Denasch tried to get away I would have been compelled to arrest them on suspicion."

"On suspicion of what?" hissed Winter.

"That's just it. I don't know. You and I and Macgregor must secure five minutes to ourselves as soon as possible. You remember I told you that a queer thing happened in the town at 10.30?"

"Yes. But does it affect Lanson's death?"

"Again, I don't know. It may be so."

The butler and the two girls had halted opposite the first door in a corridor exactly resembling that from which the library branched, except that the rooms in this wing were evidently smaller and more regular.

"Miss Lanson's suite," he explained.

"Switch on the lights," said Winter, "and let Mr. Wood and me enter first."

The police-officers found themselves standing in a charming boudoir, furnished with the taste of a connoisseur. The right artistic note was struck at once by the presence of four exquisite Corots on the walls.

"The bedroom, dressing-room and bathroom open out through the door on the right," said Mr. Pinkney.

Winter turned to Irene Lanson, who, with her friend, Dorothy, had not hesitated to keep close to the men.

"I regret the necessity," he said, "but you see that we must examine your apartments thoroughly. It is essential now we should make sure that no hiding-places are overlooked."

The girl nodded listlessly. Indeed, it was evident already that Dr. Macgregor had not stinted the dose of bromide. Men trained in Edinburgh are not afraid of using either sedatives or anæsthetics when they are needed.

Half a minute sufficed for the search. From the windows there was a sheer drop of forty feet to the garden beneath.

"Would you care to have your maid?" inquired Winter sympathetically when he came back to the boudoir.

"She ought to be here now," was the languid reply. "She, I suppose, like the rest of us, is upset by to-night's tragedy. . . . Oh, sir, you look a strong man and a clever one. Find my father's murderer, I implore you. And, if you do find him, promise me one thing—that I shall be brought face to face with him before—before you take him away."

It was a strange request, but Irene Lanson was a

distinctly abnormal young woman. Winter did not hesitate an instant.

"Yes," he said. "That shall be done. Mr. Pinkney will call you, even if you are asleep. Of course, you will not attempt to injure the prisoner, who will be handcuffed?"

"No—on my honour."

"And now, Miss Lanson, about your maid?"

"I don't want her. Mr. Pinkney, please tell Romer to keep away till the morning."

"Rene," put in the other girl, "wouldn't you like me to remain with you to-night?"

"No, dear. I want to be alone. Will you all go now? I'll lie down. I will, indeed."

Without waiting for a reply she swept through the doorway into the inner set of rooms. Even in that simple action she reminded Winter of some famous actress leaving the stage after a tragic scene.

"Don't turn out the lights," whispered Winter to the butler. "And lock the door as quietly as possible. Not that it matters much," he added, as they stood for a moment in the corridor. "She ought to be asleep before she has time to get undressed. By the way, where is her maid?"

"I haven't seen her, sir, since—since—I was thrown down the stairs by that scoundrel. She was coming up at the moment."

"What is her name?"

"Alice Romer, sir."

"Rather odd, isn't it, that she should be absent from her duties on such a night?"

"I can't understand it at all, sir."

"Now, Miss Temple, where are *your* rooms?"

"The next suite," said Dorothy Temple at once. "And I don't mind admitting, Mr. Winter, I am not sorry Miss Lanson can do without me to-night. We—

we might quarrel. Of course you will pay no heed to anything she said—in the hall. She has been exceedingly nervous all day, and the death of her father could not have come at a more unfortunate moment."

She had allowed Mr. Pinkney and the local superintendent to get ahead, and Winter knew that she had something to say which was meant for him only. Somehow, he thought he could trust this girl of his own race. Her eyes were clear and fearless. It was merely a sign of the times—an unhealthy and disturbing sign—that she should be living in the Castle in which she was born as the paid dependent of an international financier.

"Have you the faintest notion as to why Mr. Lanson was killed, or the identity of his murderer?" he muttered. "Don't be afraid to speak. Any sort of hint—the most far-fetched doubt—may be enormously helpful."

"I really cannot assist you at all. But—I don't like Mr. Sevastopolo."

"We'll have a talk to-morrow," breathed Winter, because Mr. Pinkney was opening a door with a master key. He carried one, he explained, and another lay in Mr. Lanson's desk. These two keys would turn every ordinary lock in the Castle. A singular precaution, the detective reflected, and one somewhat akin to the device which announced the opening of the main gate.

Miss Temple's apartments resembled in plan, and were almost as expensively furnished, as Miss Lanson's.

"I have no maid of my own," she said, anticipating Winter's question. "One of the chambermaids looks after my clothes if I need any help, which is seldom."

"You will not be afraid to sleep here?"

"Not I. Mr. Lanson's murderer is no ordinary thief or burglar. He knew his victim's habits. He is no stranger to the Castle. I shall be greatly surprised, Mr. Winter, if you find him cowering in some dark corner."

"I agree with you there. For all that, the search must be made."

Forgetting, or ignoring perhaps, the personal risk she was incurring, the girl went with the men into the bedroom and dressing-room. Obviously she was screwing up her courage to make some communication which she felt ought not to be delayed. At last she spoke.

"Mr. Winter," she said, "I have known Mr. Wood and Mr. Pinkney since I was a child, and they know me. They will tell you that I am outspoken, and careless of consequences if I think I am in the right. Well, then, I want you to cast aside the absurd suspicion that Mr. Felix Glen is in any way responsible for his relative's death. They quarrelled, I am well aware, but the quarrel was about family affairs, and I have reason to believe that Mr. Lanson might, in time, have admitted that Felix was right and he was wrong in pushing matters to an extreme?"

"What matters?" said Winter.

Dorothy flushed, not deeply, for the moment was too solemn and its issues too tremendous that she should allow her own troubles to occupy her mind to the exclusion of all else.

"You must be told to-morrow," she said pathetically, and, after that momentary rush of colour, her face went white. "If you hear the truth now it may affect your inquiry. Mr. Lanson had decided that Felix should marry his daughter. He had a theory that the—domestic fortunes of his house would

be set on a sound basis if Rene's husband were of a stock which had no trace of Greek or Levantine blood. But neither cared for the other. Rene has given way to a mad infatuation for Mr. Sevastopolo. It is nothing else. I cannot help regarding Mr. Sevastopolo as a plotter, a designing man. He is clever, too—with a financial genius about equal to his employer's. I hate to say this, especially because—because——"

"Mr. Felix Glen wants to marry you?"

"Oh!" cried the girl, gazing at Winter with startled eyes. "How can *you* possibly know that?"

"Isn't it exactly what you were forcing yourself to confess?"

"Yes, but——"

"I'm sorry. I was only rushing you over a difficulty. I have so little time, Miss Temple, and there is so much to be done. One word, and I must leave you. The marriage project was the cause of to-night's quarrel?"

"Yes. Felix hasn't said so, but a look was sufficient."

"Do you think he spoke of you to Mr. Lanson?"

"I am sure he would not. I promised Rene to stand by her until she had brought her father round to her way of thinking."

"Does she know how you and Mr. Glen stand?"

"N-no. She is so impulsive. We are very, very poor. Felix has still his way to make in the world. She would blurt out anything when aroused. You heard her to-night."

"Thank you. Try and sleep soundly, Miss Temple. You have a tremendous day before you. But be assured I am convinced already that Mr. Glen knows far less than I as to the possible cause of Mr. Lanson's death."

Dorothy's blue eyes filled with tears, and she turned aside. Winter beckoned to the others. He said to the butler, while the outer door was being locked :

" You are in a confidential position in this house, Mr. Pinkney. Not a syllable to anyone as to what you have just heard."

The old man smiled wanly.

" Bless your heart, sir," he said, " these young people have no secrets from me. I saw how the land lay months ago, yet I have never spoken of it to a soul."

" Splendid ! Now we must keep our promise. Station a dependable man here—a fellow who will stick to his post even though the family ghost comes clanking along the corridor in chains."

At that the butler flinched. He uttered no word, however, a fact which Winter noted favourably, for, indeed, a clanking ghost had long been associated with the older part of Sleaford Castle. The spectre was historic, having been vouched for by generations of respectable people. Indeed, the servants' hall was convinced that Mr. Lanson tempted fate when he brought those resplendent suits of armour into the place from foreign parts. If one believes in ghosts at all, this theory was not unreasonable. Plain British coats of mail which had stood for centuries in the banqueting hall, now a library, had been dispossessed to make room for more glittering intruders. Small wonder that the disembodied spirits of their wearers should be annoyed !

" Mr. Pinkney," said Superintendent Wood, " please ask Dr. Macgregor to come here for a moment before you choose your sentry."

When the doctor joined them the three drew a little apart into a corner of the lobby at the head of the

stairs, and Mr. Wood related, for Winter's benefit, full details of the strange mishap which had befallen Police-Constable Barker in the ruins of White Friars at half-past ten. Winter's precise brain naturally fastened on to the remarkable coincidence set up by the attack on Barker and the death of the millionaire, if only from the point of view of the time of both occurrences. Glen's queer explanation of his subsequent visit to the place at eleven o'clock sounded lame and unconvincing at midnight.

"Surely there cannot be a secret passage between the Castle and the ruins!" he muttered tensely.

"That's what has been running in my mind since I was called to the telephone when we arrived here," admitted his colleague. "I remember, as a boy, such a thing being spoken of, but have never since been given the slightest proof that it exists."

"They were common enough in the old days," put in the doctor, who was by way of being an archæologist. "Their purpose is self-evident. If the Castle were carried by assault, the Abbey would offer sanctuary to the very folk whom the outside enemy were most anxious to murder. Even in peace time it was highly convenient for certain people to be able to enter or leave the Castle unseen by others."

"Are the ruins being watched now?" demanded Winter.

"Oh, yes. I have a reliable man on the spot—well armed, too."

"And Mr. Glen claims that he went there to see the moon rise?"

"So he says."

"How about this other mysterious moon-watcher, Denasch?"

"I suppose he merely accompanied Mr. Glen. At any rate Denasch kept his mouth shut."

"Would Mr. Pinkney or Miss Temple have any first-hand knowledge of this passage?"

"It is possible."

"We must find out at once. Here comes Pinkney. I'll ask him."

No, the butler could tell them nothing. He, like the superintendent, had heard of an underground way, but to the best of his belief it was a myth. Certainly no systematic search had been made for it in his time. Winter knocked gently at Miss Temple's door, and she came at once. Her information was more definite than the butler's. During the life of her grandfather, the fifteenth baronet, efforts had been made, both in the Castle and the ruins, to discover a means of communication, but without result. She remembered her father speaking of it one day at luncheon when she was quite young, and he said definitely that not only had such a passage never been discovered, but its construction would have offered almost insuperable difficulties, as the peculiarly hard rock on which the Castle stood ran without a break to White Friars and beyond. The said rock had cost Sleaford a mint of money when a modern drainage system was adopted.

Winter apologised for disturbing her. Having given precise instructions to the footman stationed at the junction of staircase and corridor, he led the others to the hall.

Glen and Denasch remained as he had left them. The two secretaries were standing at the foot of the stairs. The number of servants in the hall had increased appreciably, since those whose duties detained them in the distant parts of the Castle had hurried to this common rendezvous as quickly as possible, and were forthwith compelled to stop there, for Sergeant Phillips took his job seriously.

Winter tackled the secretaries first.

"Which of you spoke to Mr. Sevastopolo?" he inquired.

"I," said Davidson.

"Have you a notebook in your pocket?"

"Yes."

"Oblige me by writing now a record of the conversation as nearly verbatim as you can make it, using the first person throughout, and interpolating any fleeting impressions you may have formed as to his manner of receiving your news, etcetera. Imagine yourself an analytical novelist, Mr. Davidson, recording an episode of vital importance to the plot of a story, and you will give me exactly what I want."

Davidson looked surprised, as well he might, but, being an intelligent young man, lost no time in getting to work. Indeed, he sat down at once on the stairs, propped a notebook on his knees, and began his essay.

Winter then faced the larger gathering, and lifted a hand to insure attention, though, indeed, every eye was on him already, and the murmur of talk had been stilled the moment he appeared.

"Will all those who witnessed the attack on Mr. Pinkney by the masked man step forward?" he said.

Four men responded. Two wore the house livery; the senior night-watchman, Bates, and an assistant cook named Tomlinson made up the quartet. No woman presented herself.

"Where is Alice Romer, Miss Lanson's maid?" cried Winter sharply.

No one knew. She had not been seen recently. Bates deposed that she had seemed too scared to enter the library, and he imagined she ran back to the servants' hall. The housekeeper, however, an

elderly lady to whom Charles Dickens would have devoted a page of description, so housekeeperly were her curls, costume and keys, declared that Alice Romer had not reappeared downstairs since half-past ten.

"When she turns up I want a word with her," said Winter. "In fact, I shall ask for statements from the five persons who saw what happened. . . . Now, Mr. Pinkney, I must depend on your guidance. A thorough search of the entire Castle must be made. How many separate parties will be needed?"

The butler took thought.

"Four, sir," he announced. "Four can deal with all apartments in the main building. Of course there are others opening out of the courtyard."

"Is there no lateral communication—through the side walls, I mean?"

"No, sir. Everybody whose business lies in this part of the Castle must enter by the main door. Naturally, the chauffeurs, stablemen and gardeners live in their own quarters."

"Very well. You, Superintendent Wood, Mr. Trevor, and Sergeant Phillips will head the four squads. All women must go to their own rooms and be locked in, after those rooms have been examined. There is no hardship in this; Miss Lanson and Miss Temple have already agreed to it. I want Dr. Macgregor to remain with me, also Mr. Bates and his assistant, and one constable. If any discovery is made, report to me here instantly. . . . Gentlemen, will you be good enough to arrange your parties at once? Mr. Pinkney will tell you how to split yourselves up. And, for goodness' sake, let the search be dependable. Work together, but always leave one man outside the door, so that no one can pass without being challenged. If any of you is not prepared to face the possible risk, say so now."

A furtive grin flickered over a good many faces, but Mr. Pinkney banished it by saying gravely :

"The men I pick, sir, can be trusted in that respect."

Winter thought it best not to interfere further. In fact, his orders were carried out so expeditiously that the hall lost most of its occupants within a minute.

He turned first to Bates.

"Will the watchers outside the Castle stand fast till they are relieved ? " he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Bates. "I rubbed that into them right enough."

"And now, Mr. Glen, about your affair," went on the detective pleasantly. "I'm told you were brought here because you visited the White Friars ruins at eleven o'clock to see the moon rise. Is that literally true ? "

"I've said so to half a dozen thick-headed policemen already," replied Glen, who seemed to be almost startled at being addressed. He had followed the proceedings in the hall with moody eyes, and was quite obviously in a bad temper.

"Then I am sure you will not mind discussing the matter with a seventh," said Winter. "In my case, you will remember, I am a witness in your behalf."

"I require no witnesses. My actions to-night, as at all times, are open to all the world."

"But please don't be angry with the police because they are puzzled by a strange occurrence. A policeman was assaulted violently by some unknown person hiding in the ruins at half-past ten. Mr. Lanson was murdered about the same time, almost to a minute. There is a suggestion that an underground passage may run from the Castle to the Abbey. In that event,

you will agree, the presence of Mr. Victor Denasch and yourself at such an unusual place half an hour later can hardly fail to call for investigation."

Glen sprang to his feet. The sombre expression of his face yielded to a flush of anger.

"Are you, too, telling me it is possible I had a hand in my uncle's death?" he cried.

"No. I said so publicly a few minutes since. I want your help, not your resentful aloofness. Next to his daughter, you are Mr. Lanson's nearest relative. Surely I am entitled to look for your willing assistance in every line of inquiry relating to his death?"

"Why did you begin by practically putting me under arrest the moment I came here?"

"You were brought here by the police under peculiar circumstances. I ask you to explain those circumstances, and you blaze into protest."

"Dash it all, man, you saw me playing billiards in the Crown Hotel during and long after the very hour you fix on for my uncle's death. I went out shortly before eleven at Mr. Denasch's request."

"Yes, that is absolutely correct," said his companion, speaking for the first time since he had entered the Castle. "Mr. Glen and I were discussing art, and I was describing certain qualities of light seen only in moonlight, though the effect is closely reproduced by the rays of electric arc lamps. Just to test my theories we went to the ruins—I didn't even know their name—and here we are!"

At that instant the footsteps of someone in a violent hurry were heard approaching the staircase across the lobby from which the left corridor opened. In another second a man's scared face peered over the marble balusters. His voice, which he strove to keep at a low pitch, cracked with excitement.

"Oh, sir!" he cried, gazing wild-eyed at Winter, "will you and the doctor come at once? We've found Alice Romer! She's dead!"

CHAPTER IV

The Turret

In physique, Winter was the strongest man in Scotland Yard. As for nerves, in the common meaning of the word, he had none. Yet at that whimpered cry, made eerie by the messenger's affrighted aspect, he could have bellowed with Macbeth:

> The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loom!
> Where gottest thou that goose look?

But experienced detectives seldom yield to moods. Still less frequently do they put wayward thought into blank verse. Winter dashed to the stairs, nor did he forbid the others to follow; even the placid-mannered Davidson rose, closed his notebook, and ran with him. He did not forget, however, to bid Bates and the policeman remain. It was just in such a panic-stricken moment that the hall might be left unguarded.

"Where was the girl found?" was Winter's first question.

"At the foot of the turret stairs, sir."

"Straight up," put in Davidson. "There are only two main stories."

As they crossed the lobby a lighted lift shot down-

ward past a door of open ironwork. It contained two figures. One was hidden. The other was apparently the mid-Victorian housekeeper, Mrs. James.

Winter put a hand on Davidson's shoulder.

"You don't hesitate to do what you are asked," he said. "Will you hurry to wherever that lift stops and ascertain who is in it, and why?"

The secretary turned on his heel instantly. Glen seemed to feel a sting of reproof in Winter's words because he seized the opportunity to display his knowledge of the Castle's interior economy.

"This next set of stairs leads to a transverse corridor," he explained. "The turret rises over the centre of the building, and is reached by a winding staircase."

Winter nodded. He pretended to be rather breathless, whereas he owned a phenomenal activity of body, an attribute which had saved him from death or disablement in many a tough struggle with desperate evil-doers. At that moment the sixth sense which every skilled detective must be endowed with was warning him that Victor Denasch had some motive in lagging behind the remainder of the party. Winter wondered what the ultra-polished young man had in his mind, so he mounted the stairs with difficulty, watching Denasch with ears instead of eyes.

They found Alice Romer laid on a settee near the door of the lift. The butler's squad of searchers had discovered her almost immediately, and the presence of many of the maid-servants showed that their bedrooms were situated in this section of the Castle.

The girl's body was inert, and her cheeks were ivory white, but Macgregor saw at a glance that she was still living.

"Tell me exactly what position she was in when you picked her up," he said to Mr. Pinkney.

"Almost on her face, sir, with her left arm stretched out. Her head and shoulders were half-way through the open door, and her feet on the stairs."

"Looking exactly as though she had slipped and fallen, pitching forward?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor's strong and capable fingers had been pressing the girl's scalp meanwhile. Then he tilted her chin, and holding each ankle in turn, moved each leg at knee and thigh. He tested her arms similarly.

"Nothing broken, at any rate," he announced. "She may be suffering from a slight concussion, though I doubt it. My opinion is that she has fainted, and will soon recover her senses."

Mr. Pinkney sighed his relief.

"That's good news," he said. "We all thought she was dead. You see, sir, she was lying very awkwardly."

"I'm sure of it. The resultant compression of certain arteries would help to keep her insensible. Have you any brandy and smelling-salts?"

"Mrs. James and a footman have just gone for some, sir."

A rising light and a slight clang proclaimed the return of the lift, which now held three passengers, Mr. Davidson having come with the others.

"Where is her room situated?" went on the doctor.

"No 17, in the left corridor, sir."

"Let us take her there. Then we can remove her shoes and stockings. Massage will help the restoratives. We'll carry her on the couch, just as she is. A couple of you girls come along too. You can rub her wrists and ankles."

Winter bent close to Macgregor's ear.

"Pay special heed to the first words she utters, and before she has time to gather her wits find out why she fainted," he whispered.

He turned to the butler.

"Has the turret been searched?" he asked.

"No, sir. We have done nothing in that way yet. I was explaining to the others just how we were to deal with every room, when we saw Romer's head sticking out through the doorway of the turret stairs."

"Shouldn't that door have been locked?"

"It has never been locked, sir, since two gentlemen sitting up there late one evening were shut in and had great trouble in making anyone hear."

"I was one of them," put in Glen. "An eminent R.A. was the other. More moonshine stuff. That time it was a full moon rising over the moors."

"As I am here, I will examine the turret myself," decided Winter.

"May I come with you?" exclaimed Glen.

"Certainly. . . . Here—give me your torch and automatic, and I'll lead the way"—this to the policeman attached to the butler's squad.

"Better let me go in front," suggested Glen. "I am acquainted with the place. There is a tricky turn as you reach the top. With one sweep of the torch I'll tell you whether or not the place is empty, or apparently so, I had better put it."

Winter agreed at once. He wanted this young man to be friendly, not hostile, and here was an opportunity to show complete confidence in him. Glen flushed with gratification, and made at once for the entrance to the turret stairs. The steps were broad, and not steep, running round a solid central column of stone. A hand-rail guarded both sides.

Winter followed Glen, but squeezed close to the wall to allow the constable to pass. Davidson, who had assumed that no explanation as to the occupants of the lift was called for, came next.

"I want you to go back," breathed Winter, "and keep an unobtrusive watch on Denasch. If, as I imagine, he does not come with us or remain in the corridor, find out what becomes of him."

Winter had to leave it at that. He ran up a few steps, overtook the policeman, and was just in time to press on Glen's heels before the latter halted, with a surprised "Hallo!"

"Keep your eye peeled as you come out," he added quietly. "Someone has left a torch on the table, and it's turned on, too!"

Then he touched an electric switch, and the place was flooded with light.

"Don't touch that torch on any account," barked Winter, who felt that, at last, something definite and tangible had emerged out of a maze of doubt and complexities. In a couple of seconds he was standing by Glen's side, and looking about him with those big and prominent eyes which seemed to discern all things within their orbit without dwelling on any object in particular.

The apartment was hexagonal, with small, deeply recessed windows in each of the six walls. All this part of the Castle, including a donjon keep and the rooms of ceremony, had been dismantled about the time of the Spanish Armada, to make way for the existing Elizabethan residence. The turret was probably about as high as the battlements of the keep, and served the same principal purpose—to give an uninterrupted view over the surrounding country. To this end the circle of every window was splayed from the interior, a fact which accentuated the

thickness of the walls, and, incidentally, increased the field of vision of anyone standing in the room.

A square of Turkish carpet was on the floor, leaving four segments of polished oak boards. The furniture was simple—a table and half a dozen Chippendale arm-chairs. Some tall, narrow book-cases were filled with novels. In effect, this was a place of quiet, where a book and a pipe would be more *de règle* than aimless chatter.

The two rails of the staircase ran up to a convenient height, forming the "tricky turn" Glen had spoken of. Nothing bigger than a mouse could be in hiding. Even the electric torch had probably been left on the table by the girl who had tripped on the steps below, though why she should have gone down in utter darkness was a problem yet to be solved.

Overhead a groined roof ran to a charmingly carved oaken centre, to which was clamped a tiny chandelier with four lamps. A tall man could reach them easily. In one of the sections of the roof a trap-door was visible.

"There's a space above, then?" said Winter, fastening instantly on to the only possible place of concealment.

"Yes, to give access to the lead covering in case of any leakage. It's bolted from the inside, however, so—— No, by Jove, it *might* have been fastened by an accomplice. Let's have a peep-o!"

Without waiting for permission, Glen mounted a chair, shoved back the bolt, which was stiff, and needed a good deal of force and twisting before it would budge, and, by using the top of a book-case as a ladder, thrust his head and the policeman's torch through the opening.

He reappeared instantly.

"Gee!" he cried. "I've disturbed the dust of ages

in there. Do you think it's absolutely necessary to examine such a cock-loft?"

"I fear it is," said Winter. "Still, it isn't your job. Let me or the policeman——"

"Oh, I'm a star performer at this sort of thing, but I don't want to spoil a perfectly good dress suit. It's the only one I own."

Suiting the action to the word, he came down, stripped to shirt and underclothing, and was up again with surprising nimbleness. Soon he vanished, and the two men below heard him passing carefully over the somewhat difficult slope of the wooden roof.

Suddenly the policeman touched Winter's arm, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Beg pardon, sir, but one of our men, crossin' the Slea bridge soon after eleven, saw a light flashin' from the Castle. From what he tole me I imagine it kem from this very spot."

Winter admitted afterwards that he was beginning to hope the Lanson murder case, as the affair was entitled by the newspapers next day, would not develop any more puzzling features before midnight, at any rate, yet here was a country policeman breathing into his ear yet another almost bewildering bit of evidence.

"A light?" was all he could mutter, gazing at the man so fiercely that his informant flinched.

"Yes, sir. That's wot it was—a regular flash-light, shown three times. We cuc-cuc-couldn't tell you sooner—never had no chance, we hadn't."

"Not a thing up here except the aforesaid dust," came a hollow voice from above.

Winter sprang to the chair and thrust his head and shoulders through the trap-door, thereby greatly surprising the policeman, who had noted his laboured breath after mounting the main stairs.

"There's no way out, I suppose?" he said, turning to where the concentrated gleam of the torch lighted a circle of stout timber and sheets of lead.

"No. Not even a ventilation hole, or we should find a thousand bats in residence," replied Glen. "Look here, you'd better not take my say-so. If you can squeeze through that manhole you can lean forward and survey the whole of the accommodation. I've collected nearly all the dust round about that locality."

"I think you would prefer it," agreed the detective, drawing himself up with the ease of an athlete in good training and thus astonishing Glen in his turn.

The latter, of course, stood almost in darkness, as the queerly-shaped enclosure of a dome within a dome reflected no light, and the rays of the torch illumined only a tenth part of the interior at a time. Indeed, a more penetrating radiance came through the trap-door when Winter's bulk was removed from above it, and Glen then became visible, offering a strange resemblance to a white marble statue.

"We must make quite sure of this place now," said Winter. "I'll tell you why when we go down."

For answer, Glen swept the torch slowly into every nook and angle.

"I'm an old hand at this game," he commented with a half-laugh, which he converted into a cough, obviously remembering the nature of the quest he was engaged in. "Searching Boche dug-outs by candlelight helps a lot, you know."

But Winter persisted. Somehow, he felt in his bones that, despite the rusted bolt and the hermetically sealed aspect of the roof, there was a sense of mystery

about this lop-sided abode of everlasting night. Its vault-like gloom might not have been dispelled for centuries. Though thrust high in air, with every ray of sunshine from noon till eve beating on it—while the moonlight must now be glistening from its weather-worn facets—within was nothing but the tenebral darkness of a tomb.

"We cannot afford more time at present," said Winter grudgingly, after he had almost convinced himself of the sheer impossibility of the existence of any exit other than by way of the trap-door. "I'll return later, with a better light. Meanwhile, we'll seal the door beneath."

"You know best," admitted his companion, who was now evidently trying to atone for his earlier brusqueness of attitude and word. "But I can't see what chance you have of getting much forrarder here. You'll appreciate that fact better by daylight. Three sides of the turret overlook the courtyard, eighty feet beneath. The other three are twenty feet above sloping roofs——"

"Let us get out of this, quick!" cried Winter, and he thrust the lower part of his body through the square opening.

"Mind how you go! Put your right foot on that shelf!"

But the burly superintendent disdained such aid. He dropped to the floor nimbly as a cat. Glen, not to be outdone, followed in like manner. He grinned amiably at his companions, for his white shirt and light-coloured under-garments were daubed with brown. He began dusting himself with his hands.

"Never mind that now!" said Winter. "Is this the window which faces due south? Ah! it's unlatched. Now lend me your torch, and switch off

those lights! Come here, both of you, and watch. I'm going to signal in the direction of the town. Whatever you do, don't disturb that torch on the table!"

The others obeyed in silence. When the room was lighted only by the somewhat ghostly beam from the abandoned torch, Winter opened the window which he had found unfastened, leaned well forward into the circular cavity, and flashed the policeman's lamp three times. The moon, now risen, though not at the full, was strong enough to reveal the roofs and spires of Sleaford, lying snugly beneath the hump of rock crowned by the Castle. Few lights were visible, as the town lamps had been extinguished at half-past eleven, so any answering gleam could be discerned without fail. But Sleaford remained utterly unresponsive. Indeed, the only person in the place that night who noted the well-marked flashes was Police-Constable Jackson, very much on the alert among the broken arches of White Friars.

Winter hardly looked for any reply. He was merely leaving nothing to chance. He had decided already that Alice Romer had gone to the turret at eleven o'clock to signal to Denasch, and that the latter could not have received the message, whatever it signified, because he and Glen were arrested the moment they entered the wicket gate.

"That's what I wanted to know," he announced, closing the window again. "Shove on your clothes, Mr. Glen. By the way, what time would it be when the policeman grabbed you and your friend, Denasch?"

"It struck eleven as we were walking to the police-station. But—about Denasch—I met him for the first time this evening."

"Ah! That's interesting. He introduced himself, I suppose?"

"Yes. Said he was a pal of Sevastopolo's, and was here to see my uncle on business. Of course, you know Mr. Lanson isn't really my uncle."

"I understand. It was Denasch who brought you to the ruins?"

"Exactly. He struck me as a well-informed chap. His views on art are ultra-modern, but pretty sound for an amateur. And in a country hotel there are so few people one can talk to. I even gave *you* the once-over early in the evening."

"You flatter me. But I avoided you. Well, all that will be cleared up later. Now, not a word to Denasch, or anybody, about what we have said or done here. We searched the place and it was empty—which is true as far as the literal facts go. Are you ready? We must hurry."

While speaking Winter had examined the latches of all the remaining windows, but they were properly adjusted. He fastened the south window, and, on reaching the corridor, locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. Mr. Pinkney was just emerging from a distant room, having covered a good deal of ground while Winter and his helpers were in the turret. Davidson was at the foot of the second flight of stairs and, when he heard footsteps, looked up. He motioned the others to stand fast, and came to them silently.

"Shall I report now, or later?" he inquired, which was a really admirable way of avoiding offence to Glen in case the detective wished to keep him in ignorance of the secretary's particular mission.

"Now," said Winter. "Mr. Glen is entering thoroughly into this inquiry."

"Well, no sooner had you disappeared than Mr.

Denasch hurried to the telephone booth. Bates did not interfere, thinking perhaps he was acting according to your orders. However, Denasch came out almost at once, having obviously been refused any wire connection by the Exchange. Then he tried to leave the Castle, but was prevented, and a row sprang up. Bates and the policeman had to threaten him with arrest before he would give in."

"A determined person, evidently, but not determined enough," commented Winter. "It would be most useful if the local police were to put him in a cell for the remainder of the night. However, it is not fair to expect them to take the responsibility. I'll tackle him myself. Come with me, all of you. I want plenty of witnesses, or observers rather."

Soon he was confronting the pink and white Mr. Denasch, who was trying to mask the anger in his eyes behind a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"Why were voices raised in dispute here a few minutes since?" demanded the detective, who had his own reasons for not quoting Davidson's statement.

Bates explained. Denasch, who at least owned the power of self-repression, uttered not a word.

"With whom did you wish to communicate?" inquired Winter civilly. Denasch was hardly ready for a polite question. He hesitated, but only for a second.

"With Mr. Sevastopolo," he said.

"Why?"

"I suppose you are entitled to ask. I came here on a business mission, which comes to an end automatically by Mr. Lanson's death. I am more than anxious to have Mr. Sevastopolo's advice as to my future movements. Am I to remain here or return to London?"

Winter glanced at a clock which stood on the wall at the back of the half-landing.

"It is now midnight," he said. "Surely your anxiety can be dispelled more readily to-morrow morning? A train leaves here for London at 7.30 a.m., I know, but, in the conditions, would it not be wise on your part to wait until later in the day?"

"I am not in a position to judge. Mr. Sevastopolo could direct me."

"I am really thinking of your somewhat untimely visit to the White Friars ruins, which is not yet explained to the satisfaction of the police."

"What on earth has that got to do with the matter?"

"I want you to tell me—not now, but after Alice Romer has recovered her senses. You, too, will have had time for reflection."

"I fail to understand what you are driving at. Alice Romer? How does she concern me?"

"You know who she is?"

"I heard her name mentioned by you and others. She was missing, and has been found dead—someone said."

"A pardonable error on such a night. She is very much alive. . . . No, listen to me," because Denasch was clearly on the point of uttering a more positive disclaimer. "There can be no manner of doubt that your errand to White Friars a few minutes before eleven o'clock needs something stronger than moonlight to reveal its object. I make you a reasonable offer. Go to your room in the hotel, and remain in Sleaford without telephoning or telegraphing to any person anywhere until I have seen you to-morrow morning. Refuse, or break those conditions in the

least degree, and you will be arrested, either now or then."

Denasch did not change colour, but his red lips showed a bluish tint.

"This is monstrous!" he shrilled. "You have no right to threaten me in this manner."

"I have given you a fair alternative, Mr. Victor Denasch. Of course, if you choose to be treated as a possible criminal I shall frame a charge and enter it up correctly, in all particulars."

That cryptic remark seemed to reduce the man to a state of sullen submission.

"Very well," he said. "The best way to prove my innocence of any complicity in this crime is to answer your questions and await your convenience. May I go now?"

"You accept my terms?"

"Yes."

"Let Mr. Denasch leave the Castle," said Winter to Bates. "The hotel is only five minutes' walk from here," he added, apparently as an afterthought, but the visitor to Sleaford knew quite well that any further artistic theories he had in mind had better be kept in abeyance if they called for more wandering about the town that night.

Bates opened one of the hall doors, of which there were two, one on each side of a glass portico at the top of the outer steps; those remaining in the hall listened in silence to the footsteps of the two men as they walked to the main gate. At that instant the clock in the parish church proclaimed the hour at which, according to Hamlet, "churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world."

None spoke. What between the music of the chimes and the twelve solemn notes of a deep-toned

bell, the postern in the outer gates was opened just as the last vibrations died away. Winter looked around at Davidson.

"That warning click sounds only for the big door itself?" he inquired.

"Yes. The device has merely a ceremonial significance."

"Isn't Victor Denasch that blighter's real name?" put in Glen.

"Why do you ask?" countered Winter.

"Because, while you were reading the Riot Act I took close stock of him. In the hotel I regarded him as an Alsatian Frenchman. Now I know he is a Levantine, probably reared in Malta. If his face were well washed it would come out sallow. At present his lips alone can grow pale. Of course, one doesn't expect to find a johnny not on the stage so cleverly made up."

Winter surveyed the artist with new interest. It would appear that this young man had both eyes and brains, and could use them on occasion.

"We'll review all the circumstances in the morning," was what he said, however. "I want to examine the library carefully, and would like Dr. Macgregor's help and yours too, of course. I wonder how long the doctor will be detained by that enterprising young person, Alice Romer. If you haven't completed your memorandum of the talk with Mr. Sevastopolo, Mr. Davidson, you might give me now a brief——"

A woman's shriek, long drawn out and piercing, came from the upper part of the building. Though two flights of stairs and a long corridor intervened, the little company of men in the hall arrived at the same conclusion simultaneously.

"Alice Romer has either recovered her senses or lost them very thoroughly," was Winter's grim

comment. "Thus far, after being here an hour, I have not been permitted to do straight off one single thing I wanted to do. I've never before been mixed up in such a case—never!"

CHAPTER V

Wherein Irene Lanson Puzzles Mr. Winter

Davidson volunteered to find out the cause of the hubbub. The explanation was simple enough. The girl had no sooner opened her conscious eyes on a world of reality than memory resumed its sway, and she passed at once into the semi-delirium of hysteria. Scotch doctors have a sharp way of treating that ailment, however, and Macgregor flicked her with a wet towel till she cried "Ouch!" so naturally that the other maids in attendance would like to have protested against these drastic methods. Still, she was evidently on the verge of further complete collapse, so the doctor gave her, too, a stiff dose of bromide, and promised to send a nurse to sit by her bedside till the morning.

He told Winter these things when they met. Then he drew the detective aside.

"It will save time if I go myself for the nurse," he said. "I'll be back in twenty minutes, or thereabouts. Meanwhile, you ought to know that Alice Romer's fall down those stairs was caused by fright, in the first instance. That is to say, she was scared into a faint. On regaining her senses she recollected once more whatever the thing was that frightened

her, and the vision was so terrifying that she uttered a crescendo of 'Oh's!' which passed quickly into a scream. That's all."

"A pity," commented Winter, whose innate kindliness was becoming calloused by the succession of inconclusive if remarkable occurrences in Sleaford Castle since his arrival there. "However, I must not detain you. Mr. Lanson's body will not be removed till you return."

Macgregor hurried off. Bates let him out, and he was not aware of any pedestrian being on the road in front until he almost ran over Victor Denasch in a rock cutting which formed part of the Castle approach, a place where the moonlight did not penetrate. It was a narrow escape—such a near thing that after he had passed he thought he recognised the man's figure, and pulled up.

"That you, Mr. Denasch?" he called out.

"Yes."

"Sorry I came so close, but that black shadow was deceiving. Going to the hotel? Shall I give you a lift?"

"No, thanks. I prefer to walk."

"A bit short-tempered, I think," mused the doctor, as his car sped on again. "Probably I'd feel that way myself if I'd just been missed by a fraction of an inch. Wonder why he's off on his own. I suppose that detective sent him away because he had nothing to do with the affair. Sharp chap, Winter!"

Yet the day was not far distant when Winter ruefully denied his own sharpness, and Macgregor found himself regretting that he had not converted Denasch into a casualty requiring prolonged detention in the local Cottage Hospital. He was not given another opportunity.

Glen seized what he regarded as an unoccupied

moment to go and wash off the grime of the turret. He was now keen on the chase, but had to confess that he could make no suggestion of any value. Even in regard to Denasch his evidence tended to clear the man of any well-founded suspicion.

Winter waited until the night-watchman had come back from the main gate. Then he took Davidson and the policeman who had been with them, upstairs to the library, of which, it will be remembered, he had retained the key. To his vast surprise, there was another key in the lock on the inside, and the lock was turned as well. The discovery moved even the imperturbable Davidson to excited speech. He declared that something had happened which could not apply to him in this life, and, it is to be hoped, will not be accurate as to a future one.

Winter, thoroughly nettled now, decided to test the first fantastic notion that flitted through his brain.

"Run, you," he said to the policeman, "and bring here the footman, or whatever he is, stationed outside Miss Lanson's room!"

"Surely it's impossible!" gurgled Davidson, when the man made off.

"Nothing is impossible to a neurotic," snapped Winter.

Then he realised that the secretary was probably thinking of Dr. Macgregor's free use of bromide, and he went on:

"I've known a crazy woman have full command of what she called her senses after swallowing twelve doses of bromide, each containing ten grains," he said. "How many master keys are owned in this extraordinary place?"

"Miss Irene does not possess one, to my knowledge."

"That is not answering my question."

"I cannot answer it. To the best of my belief, Mr. Lanson and Mr. Pinkney alone had such keys, and even they will not open *this* door. Mr. Lanson himself had the only key for the library, and it is now in your hand. Its presence in the lock outside was a sure indication that he was within, except when one or other of the secretaries went there by his direction."

"Then where did the other come from—that which is now in the lock?"

"I do not know."

The policeman arrived with the footman, and the latter admitted instantly that Miss Lanson came out of her room and hurried down the stairs soon after he was stationed at the angle of the corridor.

"You had your orders!" stormed Winter. "Why did you permit her to pass, and why, having done so, did you not inform me?"

"Sir," stuttered the man, "Miss Lanson is my mistress."

"You, and every other person in this place, are under *my* control now. Go back to your post! If you allow any other man or woman to open a door once they are locked in, and do not report it, you will be arrested as an accessory after the fact, and that means you will be charged as an accomplice in the crime of murder. Be off!"

He hammered loudly on a panel, and waited a few seconds, but neither he nor his companions could hear a sound within. This was only to be expected, however. The door was solidly built, and lay in a deep recess.

After knocking again, he stopped, and tried to shout through the keyhole:

"No matter who is inside there, the door will be broken open without further notice!"

He was still bent when the key was turned, and Irene Lanson appeared, a tragic figure framed in the bright light of the interior. Far within, a limp form still lay back in its chair.

"Oh, it's *you*!" she cried. "What do *you* want *here*?"

The chief executive officer of the Criminal Investigation Department had seldom been called on to answer a more disconcerting question. Moreover, he had been caught in an undignified posture. But his blood was up, and, as was his way when roused, he attacked without mercy.

"Miss Lanson," he said with icy distinctness, "do you want to be regarded as a criminal?"

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she shrilled, though there was a hint of fear as well as of indignation in her voice. Probably, never before had she been brow-beaten by anyone.

"Why do I find you here, sneaking into a place of death, when you had promised to remain in your own rooms?"

"Who has a better right than a daughter to weep by the side of her murdered father?"

"You have not been weeping. You have been prying, searching—for what?"

Winter's air was commanding, threatening. His mere physical bulk overawed the frail woman standing in the passage. She backed away from him involuntarily.

"How dare you?" she breathed again.

"I dare more than words!" he almost shouted, springing at her, and grasping her slim shoulders. "I am here at your father's request. He knew he was surrounded by traitors. Are *you* one? What is my daring compared with yours, who, with the devilish nerve of all evil-doers, disobey the commands of the

police, and are ready even to rob the dead? Did you quail before the presence of that blood-stained dagger on the table? Not you! Give me the document, or whatever it is, you came here to rescue. Give it to me, I say, or I'll tear the clothes off your body to find it!"

He shook her violently. Adopting woman's last means of defence, she burst into a storm of tears, and strove to wrest herself free.

"Resistance is useless," said Winter fiercely. "You must confess now, this instant. Women of your type understand nothing but force. Why are you in this room?"

Davidson grasped his right arm.

"Really, Mr. Winter——" he began.

The bigger man's eyes blazed at him in wrathful astonishment.

"Constable, arrest this fool!" came the ready order, and the secretary was torn away promptly. Winter's right hand seized the front of the girl's dress, a demi-toilette affair, cut fairly high in the neck.

"I'll give you no further warning," he growled. "Tell me the truth, and produce the papers you have been searching for, or——"

His grip on the frail material tightened, and it began to yield.

"Please don't!" gasped the girl. "I came for no papers. I—I have been telephoning."

"To whom?"

"To—to Mr. Sevastopolo."

"Why from this room?"

"Because—because—I heard that man, Mr. Glen's friend—quarrelling with the people in the hall."

"And how is it that you had a key?"

"My father gave it me. He did, indeed. No one

was even to know I owned one, and I was never to use it without his permission. Poor darling! He cannot tell me now whether he approves or not."

She faltered on those last words, which had a genuine ring about them. But Winter distrusted her profoundly. Somehow she never seemed to be natural, but always on the stage. Nevertheless, he released her.

"Did you get through to Sevastopolo?" he demanded, still dominating her by an unbelieving and piercing look.

"Yes. My orders overbore Mr. Pinkney's with the telephone operator. Am I not mistress here?"

"You are mistress in all things that do not concern your father's death. In that respect the law is supreme, and I had most special reasons for wishing that Mr. Sevastopolo should not be in private communication with you to-night. What did you say to him?"

"I—I only wanted to hear his voice—to make sure he really was in London."

"In other words, you feared he might be in Sleaford?"

"Yes, yes. Something—not quite that."

"Oh, yes, it was! You knew that your father suspected him of double-dealing?"

Irene Lanson collapsed against the table, and would have fallen but for its support.

"No, no. There was nothing really serious!" she almost whispered, apparently yielding to the terror of a half-formed thought. "Father and he disagreed about the handling of some matter of business. Of course, Mr. Sevastopolo gave in. Why shouldn't he? He went to London to rectify his own mistake."

"Miss Lanson," said Winter, cooling down a little now that he knew the girl was not trying to mislead

him at the moment, "you are interfering in grave matters, going far beyond the depths of your knowledge, a fact which you yourself will admit readily within a few days. If you are escorted to your rooms again, will you remain there till the morning?"

"Yes, I will! Indeed, I will!"

He turned to Davidson, still held firmly by the policeman.

"And you?" he said sternly. "Are you acting with or against the police in this inquiry? You must had seen Miss Lanson crossing the main stairs!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Winter," was the immediate response. "My excuse is the footman's. She is my employer's daughter. Nor could I stand by and see violence offered her. That is all."

This young man had the rare quality of reticence, at least. Not by the quiver of an eyelid did he convey to the detective that a few lurid words had revealed to him many things previously hidden.

"Let Mr. Davidson go," said Winter to the policeman. "Remove that key from the lock and bring it to me. Then take Miss Lanson to her own rooms, the first set in the main corridor on the left, and when you are sure her door is locked, come back here."

The girl, recovering her poise marvellously, swept out. The policeman, being nearer the exit, got there first and secured the key. At that instant Glen appeared.

"May I come in?" he said.

The words were out of his mouth before he saw his cousin. Then he was so surprised that he could only stare at her as she flitted past. The policeman, eager to obey orders, ran to and fro across the parquet floor, which creaked loudly under his weight.

"May I come?" repeated Glen, when the girl and her escort had vanished without anyone seeming to pay the slightest heed to him.

"Certainly," said Winter. "Both Mr. Davidson and you can help me greatly."

Glen strode forward, but his eyes were not on Winter or the secretary—they flitted, with an awe deepening into horror, from the cadaver lying back in the chair at the head of the table to the dagger resting where Macgregor had placed it. His pace slackened. He was evidently not prepared for the ghastly appearance of the dead man's face or the still more unnerving sight of the weapon which had killed him.

"Poor old chap!" he murmured. "Poor old uncle! To think I should find you like this!"

He went nearer, with a curious timidity, as though fearing he might arouse one who slept.

"And to think that you, who were so kind to me all my life, should have spoken so harshly when we parted," he said, still in that low tone of self-communing. "If only we could have understood one another. If only—— Dash it all! I'll never forgive myself if anything I said upset you! But I couldn't give up Dorothy—not for all the money in the world. It was too much to ask of a fellow. And the alternative! That was not to be thought of either. Oh, damn! Why couldn't things have worked out differently?"

Winter, who missed no phase of these emotional crises, saw that Davidson drew in his breath sharply, and moistened his lips with his tongue at that reference to Dorothy Temple.

"More complications!" he concluded. But he only said aloud:

"This is a bad business from every point of view, Mr. Glen. However, so much time has been wasted

already that I must ask you to repress your quite natural sorrow. Please do not touch Mr. Lanson's body—or anything else. When found, he was lying face downwards on the table, though seated just where he is. Now, I take it that during your talk with him, whatever it dealt with, there was no other person present?"

"Not to my knowledge, most certainly," was the answer, given collectedly enough. "My uncle could hardly have wished our conversation to be overheard. He wanted to force me——"

"Never mind that now. What I want to make sure of is that no one else could possibly be in this room. What time did you leave Mr. Lanson?"

"It must have been after nine o'clock. We all dined together at eight. Then uncle asked me to join him in the library. That would be about ten minutes to nine. He said a good many things, quietly at first, but rather heatedly, when he realised I was not going to do as he wished. Then he lost his temper and ordered me out of the Castle. I, too, got hot under the collar, and stamped off. I just grabbed a bag, threw in a few necessaries, hopped into a car, and was in the Crown Hotel by 9.15. All rather melodramatic stuff on each side. I thought him one of the best, and he——"

"Not earlier than 9.15?" interrupted Winter.

"I really don't think so."

"Then you didn't go to your room in the hotel, because I saw you at that hour?"

"No. I wanted to cool off, and hated the idea of being alone. So I lounged into the billiard-room, and there I met Denasch. I don't know even yet what number my room is. The hotel people said they had one at liberty, and that was all I cared about."

Winter glanced behind the screen, but did not

examine that part of the room closely. He would wait for daylight and a magnifying glass. He gave more heed to the nearest suit of armour—that from which the fatal dagger had been abstracted.

"Why," he commented aloud, "any man of average size could conceal himself here. Are they all alike?"

"No," replied Davidson. "Some are complete coats of mail. Others, to save weight, and give greater freedom of movement, protected only the front of the body, and were buckled to pieces of leather. I remember——"

He broke off abruptly, but had the good sense to anticipate the imminent question.

"One day, when Miss Irene came in to see her father about some trivial thing, she was examining an edition of Balzac over there"—he pointed to a book-case on the right—"and she disappeared suddenly. Neither Mr. Lanson nor I, nor Mr. Trevor, who will recall the incident, missed her for a few seconds, and we were positive she had not gone out. We were puzzled, almost startled, when she laughed at our bewilderment. She had simply picked up her skirts and hidden behind that Venetian suit."

"Is it conceivable that Mr. Lanson himself could have brought someone into the library after dinner and secreted him here?"

Davidson weighed the point. Before replying directly he appealed to Glen.

"You came here about five minutes after Mr. Lanson left us?" he inquired.

"Yes. I just finished a cigarette, smoking not being allowed in this room."

"Well, that being so," went on the other, "it is barely conceivable, though wildly improbable, that Mr. Lanson admitted a visitor. I do not believe

there was a stranger in the house. In any case, the servants on duty in the hall would know of it—of the entrance of such a person, I mean."

"How was Mr. Lanson occupied when you came in?" said Winter to Glen.

"He seemed to be thinking deeply. His left hand was under his chin, with two fingers extended along his cheek. The right hand rested on some papers."

"Are those papers here now?"

The younger man surveyed the litter on the table attentively.

"I think not," he said. "They were arranged in an orderly way, just as though they had been taken from a file—one of those box things, you know, with a spring clip—but nothing of the kind was visible. There was a richly bound volume lying near, but that has gone too. . . . You see," he added hesitatingly, "I'm an artist, and couldn't help spotting the wonderful picture the old boy made, with his finely-drawn, ivory-white face partly lighted by the reading-lamp and his black velvet coat. The gold and brown binding of the book showed up vividly. It blended so well with the oak and mahogany."

Davidson walked to the book-case which held the Balzac volumes. Stooping, he extracted one of a set of books which occupied two shelves about breast high from the floor.

"Was it one of these?" he said, bringing the book to the table and laying it there.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Glen instantly.

"Well, as it happens, this is the only instance of deception in the room. You will notice the title—'*Litera scripta manet, Bac-Cre.*' This is really a file, containing current correspondence, which is not cleared to the records room beneath for two or three

months after date. It was my suggestion, and Mr. Lanson was amused by it. In a word, it saved time."

"Are you well acquainted with the contents of the whole set of files?" put in Winter.

"Thoroughly, in relation to my own duties, and fairly accurately as to the general appearance of each file."

"Any volume missing?"

"No."

"Will you open each and say, after a casual glance, whether or not any bundle of papers such as Mr. Glen described has been abstracted?"

In little over a minute Davidson had examined twenty files. The policeman returned while he was thus engaged.

"These seem to be in perfect order," he announced then. Selecting one, indexed on the cover "Gov—Gre," he took out its contents.

"Is this lot like the papers Mr. Lanson had been consulting?" he asked Glen.

"Exactly," said the other.

"I thought so. This correspondence deals with an application by the Greek Government for a loan—a matter which gave Mr. Lanson a good deal of trouble during the past few weeks."

"Would that be the business Denasch wanted to discuss with him?" asked Winter.

"I believe so. Most certainly Mr. Sevastopolo is interested. It was what Mr. Lanson and he spoke of at a quarter-past ten. At least, that is what Sevastopolo told me less than an hour ago."

"Ah. Your memorandum will deal with that?"

"Yes. I may as well explain now that Mr. Lanson, after encouraging, up to a point, the notion that he would finance a reform party in Athens, decided

suddenly to have nothing to do with it, and was very angry with Mr. Sevastopolo for having tried to pledge him to it. 'Polo,' as we call him, was anxious to explain his position to-night, but Mr. Lanson would hardly listen, and cut him off curtly. The second call arose out of the first. It seems that the Greek Republicans have driven the King into exile, and Polo thought that fact might tend to alter Mr. Lanson's views."

"When did this become known—about the Athens revolution, I mean?"

"Not long ago. Probably Polo would be the first man in England to hear of it."

"Before the Embassy?"

"Oh, yes. We never trouble about Embassies. These big financial deals are all cut and dried long before the diplomats know anything about them."

"You told Mr. Sevastopolo that Mr. Lanson was dead, of course?"

"Naturally. To have withheld such a vital fact would have argued distrust of my colleague."

"He was greatly shocked, I suppose?"

"He was nearly stunned. For a while he could only stammer unintelligibly in Greek, which I do not understand."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word of what he said. I read some Greek at Oxford, but the classical language differs widely from the modern."

"Did Mr. Sevastopolo imply that he was speaking from the Park Lane Hotel?"

"No, but that is his London address."

A sharp click from the wall behind where he was standing caused Winter to turn rapidly. It was the signal from the main gate.

"It will take me some time to get used to that

wretched contrivance," he cried with a momentary note of irritation in his voice. "The doctor has returned with the nurse, I suppose? . . . Mr. Glen, if you are Mr. Lanson's nearest male relative I shall be glad to see you exerting some authority in the Castle, not superseding Miss Lanson, of course, but deputising for her. Will you go now and meet Dr. Macgregor? When he has disposed of the nurse, I want you and him to arrange for Mr. Lanson's body to be removed to his own room. I think he could be carried there easily by a couple of men-servants."

Glen hesitated.

"I feel I ought to tell you," he began, but Winter stopped him promptly.

"Mr. Lanson probably said things to-night which he might have regretted later," said the detective. "If he threatened you with total exclusion from his will, for instance, it is most unlikely that he carried out his intention before he died. . . . Is Mr. Lanson's will among the papers filed here, Mr. Davidson?"

"Most certainly it is not. One copy is in a safe downstairs, and another is deposited with his London solicitors. Will it be a breach of confidence if I say that Mr. Glen is one of the trustees?"

"I?" cried Glen, looking thoroughly astonished.

"Yes. Mr. Lanson had set his heart on seeing all his plans carried out during his life-time."

"But what on earth do *I* know about finance?"

Winter interfered again.

"So, Mr. Glen, there is literally no reason why you should not do as I request—now," he exclaimed brusquely.

Glen seemed minded to say something, but evidently thought better of it. Once more did the war-time habit of soldierly obedience come to his aid. He walked out in silence.

Winter uttered no word till the door was closed

behind him. Then he turned to Davidson, who had sunk listlessly into a chair. Placing a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder, he said so quietly that the policeman could not overhear:

"There cannot be the least doubt that Mr. Glen and Miss Temple are an engaged couple. It will save a lot of heart-burning if that fact is accepted by everyone concerned. I have faith in you, Mr. Davidson. You have a wise head on your young shoulders. Very well. Let it control your heart. . . . No, no!" because the other gazed up at him with the blank eyes of despair, "this won't do at all! Pull yourself together! We have important work before us. While you and I are here undisturbed we must search Mr. Lanson's pockets for any papers they may contain. Then, when the body has been taken away, you will help in going through the documents on the table. Surely you grasp the necessity of this! Your employer was killed because of some action he had resolved on, an action which was so totally opposed to that which some individual, or a group of people, desired, that his death alone offered the sole means of success to his adversaries. That is how I read this crime. Oddly enough, I am perhaps even better acquainted than you with the circumstances. I'll explain myself later. What I want you to do now is to set aside any dreams as to the future you may have indulged in, and help me in finding Mr. Lanson's murderer. Once we know the motive of the crime we shall not be far from discovering its perpetrator."

"But, Mr. Winter," sighed the other, "I had hoped——"

"Oh, yes. I have sized up the situation. I'm nearly twice your age, and happily married, too, to one of the best women in the world, yet I don't mind telling you she was not the first girl I wanted to call

my very own. We've all gone through it, but we recover in time. I'm glad to have had this chance of a clear understanding with you. And that will be all on the sentimental side just now. Our present job is to ascertain who killed this poor fellow here, and how the scoundrel has escaped. He, or she, is in this building yet, or I'm a Dutchman."

"She!" cried Davidson, so thrilled by a new thought that the stupor to which he had yielded for a little while vanished.

"Yes. Why not? It is nothing new for a woman to masquerade as a man. They do it much more often than people imagine. Besides, even if a man's hand drove home that dagger, a woman may have inspired the thrust. I take nothing for granted in an inquiry like this. For instance, where was Mr. Victor Denasch at half-past ten? And why did Miss Lanson want to assure herself that Sevastopolo was actually in London? Do you realise how amazing her action was? She used that telephone there, while the dagger which pierced her father's heart was actually resting beside the receiver. In this case we have no evidence, but a hundred clues. Let us follow some of them now—this instant!"

CHAPTER VI

A Battle of Wits

Though skilled doctors and famous detectives have many qualities in common, circumstances had conspired to mislead Dr. Macgregor, else he would never

have lost an invaluable quarter of an hour before telling Winter the one definite thing which in its sequel profoundly affected the fortunes of many people concerned in the Lanson tragedy. As it was, he saw to the installing in Alice Romer's room of the nurse whom he had brought from the Cottage Hospital, and directed the removal of Mr. Lanson's body as well. Then he sought a confidential word with the representative of Scotland Yard.

"May I ask why you sent off that chap Denasch in such a hurry?" he said when Glen and he returned to the library together.

"Simply because I didn't want him here, and had no valid legal excuse for arresting him," was the reply.

"Oh, I thought you had ordered him out of the town."

"Why in the world should you think that?"

"Because he crossed the Slea Bridge in a car half an hour ago, and must now be some miles along the London road."

"Are you sure of your facts?" demanded Winter, speaking so seriously that Macgregor bent his brows in the characteristic Scottish way which indicates real mental concentration.

"Absolute certainty is a rare thing in everyday life," he announced after a weighty pause, "but it does seem to me that what I have told you is an instance of it. In the first place, I barely missed running over him when I left the Castle, so I slowed down and apologised, offering to take him to the hotel, but he refused. Then I made for the Cottage Hospital. As I anticipated, there being no troublesome cases in hand, every member of the staff was in bed, and I had to wait nearly quarter of an hour for the nurse I wanted. Coming back through the High

Street I saw Mr. Denasch, still in evening dress, but wearing a light overcoat, enter a car waiting outside the hotel, and drive off. His luggage was on top; I recognised him quite clearly; I knew the car, which came from our local garage; and it has gone along the London road. The links in the chain of circumstantial evidence are fairly complete, I take it?"

For some reason—possibly by the action of unconscious cerebration, though he set slight store on such occult workings of the mind—Winter was obviously disturbed by the doctor's news. He reviewed the incident in silence for some seconds.

"That fellow has the nerve of the born crook," he said vexedly at last. "Of course, he will end in jail, and I am beginning to believe now that I should have sent him there to-night. I imagine he is not going all the way to London, but making for the nearest town where there is an all-night telephone service."

"That means Derby or Nottingham, to the south," said Macgregor.

Then Winter sent the policeman, who struck him as intelligent, to interview the local telephone operator.

"I don't want the embargo taken off the Castle line for some hours yet," he explained, "so ask the Sleaford Exchange to oblige Scotland Yard by circulating a request that if a call is put in for Mr. Sevastopolo, at the Park Lane Hotel, from any town in the Midlands during the night, the operator who takes it will note all particulars, and listen-in, if possible, reporting back here without delay. It should not be difficult, because the trunk line night service is confined to so few routes. Give the number of the Park Lane Hotel. Jot it down in your notebook. . . . When

that step has been arranged, you personally must ring up Victoria, 7000, and ask for Detective-Inspector Sheldon. Tell him I'll call later, but meanwhile he is to get in touch with Mr. Furneaux, who ought to drop everything and come here by the first train to-morrow. Sheldon and he will arrange about other matters in London. . . . Yes, write the exact words of the message. Afterwards you can explain in your own way just what has happened here. I make no reservations. Answer Mr. Sheldon's questions fully if you can. In the unlikely event of his being out, speak to the man on duty as though Mr. Sheldon himself were listening."

"Am I to mention——?"

"You are free to talk yourself dry," broke in Winter, "so long as you don't go one inch beyond your actual knowledge. I shall look for you here in about forty minutes."

The constable saluted and went out, feeling rather proud at being chosen for what he felt was an important mission. He was an excellent policeman, of the stolid British variety which crowns thirty years of good service with a sergeant's pension, yet that night he became a quite solid prop of the British Empire. Having carried out his instructions to the letter, he found he still had nearly a quarter of an hour at disposal, so made no scruple about knocking up the local garage proprietor.

Naturally the man growled at being disturbed by the police over so simple a matter, but told what he knew. It was to the effect that the gentleman from the Crown Hotel offered top rates for a reliable car to take him speedily to Birmingham. He and another gentleman might return to Sleaford early in the morning. If not, the car would come back empty.

"Nothing to make a song about in that, is there?" he concluded wrathfully.

"You never can tell," said the law.

"Well, the same gentleman went to Sheffield this morning. I took him there myself."

"Did he now? What was he after there?"

"Not much. Called at a couple of big shops—a jeweller's and an ironmonger's—and came home after luncheon."

"Made the round quite openly?"

"Well, not exactly that. I drove him to the jeweller's, and he asked me to wait at the King's Head Hotel. I looked in on a friend in the High Street, and happened to see Mr. Denasch coming out of the ironmonger's."

"Oh, he told you his name?"

"No. I inquired at the Crown bar this evening."

Winter heard these trivial things with marked interest and approval. In fact, when Birmingham reported an hour later that someone staying in the Queen's Hotel had rung up Mr. Sevastopolo at 2.30 a.m., and that the latter, after a brief conversation in a foreign language, had agreed in English to join the caller by the train leaving London at 6.45 a.m., Winter was so gratified by the achievements of his humble assistant in Sleaford that the town greeted a new acting-sergeant within a week.

Thus it happened by seeming chance that a slim, olive-skinned, black-haired man of about thirty had no sooner settled himself in a corner seat of a first-class carriage at Euston next morning at a quarter to seven—he having caught the train by a bare margin of a couple of minutes—than a slimmer and much smaller man, probably ten years his senior, hopped into the same compartment just before the warning whistle signalled the departure of the train.

The olive-skinned person looked slightly annoyed, but the later arrival grinned amiably and said:

"Close shave, that! I nearly missed it!"

The man first in possession said nothing. He was probably regretting his earlier inability to get the carriage door locked by the help of a half-crown, but the train was gliding out of the station already. His diminutive travelling companion, arranging a couple of portmanteaux on the luggage rack, rattled on cheerfully, though his back was turned:

"Queer world, isn't it? Here am I, by the skin of my teeth, in an early train for Birmingham, yet I actually have a seat booked in the Continental Express from Charing Cross to-day for Calais and Athens! Just imagine—Brummagem instead of the Acropolis! A mid-Victorian Town Hall substituted for the Parthenon! Don't you sympathise with me?"

Of course, his back being turned, the traveller who had changed routes so curiously could not detect the startled look which flitted across the other man's eyes when Athens was mentioned. But, if it were his simple intent to force conversation from unwilling lips, he succeeded admirably. His concluding question, now that he had turned and was seated, brought the instant retort:

"You certainly seem to vary your destinations rather remarkably. Do you know Athens? Would it have been your first visit?"

"No. Yes. You put two questions, and I have answered them in sequence. I have never been to Greece. I am longing to go there, though the wretched country seems to be always in hot water. Some affinity between Greece and hot water, eh?"

"Was Birmingham the only alternative?"

"That, or Sheffield. When dynasties totter to ruin, the dreadful people who fashion guns, big and

little, are apt to come into prominence. Birmingham is a place of evil activities. It manufactures articles which are abhorrent to art, but it also provides highly efficient weapons for warfare. What a repute for any city—that it should succeed in destroying mankind both body and soul!"

This strange little man apparently had it in mind to puzzle, even to worry, one who was an utter stranger. If so, his impish humour was gratified. The tint of olive in his hearer's face passed quickly from ripe gold to a sickly green. Indeed, the most casual onlooker might have concluded that here was one profoundly disturbed, even frightened, by something which sounded like aimless prattle. For a moment he was wholly at a loss for the most commonplace of words. He produced a cigarette-case, fumbled over it nervously, took out and lighted a cigarette and, as a sort of polite afterthought, proffered it to his *vis-a-vis*.

"Thank you, no," came the prompt reply. "I have many vices, but not that one. Don't think me rude if I say that the smoking habit atrophies the finer qualities of the mind. I believe it clogs certain delicate brain cells. Tolstoy held that it dulled the conscience. Perhaps that is going far, or, it may be, the theory assumes the existence of some attribute lacking in abnormal mentalities. All of which means that I personally don't smoke, though I have a respected colleague who not only burns choice Havanas all day long, but chews at least half of them. So I avoid generalities—beyond this—that scoundrels never smoke a pipe. They may dally with a cigar, and they positively revel in cigarettes. Nor is that a happy remark, seeing that you are now inhaling a cigarette, and a Turkish one—a prime offender. Please forgive my babble. I'm only a small chap,

and talk this way in a vain effort to impress people. Sometimes I succeed. In any event, I seldom bore my hearers."

It may be taken for granted that the late Mr. Charles Lanson had not amassed his wealth by choosing fools as assistants. Mr. Ramon Sevastopolo was regarded as an uncommonly shrewd young man when he began life in an Athens bank, and his experience of the world had sharpened his naturally keen wits during the intervening twelve years. So he jumped at two conclusions: first, that the diminutive stranger was rattling on thus agreeably in order to put him at his ease after startling him purposely, and, secondly, that he was now face to face with a British Government emissary who, by some singular and most uncanny chance, knew more about his (Sevastopolo's) affairs than was either palatable or expedient.

The Greek brain must be comatose if it fails to scent intrigue when it exists, and Sevastopolo's brain was exceedingly active at that moment. He recovered his ordinary poise, of which the outward manifestation was a blend of suavity and frankness. Not even his brilliant eyes permitted the wary mind behind them to reveal any of its secrets, unless, indeed, he were taken completely by surprise, as had been the case while the long platform at Euston was still flitting past the carriage windows.

But the man in the opposite seat had had his back turned then, so Sevastopolo surveyed him now with an expression of friendly amusement. Indeed, why should he fear a clash of wits with this talkative person? Certainly it was strange that the authorities should entrust such a rattlepate with the conduct of grave affairs, but a sharp-witted adversary should be thankful for that. The little fellow looked more like

a professional jockey or a front-rank comedian than the representative of a Government. He was extraordinarily natty in both physique and clothing. A blue silk shirt, blue linen collar and plain brown necktie were in strict harmony with a well-fitting blue serge suit, brown silk socks, and shining brown shoes, of which even the laces were knotted symmetrically. He wore a straw hat, too, with a blue and brown band. A pair of shrewd but distinctly humorous black eyes shone beneath the forward-tilted brim from an ivory-tinted face, seamed and pallid as a Japanese mask. The notion actually presented itself that the man might really be a Jap.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" began Sevastopolo, the question undoubtedly arising from that last half-formed idea.

"Certainly. It is Charles François Furneaux. Not so French as it sounds. I was born in Jersey, so come of French stock while remaining a fully-fledged Briton. Queer race, we English. Made up of all sorts, aren't we? But then, Mr. Sevastopolo, you understand such divisions better than most, as you are often called on to deal with a witches' cauldron of nationalities in the Levant."

It demanded a tremendous effort, but the Greek only permitted himself to look astonished.

"You know me?" he cried, without a tinge of falsetto in a voice ready to crack with excitement.

"Solely by repute—the heaviest penalty of greatness."

"Surely you don't regard me as a great man?"

"Oh, I do, really. Of course, greatness is only relative. Certain persons who were classed as great rulers, great politicians, great financiers, before and

during the Great War, are now widely and justly condemned as great rascals. You, I take it, Mr. Sevastopolo, have not yet reached the eminence of a precise classification, but you're on the way—oh, yes, mounting rapidly. I'll see your photograph in all the papers one of these days!"

At any other time Sevastopolo, who did not underrate his own place in the scheme of things, would have resented that explanation as an impertinence, and dismissed the subject forthwith by a careless "Ah, well!" emphasising the snub by a prompt immersion in the bundle of morning papers lying yet unopened by his side. But in his oval head—it was literally egg-shaped—was hidden some dangerous knowledge which rendered it essential that he should better comprehend this compact philosopher's real purpose in life.

"That is hardly a flattering remark," he said blandly.

"It wasn't intended to be," chirped Furneaux. "Flattery is gross at all times. At seven o'clock in the morning it would be positively nauseating."

"I agree with you there. In fact, I am so disinclined to it, even in the unusual event of its being offered at such an hour, that I had hoped to travel alone as far as Birmingham."

"Excellent!" and Furneaux's wizened features creased in a delighted grin. "It is my good fortune that fate, not unassisted by contriving on my part, should have enabled me to make your acquaintance."

"Ah! That's better. I like candour. Permit me to follow your example. What did you mean just now by speaking of dynasties tottering to ruin? Had you any particular line of kings in mind?"

"That depends on the meaning you attach to the

adjective 'particular.' Viewed from many aspects, the Greek monarchy is the least particular in existence. It hardly cares what the means adopted so long as it clings to power, or even the semblance of it. But you, of course, are well aware that the King of the Hellenes will be requested to-day by his loyal subjects to vacate his throne in the shortest possible time—to stand not upon the order of his going—but git—to go while the going is good."

Sevastopolo, rather suspecting his eyes, put up a smoke screen and turned to his newspaper.

"I haven't seen any telegrams——" he began.

"Oh, you won't—if you mean in the press? That spicy bit of news cannot leak out till this afternoon, at the best. I don't suppose the King himself knows it yet."

"You are quite well informed as to affairs in Athens, Mr. Furneaux?"

"Yes—yes. I have my sources."

"It will be most helpful to me—as a Greek and, I hope, a patriot—if you tell me what, in your opinion, the probable outcome of this present upheaval will be."

"Ah! If only I could guess!"

"Your guesses thus far have been remarkably accurate."

"But, don't you see, *you* are the man whose judgment on this point is really valuable?"

"I?"

"Yes. Mr. Lanson's death makes such a difference to the world's finances. A man who controls so many fluid millions cannot be murdered without—— Pray pardon me, Mr. Sevastopolo! Have I said anything outrageous? You *know*! You KNOW!"

"Possibly. But how the devil do *you* know?"

The protest was out before the Greek realised its

vital import. His bloodless lips had confessed to this utter stranger that he, too, shared the deadly secrets of those in high places. For a few seconds he threw caution to the winds, and glared at Furneaux with eyes from which gleamed a lambent fury, because he saw, or thought he saw, the threatened downfall of all his plans if the British Government were so accurately posted in them as this fantastic little man's statements implied.

"It is my business to know these things," said his torturer, speaking now with a new gravity which Sevastopolo found more disconcerting than his earlier flippancy. "I am only clearing the ground, as it were—opening a way for that free commingling and exchange of ideas which might throw light on the cause, or motive, of a brutal crime. That is why I am here, and that is why I don't hesitate to say you are guilty of incredible folly in associating yourself with a paltry scoundrel of the Denasch type. Why are you not hurrying direct to Sleaford? Why are you going there by way of Birmingham? Denasch is a thorough-paced rogue, whom any man's money will purchase. If you travel with him to Sleaford to-day by road you will lose caste, Mr. Sevastopolo. Believe me, you are descending in the social scale by even accepting a seat in his hired car."

The Greek had the courage of his type. He was no warrior. Not for him the stricken field, the imminent, deadly breach. He would probably shriek in anguish at the sight of lance or bayonet approaching his precious skin. But words were weapons he understood and did not fear. He thought it high time now to attack.

"You have, or think you have, a curiously intimate acquaintance with my affairs, Mr. Furneaux," he said icily.

"Undoubtedly," was the unlooked-for answer.

"I wonder why?"

"Do you?"

"And I am entitled to demand an explanation."

"If you knew half as much about me as I know about you, you'd be glad to waive your rights in that respect."

"Surely that is the very point at issue? Admittedly you have thrust yourself upon me, and seek to puzzle if not actually irritate me by parading certain remarkable items of news not yet widely spread, together with a series of assumed facts in regard to my own actions and movements. You must have a reason for such behaviour. What is it?"

"In effect, you want me to stop trying to pull your leg and tell you clearly why I am here?"

"Put it that way if you like."

"All right. You knew—or you ought to have known—that Victor Denasch is the unscrupulous if little trusted agent of a group of German financiers and high politicians who aim at keeping the Balkans inflamed until the Middle-Europe Empire can be set on its feet again. You sent him to Mr. Lanson, who had the good sense not to receive him, and you were as angry with your employer as you dared be because your schemes miscarried. It was not altogether too late. A million sterling can make or unmake any King in Athens. Within a few minutes of the hour when you risked dismissal by pleading that Mr. Lanson should help your precious conspiracy, he was killed. Victor Denasch—shall we call him?—though not bodily in the Castle at the time, seems to have been well established there in spirit and intent. He acted so peculiarly in Sleaford last night that he narrowly escaped arrest on a charge of complicity

in the murder. He was literally in the hands of the police for an hour, and was let off at midnight on a sort of parole, which he breaks instantly and hurries to Birmingham, solely that he may telephone to you, and you, Mr. Lanson's secretary and confidant, a close friend of the family, scurry off by the first available train to meet Denasch. Now, I ask you, Mr. Sevastopolo, if I have either puzzled or irritated you by what I have said in the pleasant intimacy of this comfortable carriage, how much more thoroughly will you not be puzzled and irritated by similar statements made most aggressively by counsel before a judge and jury ? "

Then, at last, far too late, Ramon Sevastopolo took time to think before he spoke. Probably for the first time in his life he was afraid to open his mouth lest he might find himself regretting what he said when it could not be recalled. He was superbly master of his nerves, however, and decided, though not so quickly as was his wont, that the rôle of plaintive protest offered present safety.

" Really, Mr. Furneaux, we are still at cross-purposes," he cried, striving after a note of regretful failure to grasp essentials. " What you say is true enough, in a sense. I did endeavour to enlist Mr. Lanson's sympathies in current Greek politics, and whatever Mr. Denasch's previous record may be, he unquestionably represents most influential people in this affair. A kingdom and millions of money are at stake to-day, and Mr. Lanson's death will turn the scale one way or the other. Why should I not ascertain Mr. Denasch's views on the changed situation ? "

Furneaux shook his head, almost sadly.

" It won't do, Mr. Sevastopolo," he said. " That cock won't fight. It is already in an advanced state

of moult. Denasch is far more your man than you his. Even though he does nominally represent a syndicate of respectable Dutchmen who want to sell bulbs to the Thessalians, you know he is dealing in sterner goods."

The Greek had never been, and never meant to be, in a battle, but he felt that he was being pierced with arrows.

"What is behind all this?" he yelled, for his vocal chords yielded at last to the emotional strain. "Who are you? What are you?"

"Why didn't you ask sooner? I told you my name immediately you inquired. Here is my card!"

Sevastopolo was so overwrought with alarm that he had to brush a mist from his eyes before he could use them. Then he read aloud:

"Mr. C. F. Furneaux, Detective-Inspector, Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, S.W." Drawing a deep breath, but not daring to look up, he went on: "I think I see light now. The people at the Castle have appealed to the London police for help?"

"Something of the kind. For once in a while Scotland Yard acted so promptly that my immediate Chief, Superintendent Winter, was by the side of the dead man half an hour after the murder was committed."

"But—how could that be?"

"It sounds incredible, yet it is true. When you are calmer you will appreciate the exact significance of Mr. Winter's presence in Sleaford during the past eight and a half hours. He is a big fellow, too, pulls just twice my weight—looks like a gentleman farmer who wrestles every morning with one of his own bulls. What chance had Denasch against a man like him?

Not an earthly. . . . By the way, have you breakfasted ? "

Sevastopolo's pallor—outward and visible sign of an almost complete physical and mental collapse—accounted for that rapid change in the conversation. He seemed hardly able to understand, and gazed at Furneaux furtively, as if searching for some meaning in the harmless question.

" Like me, I suppose," smiled the detective, " you rushed off in a taxi after trying to swallow a cup of tea that consisted mainly of boiling water. Listen, now, to words of wisdom. This train stops at Northampton, and we'll wire from there to Rugby for two breakfast baskets. I would suggest coffee and kidneys and bacon. Then, by the time we reach Birmingham, you'll be ready and willing to kick Denasch clear across Corporation Street ! "

CHAPTER VII

Furneaux Widens his List of Acquaintances

The train was not due in New Street Station, Birmingham, until ten o'clock, so the Greek had a fair chance meanwhile of regaining his shattered wits. The phrase does not exaggerate the state he was in until he had eaten some solid food and reasoned thought came to his aid. Then he was all for co-operation with the police, though he resented Furneaux's blank refusal to allow him to provide the sum total of the refreshment-room charge at Rugby. Probably, had he appreciated the little man's real motive in stubbornly

insisting on sharing the cost he might have felt distressed again, because the explanation was that no detective likes to accept hospitality from any person whom he may have to arrest subsequently. As Furneaux put it: "Such things aren't done, even by Members of Parliament!"

However, Sevastopolo was far too adroit to remain huffy over so trivial a matter. At first he was minded to agree with Furneaux that the wiser course would be to ignore Denasch altogether, catch a Midland train to Derby, and thence reach Sleaford by car long before Denasch could possibly return from Birmingham. But this plan was too straightforward for the subtle Greek mind. He actually smiled as he propounded a truly Machiavellian scheme.

"Have you ever seen Denasch?" he inquired, brightening visibly when the new scheme presented itself.

"I may have seen him, but have never met him," said Furneaux, who had decided to spare his travelling companion any more brain-storms for the moment.

"Well, in the conditions, I think we ought to keep the appointment at Birmingham."

"Why?"

"Because you will then ascertain quickly that the relations between Denasch and me are purely official—strictly related, that is, to the business we had in hand."

"Will you tell me just what that business was?"

Sevastopolo did not hesitate an instant. His active brain had foreseen this question before he suggested an immediate meeting with the man whose visit to Sleaford had coincided so dramatically with Mr. Lanson's death.

"Certainly," he said. "You told me yourself that you were on the point of leaving for Athens to-day. I cannot expect you to reveal departmental secrets, but it is fairly obvious that your mission must have concerned the Foreign Office rather than the Commissioner of Police. Therefore, you must be acquainted with the present political situation, which is almost as unsatisfactory in my country as in Russia. Greece was discredited in the eyes of the Allies during the Great War, and she has only lost more ground in the five intervening years. The Hellenic people, like all other peoples, are anxious for quietude, non-interference with their neighbours, and commercial progress, but various groups of adventurers, soldiers and so-called diplomats have treated the Constitution like a football which is being kicked by half a dozen rival teams at the same time. Now, if Greece is to be saved, and she is worth saving—it is forgotten too often by the rest of the world that Greece is at once the birthplace and the bulwark of modern civilisation—it can be done only by a few sincere and able men with plenty of money behind them. Such a party exists to-day. The firstfruits of its policy is the enforced departure of the King and his chief supporters——"

"What?" broke in Furneaux, open-mouthed, with interest.

Sevastopolo seemed not to have expected this interruption, and was totally unable to guess whether it betokened incredulity or mere surprise. Still, he kept on without a break.

"I ought to explain," he said, "that the men I favour, and whom I wanted Mr. Lanson to support with a loan of no less than ten millions sterling, do not form the actual Government of to-day, but they inspire its policy, and will soon reveal their true

identity if the requisite money backing is forthcoming."

"Am I to understand that they brought about this latest expulsion of the monarchy?"

"Not quite that. They are ready to link forces with either monarchists or republicans. Their sole object is to save Greece by pulling her out of the swamp in which she is almost submerged."

"Is Denasch one of them?"

"Ah!" The Greek's well-shaped and remarkably white hands were thrust forward in a gesture of repudiation. "One has to deal with questionable agents when such affairs are in train. The big men will not, they dare not, come out into the open. That is why the new saviours of my country are posing as a commercial syndicate. Indeed, it is more than a pose. They are convinced that the regeneration of Greece lies wholly with trade. They believe that a few barrels of good oil or a few tons of first-rate currants are worth many acres of barren land on the way to Adrianople."

Furneaux leaned forward in his seat, and rested both hands on his knees. His small, intensely bright eyes met the larger, more dreamy eyes of the advocate of a new life for Greece with a piercing scrutiny which appeared to herald a demand for even more intimate details. Yet he only said:

"Where did you learn English, Mr. Sevastopolo?"

The other man's eyebrows rounded. It was evident that he had to focus his wits anew before dealing with this unexpected topic.

"At school, in Athens," he replied rather shortly. Then, bethinking himself that if he were to gain the point for which he was striving he must not antagonise again the strange creature who could strike with such sharp and novel weapons, he added more graciously:

"Of course I acquired it there as your English boys pick up Greek roots in the preparatory schools and learn a few passages of Homer and Plato at the Universities. But three years in the London bank which acted for Mr. Lanson, plus five years as his secretary, when I met nearly every man and woman of distinction in this country, rounded off the basis of grammar and stupid exercises."

"And Denasch, now? I suppose *he* talks the language fluently. Have you any idea where *he* picked it up?"

"I'm—not—quite certain. You see, I do not know much about him—recently, at any rate. I suppose you are aware he is not a Frenchman?"

"I have heard that his quite precocious childhood was passed in Smyrna, which is a long way from Paris."

"If every Frenchman held that view, Mr. Furneaux, Europe would not now be bothered with Greece's troubles."

Furneaux chuckled.

"It is a positive delight to meet a man like you," he beamed. "If friend Denasch is only half as well informed I shall have a most agreeable trip to Sleaford."

"So, then, you approve of my notion of meeting him at Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you care to take the risk."

"Risk? What risk?"

"Of hobnobbing with one who may be concerned in some way with Mr. Lanson's death."

"But, really, that is an astounding thing to say. With all his faults, Denasch would never mix himself with a set of assassins. He may be a bit of a rascal, but I assure you he is not a fool. Don't you see? Unless events take a turn which I, for one, cannot

even bring myself to anticipate, this crime shuts and bolts the door which was opening for Greek independence."

"Well, Denasch was arrested last night. He is subject to police surveillance now. He may be in jail under remand before sunset, or moonrise, whichever appeals to him most."

"But——"

"Go on. I keep nothing back. That is an unhappy trick of temperament in a detective."

"Well, I should have imagined, from what Mr. Lanson himself said to me last night—do you know we had a telephone conversation at 10.15 ?—that there were other persons in Sleaford yesterday who, no matter how innocent of wrongdoing they may be, might have come under police suspicion far more prominently than Denasch."

"Who told you this morning at half-past two that Mr. Felix Glen was his companion in misfortune a few hours earlier ? "

"Yes, he did, though I am unwilling to bring Mr. Glen's name into the matter at all."

"Quite right. His actions were above-board throughout. You will find him in a position of some authority in the Castle. In fact, owing to our roundabout route, lots of things will have happened there before we arrive. Had we gone to Derby by the Midland we would have travelled with Mr. Hassall, senior partner of Hassall, Son and Jenkins—Mr. Lanson's legal advisers in England."

Sevastopolo blanched again. It was not in human nature that he should withstand these repeated shocks and show no sign of their severity.

"So soon ! " was all he could gasp.

"Yes. You have not yet sensed the true significance of Mr. Winter's presence in Sleaford last

evening. He's a tremendous fellow when thoroughly roused, and he was not only very wide awake, but distinctly peeved when he spoke to me this morning at five o'clock. You see, I am letting cats out of bags every minute. The reason is that I should be sorry to find you barking up the wrong tree. By the way, have you included that American word 'peeve' in your vocabulary? I love it. It expresses an exact shade of annoyance—a sort of perplexed irritation verging on anger, as it were."

Sevastopolo's complacency had vanished. He felt that the cat-chasing simile was faulty. Now, had Furneaux spoken of a rat! Certainly the diminutive detective resembled a keen and aggressive fox-terrier in some of his moods. Perhaps he actually had some notion of the kind at the back of his head when he made that peculiar remark.

But it was worse than useless to remain silent. The Greek caught at two straws.

"Yes, I agree with you as to 'peeve,' and 'wise up,' and their like," he said. "They cover so much ground in a syllable. But I don't quite 'get,' to use another Americanism, what Mr. Hassall's presence in Sleaford has to do with Mr. Felix Glen's assumption of authority, as you put it."

"I didn't mention any 'assumption' on his part. I was only alluding to the position he holds necessarily as a trustee of Mr. Lanson's will."

Then Sevastopolo threw up his hands once more, literally as well as metaphorically.

"Can you—are you—is that statement actually correct?" he gurgled.

"I am told so."

"But—he is an artist!"

"Is that to his discredit?" cackled Furneaux, almost joyously. "Are not you Greeks a nation of artists?"

Sevastopolo seemed to protest rather feebly against this levity. He was accustomed to dealings with all sorts and conditions of men, but never before had he met anyone entrusted with the conduct of serious affairs whose mental jerkiness began to compare with this detective's. The man resembled a clown armed with a rapier instead of an inflated bladder. With one hand he tore away an adversary's mask, with the other he adjusted his own. What would he say or do next? The Greek shrank from unknown qualms because of those he had endured already.

"We shall be in Birmingham soon, and I have not slept much during the past forty-eight hours. Would you mind if I closed my eyes for a little while?" he murmured.

And, strange to relate, he was asleep in less than a minute. He was not shamming. He had reached the end of his tether. This was a new experience for Furneaux. He had reasons, indefinite as yet but taking shape quickly, for believing that the Greek secretary had been more devoted to his own interests than his employer's. There was even ground for suspicion that the murder might have been the outcome of certain forces which, once set in motion to accomplish a dubious project, had run amok when an insuperable obstacle intervened. Yet here was this arch-plotter, brought face to face with a tremendous crisis in his own affairs, ready to sink into as sound slumber as was ever vouchsafed to any saint in the calendar of the Orthodox Church! It was puzzling, and, in some manner, almost Napoleonic.

Oddly enough, Furneaux himself found the example admirable. He too dozed off, and did not wake up until the train slackened speed as it entered the gloom of New Street station.

Sevastopolo was still dead to all external conditions. Exhausted physically and mentally, he had sunk into an awkward position, and some documents in an inner breast pocket were forcing open the left side of his coat. It would have been a quite easy trick to abstract them, and thus perhaps lay bare certain facts of which Furneaux very much wanted to have incontrovertible proof. But Scotland Yard has its ethics as well as the House of Commons! Suspect and detective had snoozed together in confidence; one must play the game though the heavens fell.

The few minutes' rest seemed to have benefited Sevastopolo greatly. His colour returned, and he walked briskly at the heels of a porter who carried his one portmanteau and Furneaux's two to the Queen's Hotel, which has its own entrance under the station's roof. There they discovered at once the elegant and slenderly built figure of Victor Denasch, now attired in a lounge suit of French cut—he bought all his clothes in Paris, though the genuine Parisian man of fashion would not be seen dead in any garment not made in London. He hurried to meet Sevastopolo.

"Sorry to have been compelled to dig you out at such an unearthly hour," he said, speaking so loudly that a Birmingham detective reading a time-table in the lobby—obviously a policeman in plain clothes—could not help hearing every word. "But, of course, this dreadful business at Sleaford admitted of no delay. Will you have breakfast? My car is waiting outside."

"I breakfasted on the train, so we can start now," said Sevastopolo, who hardly relished the breezy familiarity of Denasch's greeting, and touched but coldly an outstretched hand. "By the way, I've

brought a friend with me, who will be glad of a lift in your car. He, too, is bound for Sleaford."

That was the most adroit move on the Greek's part thus far. In neither naming his companion nor describing his profession, he seemed to say to Furneaux:

"Could anyone be more loyal to our implied compact? Here is Denasch at your mercy. Lead him on. He will never guess who you are."

Denasch, who now cocked an eye at Furneaux for the first time, was so thoroughly mystified by the presence of a stranger that he did not note Sevastopolo's failure to use the ordinary form of introduction.

"Oh! I made certain you would come alone," was the only comment he dared to make at the moment, but the nonchalant expression of his eyes changed instantly into one of steady challenge, and in that unspoken language which every man who lives by his wits must understand, he said plainly:

"Have you taken leave of your senses? It is imperative that you and I should talk most secretly on the way to Sleaford. Why, otherwise, should we have met here?"

The local detective, confronted with three conspirators when instructed to look for two, was compelled to turn and steal a covert glance at the third man. Furneaux, always at his best in a piquant situation of this kind, contrived to favour him with a brazen wink, which greatly perplexed the Birmingham sleuth, who had never even heard tell of the "Little 'Un" of the "Yard," because, contrary to public belief, the Criminal Investigation Department does not interfere in the detection of provincial crime unless at the special request of the local authorities.

But Furneaux was a sportsman to his finger-tips,

and it was hardly fair to leave Sevastopolo in the lurch just then.

"One good turn deserves another," he said genially, favouring Denasch with one of his inscrutable smiles. "If you are to take me to Sleaford, Mr. Denasch, it is only fitting that you should know who I am. You encountered my colleague, Superintendent Winter, last night. My name is Furneaux—Inspector Furneaux—and Mr. Sevastopolo will tell you that I shall probably be able to follow intelligently anything you may have to say about what has happened at Sleaford."

There was a moment of tense silence after that. It was broken by the raucous cry of a newsboy rushing past the main entrance to the hotel:

"'Orrible murder at Sleaford! Lanson, the profiteer, stabbed!"

"So the newspapers have got it!" commented Furneaux, rather grimly. "The sooner we are on the road the better. A 'profiteer,' the boy called Lanson. I suppose he meant 'millionaire.' The terms have evidently become interchangeable in Birmingham!"

Sevastopolo, still obdurately dumb, suddenly asserted himself. With a fine gesture to the porter with the baggage, he took the lead and hurried to the door. Recognising the driver of a limousine car standing by the kerb, he simply motioned as to the disposal of the portmanteaux on the roof and opened the door. Then he turned to Furneaux.

"Will you and Mr. Denasch sit inside?" he said, and his authoritative air brooked no denial. "I feel I need some fresh air. Kindly let me occupy the front seat."

It has been seen already that Denasch could keep his mouth closed on occasion. He did so now. As

things were happening which he could not understand, he waited for one of the others to make the first move. He was not kept long in suspense. The brake was hardly off before Furneaux leaned forward, and waved an affable hand to the watchful detective, now lighting a cigarette on the steps of the hotel. Consequently the man burned his fingers, and threw away the match with an exclamation which may have been "Pish" or "Tush!" and, again, may not.

"*Crè nom d'un nom!*" grinned Furneaux. "Our departure has stung a local cop into fury."

"You speak French, then, Mr. Furneaux?" said Denasch, thankful for what he regarded as a conversational opening.

"Yes. Do you?"

"I ought to"—this with a slight laugh.

"So ought a lot of people who waste valuable years in trying to learn it."

"But I——"

"Oh, I'm well aware of the French hold on Syria. Much good may it do them! . . . How much older Mr. Sevastopolo looks when seen from behind! His head positively droops. When, if ever, this present mess is cleared up, he ought to quit high finance for a time, and take to golf, or its superior exercise, marbles. Wonderful game—marbles! The average boy wouldn't thank you for golf if he had a few glass ollies in his pocket, and an opponent worthy of his skill. Do boys play marbles in Smyrna?"

"I—er—really don't know."

"What!"

Sevastopolo was a far stronger man intellectually than Denasch; if he had been perturbed by Furneaux's peculiarly explosive way of uttering that one small word, it was only to be expected that Denasch would feel its force even more readily.

"That is to say—I have forgotten," he explained.

"You don't tell me, and at *your* age! Why, you'll be forgetting your own name next!"

If Furneaux had been what he looked—a fashionable light-weight jockey, he would certainly have won fame as a rider in five furlong races, since he had the supremely important knack of pushing his mount into a breathless gallop right off the mark. It was a method which seldom failed with the average criminal. He forced the pace until the man he was spurring had to travel faster than his mental equipment warranted. It is on record in the "Yard" that he actually drove a deaf and dumb malefactor into writing a confession on a slate by terrifying the poor wretch by highly realistic pantomime. Denasch, all unknown to himself, was nicely on his toes already, as the racing correspondents put it. That is to say, he was aware of some subtle and premonitory warning of danger, for this mercurial little person by his side had twice in a few words alarmed him by queer allusions which might either have come near the truth accidentally or be revealing actual knowledge possessed by few men and no woman in England. But, whichever way it was, Denasch felt that he must go on. Indeed, there was a degree of satisfaction now in Sevastopolo's decision to travel outside. This chatty detective's words were both strange and disturbing, but he did say things, and the depths of his information must be plumbed.

So, to pursue the simile of the racecourse, Denasch indulged in a breather while marshalling his forces for a struggle. Naturally, he had not the slightest doubt concerning its outcome. The world would come to a nice pass when an international rogue should quail before a mere policeman.

"Did I understand you to say that the man you

signalled to outside the hotel was a detective?" he began.

"Signalled!" grinned Furneaux. "That's a queer word. But why should I be a purist? Yes, the hefty-looking person to whom I waved farewell was ready to nab you if you showed the least sign of taking a train. He would have handcuffed you at a moment's notice."

"Me?"

"Are you surprised? Didn't Mr. Winter tell you to go to your hotel, and stay there?"

"Yes, but——"

"You should have obeyed. Men like Lanson are not murdered every day, nor do men like Winter issue orders twice."

"What on earth have I to do with the murder?"

"I don't know—yet."

"I cannot imagine why you should wish to be offensive, Mr.—Furneaux—is it?"

"Really, Mr.—Denasch, which it is not."

"Are you hinting at the fact that I have changed my name? If so——"

"There you go again—'signalling,' 'hinting.' A pretty broad hint I call it. You remind me of the poker game in Texas, when a one-eyed man was cheating a good-natured miner, who stood the gaff for a while but suddenly produced a revolver and laid it on the table. 'I don't want to hurt anybody's feelin's,' he said, 'but there's something crooked in this here game, an' I'd like to tell the responsible party that if it doesn't stop pronto I'll shoot his other eye out.' You've been in New York, I know, so you have probably acquired a taste for the peculiar twists and kinks of American humour."

Denasch thought fit to laugh.

"All this doesn't explain why you Scotland Yard

gentlemen are so suspicious because Mr. Glen and I visited some ruins in Sleaford last night."

"No. I admit it. Alice Romer should have recovered her wits by this time, so Mr. Winter will be delighted to clear up the situation when you see him."

Furneaux, who had been looking at the street in front, turned suddenly and gazed straight into the other man's eyes. This was inconsiderate of him, because the allusion to Alice Romer was unexpected, and Denasch flinched distinctly.

"Of course, the young woman you mention happens to be rather attractive in manners and appearance," he said thickly.

"And found you equally so."

"I didn't quite mean that."

"What, then, *did* you mean?"

"That, at my age, one takes opportunities."

"I see. A pronounced flirtation, in fact, which had reached the stage of a secret code. What did three flashes imply?—that she must see you at once?"

Denasch swallowed something, though his palate had gone dry very rapidly. But, stop talking? He could not. He dared not.

"I think I had better leave Alice Romer to tell her own story," he gurgled.

"In your place, I'd do the same. You've bungled matters sufficiently already without committing the supreme folly of trying to imagine what information a hysterieal girl may yield. Here you are, at half-past ten in the morning, miles away from Sleaford, where, as an innocent man, you should have stood fast. You have persuaded Sevastopolo to be here, too, although his own interests cry aloud for his presence in the Castle. The singular thing is that I regard him as a rather honest sort of chap, for a Greek

—that born intriguer who simply can't help slinking unseen through the brushwood by the side of the road instead of marching boldly along the hard macadam. If you have a scrap of wisdom left in that scheming brain of yours, you'll tell Mr. Winter and me just why you have been prowling about Sleaford for the past week. But I doubt if you will. Admit the mental superiority of a couple of detectives—a beefy fellow like Winter or a little whipper-snapper like me? Not you! That sort of good sense is not in your make-up. You'll fence and parry until it's too late."

"Too late for what?"

"To persuade a judge that circumstances have conspired against you."

"I swear I know nothing of Mr. Lanson's death."

Furneaux cracked a finger and thumb loudly.

"There you go!" he cried in a shrill falsetto. "Dodging the issue already! Suppose we talk of something else—say, moonshine. What was the theory you advanced last night which brought Felix Glen out to gaze at the moon? I used to dally with art before becoming a slave to Justitia—that stern mistress with blindfolded eyes, who carries the scales of the law in one hand and the sword of punishment in the other."

CHAPTER VIII

What the Butler Knew

The car drew up at the Crown Hotel, Sleaford, shortly before noon. Sevastopolo alighted, but was met on the pavement by Furneaux, who happened to be seated next the right-hand door.

"Mr. Denasch has a room here, I think," said the Greek. "Where do you wish to go, Mr. Furneaux?"

"I'll tell you in a few seconds. I see a large-sized cop bearing down on us. He may prove the messenger of the gods."

Sergeant Phillips brought verbal orders. Furneaux was to deposit his belongings in Mr. Glen's room at the hotel, and come on to the Castle at once. Denasch, a rather bold rascal in many ways, realised that all present chance of a private talk with Sevastopolo was at an end, but that fact did not prevent him from asking the Greek to write or telephone, making an appointment.

"You'll be at the hotel all day?" said the other civilly, though declining to commit himself to a definite arrangement.

"Oh, yes. I shall hardly stir out."

"If there is any difficulty in the matter, inquire at the police-station," put in Furneaux, using a confidential tone which Denasch found highly disagreeable. But a crowd was gathering. The Castle tragedy was known now far and wide, so the mere arrival of the dead man's Greek secretary, with whose semblance every inhabitant of Sleaford was more or less familiar, provided a magnetic focus. Though Sergeant Phillips cleared a small semicircle on the pavement, it was impossible that anything further should be said which was not meant for many ears.

Denasch, therefore, could only scowl darkly, pay several pounds for the hire of the car, and vanish into the hotel with his luggage. Sevastopolo joined Furneaux in the limousine and, short as was the run uphill to the Castle, enlarged his knowledge of the detective's peculiarities even in that brief time.

Furneaux was as silent now as he had been talkative in the train. His restless eyes seemed to be absorbing every feature of the High Street and the Castle Approach. He scanned the names over the shops and on the brass plates of professional men. He chuckled once on discovering that "W. Waterman" sold milk, and that the dairyman's near neighbour, "John Bull," was a butcher. Then he found the Castle towering above its rock, and thenceforth paid heed to nothing else. This, by the way, was the normal influence of the magnificent structure on those who saw it for the first time.

Sevastopolo, who had resolved to let his companion take the initiative in discussing Denasch, moved uneasily twice while the car was speeding towards the main gate. At last he was compelled to break the ice; in a few seconds they would be crossing the great court.

"What did you make of Denasch, may I ask?" he said.

"Nothing," said Furneaux.

"But you and he had a good deal to say to each other."

"He tried to lie on nearly every occasion he opened his mouth, and kept me busy telling him it was useless. He didn't utter a word of real value in this inquiry. His chief anxiety was to get hold of you for a heart-to-heart conversation. I advise you personally to rid yourself of him. Tell him the deal is all off."

"You mean our financial project?"

"I leave definitions to you. He is a dangerous associate in every way. . . . Ah, this is mediæval! This is really imposing! Strange that death should creep unseen through such a gateway. Perhaps he

scaled the walls? Who can tell? There is a fine line in Horace, beginning 'Pallida mors.' Do you know it? 'Pale Death, with impartial stride, calls at the hovels of the poor and the palaces of kings.' I wonder if he knocked at any humble door here last night before visiting the library of a multimillionaire! His visits are so unexpected, so secret. Can he possibly be sneaking in with us now?"

Sevastopolo deemed the notion so bizarre that he forgot to return the salute of the day watchman who opened the gate. At any rate, he did not mention Denasch again, which was just what Furneaux wanted.

They were received at the glass-encased entrance by Mr. Pinkney, who looked somewhat worn after an almost sleepless vigil, added to the quite tiring work connected with the search. But his manner had lost none of its urbanity. He was always the butler *par excellence*.

"I'll have your bag taken to your room, Mr. Sevastopolo," he said. "Miss Irene is with Miss Temple in the morning-room, and will be glad to see you as soon as you can make it convenient. . . . Mr. Furneaux, I presume? Mr. Winter is breakfasting. He asked me to bring you to him at once."

"Is he alone?" inquired Furneaux.

"No, sir. He and Mr. Glen were called at the same time—half an hour ago. They did not retire till seven o'clock."

"Is Mr. Hassall here?"

"Yes, sir. In the library, with Mr. Davidson and Mr. Trevor."

Two policemen rose from chairs in the hall when the new-comers entered. They saluted Furneaux, but evidently did not recognise the secretary.

"Mr. Winter must have described me with merciless accuracy," Furneaux half whispered, as Pinkney led him to a room on the ground floor at the back of the staircase.

This comment evidently upset the butler's complacency. But the non-committal phrase was his long suit.

"Well, sir," he purred, "he did give us some particulars as to your general appearance."

"Oh, he would. He never fails. Of course, I don't look like a detective. But, does he? Now, I ask you—wouldn't you expect to see him at an agricultural show prodding prize pigs with a stick applied judiciously to prospective rashers?"

"I don't know about that, sir, but he did tell me not to be surprised at anything you said or did."

"Mr. Pinkney, you and I will be friends. Later, we shall discuss the respective merits of the 1911 and 1914 vintages. Don't be startled, or even prejudiced. One can make a strong appeal in behalf of the earlier year. . . . What lies behind this blank wall on the right?"

"Oh—er—that is the lower storey of the library, sir."

"Any cellars there? No allusion to wines this time."

"No, sir."

"There ought to be an oubliette somewhere in this locality. Know what an oubliette is?"

"Not exactly, sir. Has it anything to do with the French word, *oublier*, to forget?"

"Everything. An oubliette is a place where one is forgotten—wiped off the slate, in fact. Your full-blooded Norman baron could not enjoy his

dinner thoroughly unless he had some poor wretch safely immured in a dungeon far beneath the floor."

Mr. Pinkney was rather awe-stricken, and his circulation was poor, perhaps owing to distress and loss of sleep.

"We have nothing of the sort in the Castle, sir," he said, stealing a furtive glance at the queer little man who had such a knack of drawing terrifying word-pictures.

"You never can tell, Mr. Pinkney. Another horrid trick of the hardy Norman was to have the men executed who built his secret vaults and passages, so their whereabouts could easily remain unknown to subsequent generations. . . . Ah! Here we are! My respected chief gorging on kidneys and bacon, plus a sausage. Confound it! I forgot the sausage, but Mr. Sevastopolo and I are well ahead of you as to the rest of the menu. . . . Glad to meet you, Mr. Glen. I suppose that fellow, Denasch, can really talk about art, or he wouldn't have wheedled you out last night to gaze at the rising moon. I tried him, but couldn't get a peep out of him. Seemed to have lost all interest in colour effects. Perhaps he remembered suddenly that Art is Long and Life is Brief."

"I've taken a dislike to him since I discovered that he paints his face, Mr. Furneaux," said Glen with a smile. "If you breakfasted early, won't you join us?"

Furneaux shook his head.

"No," he said. "A little codger like me has to be careful of his digestion. A cup of tea and a biscuit about two o'clock will sustain me bravely till dinner. . . . So you have no further news, James?"

"Not a scrap," growled Winter, digging a vicious fork into another sausage. "There's no one hidden in the Castle, unless it contains apartments of which we have no knowledge and whose whereabouts we cannot even guess at. What are you grinning at? Nothing amusing in that statement, is there? It would seem to be practically impossible for the murderer to have vanished altogether after committing the crime. He was a man, a tall, strongly-built man. Five persons saw him, and one, Mr. Pinkney, felt him——"

"Yes, the dear old boy's jaw is quite swollen," broke in Furneaux.

"It's the time limit that beats me," went on the Chief. "Bates, the night watchman, acted with promptitude. As soon as the murder was discovered, and that could not have been many seconds after the butler had been pushed down the stairs, Bates posted scouts outside the walls, so any attempt at using a rope ladder or that sort of device must be defeated. The sentries are there yet, our local superintendent having drafted in a dozen extra police from the district for that and other purposes. He and the county surveyor, with a couple of builders, are now examining the White Friars ruins on the off chance that some hidden passage to the Castle may be found, but they have been busy there two hours already, and have not telephoned me yet, so I assume failure. Mr. Hassall and the two secretaries are going superficially through Mr. Lanson's papers in the endeavour to trace some private letter or memorandum which may help, but they also remain quiet. There are one or two things I took from Mr. Lanson's clothes which I want you to look at; they left no impression on me. To sum up, Charles, beyond a few details

which you will soon assimilate, the position remains exactly where it was when I phoned you this morning at 5.30. Never in all my experience have I been mixed up in such a case. Mr. Lanson was killed at half-past ten, and his murderer was seen almost at once, besides being practically traced to the turret. Wood and I, and a shrewd Scotch doctor, were here soon after eleven, and we have a building nearly unique in construction to assist us in frustrating our man's escape, yet here we are, with fourteen hours gone, and not one inch forrader. Can you beat it?"

Winter was so genuinely chagrined that his friend suppressed the jibe which an uneasy glance from the Chief's prominent blue eyes seemed to challenge.

"What of Alice Romer?" said Furneaux, after a fascinated stare at the rapidity with which Winter, eating too quickly in his annoyance, got rid of half a sausage.

"She is our one best pet. Macgregor, the doctor, you will remember, saw her this morning at ten. I was asleep then, so he left this note."

Furneaux opened a bit of crumpled paper tossed across the table. It read:

The girl is all right now physically, but seems to think that an assumption of complete obtuseness has deceived me. I recommend that you leave her alone till I return at 3 p.m. Then you can bounce her as hard as you like without fear of consequences.—J.M.M.

"The unfeeling brute!" murmured Furneaux. "'Bounce her'! Who ever heard of such treatment for a lady? Let me see you do it, will you?"

"That will be your job. I'll be ready in five minutes. Then Mr. Glen and I will take you over the ground.

I've left the turret untouched till you turned up. It's a place that calls for some of your psychometric and clairvoyant stuff."

"Ah! That's better, James. Your speech is becoming normal. I should hate to see you losing grip of the commonplaces of life. Have you had a chat with Miss Irene Lanson this morning?"

"No. She is still in her rooms."

"She isn't. She is now in close confab with Mr. Ramon Sevastopolo in the morning-room."

"What?" shouted Winter, pausing with uplifted coffee-cup.

"Don't be-what me! I've been doing it to a Greek and a Levantine for five hours."

"Who told you that?"

"The butler. A stout fellow, Pinkney. He'll reveal lots of things if only you ask him. Wait till you hear him discourse on Château-Yquem and the various Margaux."

"I think you have never met Mr. Pinkney before," put in Glen with an air of surprise.

"No. We have only walked together from one door to the other."

"Then how in the world can you have discovered that he is an authority on claret?"

"He would not be worth his salt as a butler otherwise. Claret is the wine of wines. Any novice can pick up a few dates in champagnes and Burgundies, and the rest, but claret demands knowledge, taste, real discrimination. It can range from a form of vinegar to a nectar of the gods."

Winter banged a heavy fist on the table.

"Stop this fooling!" he cried. "How did Miss Lanson find out that Sevastopolo was here?"

"That has been puzzling me for three minutes

—ever since Mr. Pinkney met us at the door, in fact. He had been given his orders. The lady was waiting for the gentleman in the morning-room, he said. With her was another lady, Miss Temple."

"But when she spoke to Sevastopolo by telephone last night he could hardly have planned to travel by way of Birmingham and be three hours late in consequence, and I don't believe he was able to use the Castle wire before he left Euston."

"It is not so remarkable, really," said Glen. "You forget the warning click when the main gate is opened. My cousin, or someone deputed by her, could see the car."

"No one in the Castle could possibly discern its occupants," said Furneaux. "It was a closed car, and Mr. Sevastopolo sat behind the chauffeur."

"In what rooms is that rotten device fixed?" demanded Winter.

"In the hall, the library, the drawing-room, the dining-room, and the morning-room."

Winter rose, and pressed an electric bell. As it happened, Mr. Pinkney himself came in answer.

"Mr. Pinkney," said Winter, "will you instruct your electrician to disconnect the appliance which announces in the Castle the opening of the main gate? I want this done at once, please—and the matter must be kept quiet."

"And, Mr. Pinkney, can you tell us, or will you find out, if Miss Lanson has used the telephone this morning?" said Furneaux.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler, replying to Winter. Then he turned to Furneaux. "Miss Lanson has not, to my knowledge, made any call since she rose, but she answered one from the Crown Hotel about a minute or two before you alighted, sir."

Furneaux spread wide his hands, and his wizened features wrinkled in a smile.

"What did I tell you?" he cackled, after Pinkney had gone out. "Ask the butler. He's the lad for me. His front name is Information."

"So Denasch thought it advisable to warn Miss Lanson that Sevastopolo was on the way?" growled the Chief. "'Pon my honour, this affair grows more complex every minute. If you have finished breakfast, Mr. Glen, is there any reason why you should not go to the morning-room? You might like to see Miss Temple, I imagine."

"There is nothing I would like better," smiled Glen. "I suppose you wish me to report here promptly?"

"Yes, without your action being too obvious."

Glen hurried away. When the door was closed behind him Winter glared at Furneaux.

"Charles," he muttered, "I don't often do rash things, but I'm half inclined to arrest Miss Lanson as an accessory before the act. Her behaviour is simply outrageous. There are four people who, if they chose, could clear up the mystery of Lanson's death in five minutes by merely telling what they know. Miss Lanson is one of them, yet her every word and action are meant to thwart us."

"And the others are Sevastopolo, Denasch, and Alice Romer?"

"Yes."

"Why does Macgregor wish us to wait till three o'clock before we tackle the lady's maid?"

"He's a bit of a psychologist, and has given her some drug which will excite her nervous system, though she believes it is bromide. By that time it will have got hold of her. I am only guessing, or, rather, deducing this from something he said early

this morning. But, while we have a minute to ourselves, I want you to grasp certain essentials. Miss Irene Lanson is infatuated about Sevastopolo, and did not hesitate to conspire with him against her father. Glen and Dorothy Temple are an engaged couple, but both are poor. To a great extent they depended on Lanson, who had planned that Glen should marry his daughter. Davidson, the English secretary, is in love with Miss Temple. If it turns out that Trevor, the American secretary, has a crush on Miss Irene, the cycle will be complete."

"Not quite. Denasch and Alice Romer have paired off too."

"We have no proof of that."

"*I* have. Denasch told me so himself."

"Great Scott! How did he come to do that?"

"Oh, I just joshed him into it. Those wax-doll fellows can't resist proclaiming their successes. Honestly, though, it was not a bad move on his part. He cannot possibly dissociate himself from the eleven o'clock signal from the turret window, so he calmly owns up to a strenuous flirtation. I haven't the least doubt he or the girl will produce a written code which shows that three flashes mean 'Darling, I'm just going to bed. All my love and heaps of kisses.' You know the kind of tosh I mean."

Winter surveyed his subordinate with a brooding underlook which was far from bearing out any marked acquaintance with the amatory passages indicated with such gusto.

"But it is more than probable that he violently assaulted a policeman in the White Friars ruins at half-past ten," he said.

"Tell me more about that."

The Chief related P.C. Barker's adventure in

detail. When he had finished Furneaux chortled delightedly :

"Name of a good little grey man ! I hit the nail on the head at the first attempt. The three flashes *did* mean that."

"Oh, for heaven's sake——"

"Be patient. If you have eaten all you want, light a cigar and you'll become human. I am talking now of what I said to Denasch—that Alice Romer was signalling him to come at once, the inference being that she had important news. Of course, that's it. She wanted to tell him of the murder."

"But why at eleven ? What was he doing in the White Friars at 10.30 ? "

"How do we know she didn't signal twice ? She was late in going upstairs, you will remember—10.40 or thereabouts, the butler said. Probably she received no answering flash, so tried again, as per arrangement, and on the second occasion had something really vital to communicate—tidings so stirring that he must dare all by coming to the Castle. Shakespeare knew what he was talking about when he wrote the lines :

> Affairs that walk
> (As they say spirits do) at midnight, have
> In them a wilder nature than the business
> That seeks despatch by day.

Alice is the girl for me ! I'll stretch her on the rack, but she shall explain these belated prowlings."

Glen came back. His frank face bespoke a certain perturbation of mind.

"Miss Temple tells me that my cousin and Mr. Sevastopolo did not remain in the morning-room,"

he announced. "They are in the west garden. At least, Irene said they were going there."

"But to get out of the house they must cross the entrance hall?"

"Yes; there is literally no other exit."

"You see," chimed in Furneaux, "we only had to ask the butler!"

Winter was biting the end off a cigar, a bad habit which he had cultivated to the point of perfect achievement. He waited to examine the result before speaking. Then, with a sour look at Furneaux, he said:

"Ill-timed levity is a most offensive form of humour."

"What has come over you, James?" was the plaintive retort. "Usually, of a morning, you are the sweetest-tempered thing—an attribute arising, I believe, from a sound digestion rather than a purely angelic temperament."

"Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome burned!"

"Nero never did anything so foolish. Moreover, he couldn't. Nero never saw a fiddle. The wretched instrument hadn't been invented in his day."

"Well, he acted like an idiot in some way, or mankind would never have conspired to revile his memory for two thousand years."

"He was certainly a tyrant who delighted in torturing his victims. That is why posterity blamed him for the fiddle. I rather imagine some jaundiced courtier heard an Æolian harp in the Emperor's garden while the wind fanned the flames."

Glen, who had begun to regard Winter with the respect a young subaltern pays to a wise and dignified colonel, thought obviously that the advent of Furneaux had developed a streak of lunacy in the portly Chief. But he was a sharp-witted young man, who did not

need many more hours to learn that when these two were bantering each other there was something brewing which boded ill for malefactors on whose trail they happened to be at the moment.

Indeed, while Furneaux was still rattling off his nonsense, both he and Winter rose, and the latter said to Glen :

"Is Miss Temple alone in the morning-room now ? "

"Yes. She—er—said she would remain there till I returned."

"Take me to her. She's a sensible girl. It will do me good to have a chat with her."

Furneaux did not know, nor did he care, that the windows of the morning-room overlooked the west garden. He hurried across the hall and found the butler.

"A word with you, Mr. Pinkney," he said, leading him into the court. "Miss Lanson and Mr. Sevastopolo have just gone into one of the gardens. How does one reach it ? Through that passage ? " And he pointed to the right, where a long, deep archway revealed at the farther end a sunlit vista of greenery.

"Yes, sir," said the other, economising words.

"And what sort of place is it ? I mean, does it specialise in flowers or shade ? "

"It is so sheltered from the wind, sir, that semi-tropical trees grow there which, I am told, cannot be found for several hundred miles farther south."

"Admirable. And the paths ? "

"A favourite one leads to an ancient sundial on the north side—to the right as you enter, that is."

The little detective turned suddenly and gazed into the older man's eyes.

"Mr. Pinkney," he said with utmost seriousness, "I take it you are not fond of Mr. Sevastopolo?"

"Sir," quavered the butler, "I dislike him intensely. Miss Irene has her faults—shall we say?—but they are the defects of an impulsive nature. But this Greek is a schemer, a plotter. He is not a true man. That poor girl had better be dead than marry him. I don't know why I say this to you, a stranger, but—I am not—quite myself—to-day."

"Oh, yes, you are!" Furneaux assured him, with a warmth of sincerity that would have astonished even Winter had he heard. "You're honest and honourable and faithful, and cannot help detecting the lack of those qualities in others. Now I'll tell you something that will please you. You and I, between us, will go a long way towards discovering Mr. Lanson's murderer. That is in your private ear, my friend. Not a word of it to anyone except Mr. Winter, who can prod his fellow-men even more effectively than pigs. Please see that no other person comes this way for the next ten minutes. Any gardeners in there?"

"I believe not, sir. This is their dinner-hour."

Furneaux walked swiftly through the passage, and found himself facing a leafy wilderness. Exotic trees and flowering shrubs formed groups of beauty on a closely mown sward. Soft turf took the place of gravelled walks. To left and right, beneath the windows of that part of the Castle, ran a narrow strip of cultivated soil, blooming now with the last of the year's herbaceous plants. For the rest, so cunningly were the trees arranged that no hint was given of the massive outer walls which shut in this sylvan retreat on three sides.

"Satan tempted the first woman in a garden," muttered the detective to himself as he paused for

an instant to survey the ground. "The game still goes on, it would seem. I must try and discover how it is played!"

CHAPTER IX

Furneaux Lifts the Curtain a Little

Furneaux was so frail in physique that a certain wiriness of frame could never have enabled him to tackle with confidence even the average criminal, who, by the way, is generally not remarkable for bodily strength. But, if heredity had denied him bone and sinew, it had compensated by the gift of five senses of unusual capacity. Guiding these was an alert brain, endowed with occult qualities which few could understand, and which Winter himself regarded with awe, though prone in lighter moments to scoff at their subtleties. That day they were displayed at their best.

The butler had as good as said that the man and woman who sought this green solitude for their confidence would probably make for the sundial. It was evidently secluded enough for privacy, yet must necessarily stand in an open space, thus shutting off all possibility of their talk being overheard. But eavesdropping, or its equivalent, was not Furneaux's present intent. Irene Lanson, daughter of a Greek mother, had lived in Athens during her first fifteen years. Her earliest thoughts had been lisped in the Greek language. If she and her lover had secrets to

discuss they might shout them in the market-place of Sleaford and none else be the wiser.

He struck straight across the garden, or grove, rather, until the battlements of the old Norman fortress barred the way. Then he turned, moving swiftly and noiselessly from tree to tree—not thus far unseen, because Felix Glen, chancing to look out through one of the windows of the morning-room, noted the slim little man's first quick transit. That fleeting glimpse of him spoke volumes, however. The memory of it helped to modify the artist's first impressions.

Furneaux was still forty yards distant when he caught sight of the couple he was stalking. A break in the shrubbery revealed a circular carpet of lawn, with a stone pillar in the centre, supported by a tier of three steps arranged in pentagons. On the uppermost platform stood Irene Lanson, a graceful figure robed in black. One elbow rested on the sundial, but her demeanour was far from listless. She was speaking eagerly, vehemently, to Sevastopolo, and he, poised on the step beneath, seemed to be equally emphatic. They faced each other, but their eyes were restless. They were exercising restraint in both voice and manner. No intruder could come near without their knowledge. Furneaux did not risk a further advance. He had removed his straw hat, was sheltered by a pair of small firs and a copper beech, and remained absolutely motionless, which he knew well was the best protection of all.

He judged that the girl was protesting, the man pleading. Gradually she was being overborne. Her expression changed from doubt to thoughtful agreement, at which Sevastopolo was so pleased that he sought to take her hand. With a truly feminine gesture she forbade him. A flash from her eyes, a

turn of the wrist, and it was as though she had said plainly:

"Not here! How do we know that some of those strange detectives and policemen are not lurking among the trees?"

Indeed, the Greek's instant action gave proof of her meaning. He swept the surrounding belt of foliage with furtive scrutiny. His eyes actually met those of Furneaux, yet they saw not. The drooping branches of the firs and the dark mantle of the copper beech provided an impenetrable screen.

Sevastopolo, however, though desisting from any lover-like *tendresses*, seemed to realise that this golden opportunity might not recur during many days. He entered on a long explanation of some matter, to which Irene listened intently. Her air of complete concentration puzzled Furneaux. Winter had said something about Miss Lanson's occasional trances, in which she saw visions and spoke of centuries-old events and personages as though she herself moved and had her being among them. This absorption in the affairs of the hour was a trait hardly in keeping with the neurotic temperament. And then the trim little detective smiled to himself. In many ways he was more subject to certain forms of neurosis than this highly-strung English-Greek girl, yet here was he ready to deny her the very attributes of which he boasted most! Why, her acute brain could probably fathom to its uttermost depths some weighty matter of politics or finance before a thoroughbred Englishwoman of her own age had mastered the meaning of the words which set forth the thesis.

But what could it be which the man was stating so fluently, and which roused so much interest in his hearer? Sentence after sentence poured forth,

now in hushed accents, now in rounded periods, but always, when the voice could be heard at all, in a sonorous, evenly-balanced language which could only be Greek, for Furneaux spoke French and Italian well, and not only was it neither of those tongues, but none of their kith and kin—like Spanish.

Suddenly the girl gasped a solitary word:

"*Basileus!*"

Sevastopolo repeated it vehemently. Then, throwing prudence to the winds, he clasped her in his arms. Their lips met in a passionate kiss. For a full second they forgot all else, and yielded to rapture. But they drew apart abruptly and, after another searching of the trees, this time by two pairs of eyes, the discussion was resumed, it being now the turn of Irene Lanson to fling question after question at her lover. He seemed to answer with increasing force and conviction. The two might have been rehearsing some overwhelming scene in a tragedy rather than engaging in an ordinary conversation in a peaceful English garden.

No man who reads—and Furneaux was a great reader—can fail to remember that "*Basileus*" is the Greek for "King." Is it not writ large in the world's literature and history?

So he stared, and stared, and stared, while the talkers waxed even more earnest. Gone was their lover-like pose now. This was a high council handling affairs of state. Names were mentioned, names which figured often in the newspapers. Once Sevastopolo took from his coat pocket a bundle of documents, and the girl perused three of them with swift-moving eyes, while her lips were pursed in critical appraisement. Furneaux smiled sardonically at that. Were it not that he obeyed a code of honour rigid enough in its laws, he might have seen those very letters, and

learned at least whence they came and the identity of their writers.

But he repressed the queer notions jostling in his brain, and withdrew as noiselessly as he had approached. Avoiding the way he came, he skirted the outer wall until close to the buildings which flanked the main court on the west. These he knew were garages, stables, and servants' quarters. Every window on the ground floor was protected by a stout lattice of steel. There could be no doubt that whoever had planned the internal arrangements of Sleaford Castle, whether ancient or modern, had rendered clandestine exits or entrances exceedingly difficult.

On reaching the court, he turned to the right and walked down to the porter's lodge, or guard-room, for the Norman fortress had remained intact in this respect. He had an eye for the sunk garden as he passed, and admired its herbaceous borders and its beds of dwarf and standard roses. Standing in the shadow of the Norman arch, after indicating with a smile to the day-watchman and a policeman that he was not going out, he surveyed the Elizabethan front of the residential portion of the Castle. It reminded him of the inner quadrangle of Hampton Court, though that of Sleaford was altogether more spacious and the elevation loftier. The turret alone did not conform in period with the general architectural scheme. It was graceful and well modelled, but exotic. It seemed to consist of six separate towers jammed into a hexagon, and meeting necessarily at acute angles. There were no windows except the circular set which gave light to the smoking-room. Above these were closely-screened ventilators, so protected, as he found later, that neither light nor moisture could penetrate to the closed attic. The

stones were old, the pointing comparatively recent. One could not doubt that the whole façade dated from the late sixteenth century. Whatever alterations Mr. Lanson might have conceded to an era of bath-rooms and electric light, he had wisely left untouched the mixed brick and stonework of the forgotten artists who knew so well how to build with strength and beauty.

While Furneaux was taking in these details, Miss Lanson and her companion appeared and entered the Castle. He hurried in pursuit, and ascertained that they had gone to the morning-room after inquiring Mr. Winter's whereabouts.

He was too late, therefore, to hear and enjoy Sevastopolo's well-phrased expression of thankfulness that the inquiry into his employer's death had been entrusted so promptly to the experienced Chief Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Winter did not enthuse. He had just learnt from Dorothy Temple that Sevastopolo had been in close communication with Denasch for at least a week prior to his (the secretary's) departure for London. By mere chance she had seen them together in the environs of Sleaford, and once, she was sure, Denasch passed some hours in Sevastopolo's rooms in the Castle. Of course she had paid no heed to these things at the time. The comings and goings of all sorts of people were far too commonplace to be matters of interest. But Alice Romer's strange escapade had a somewhat perplexing bearing on Denasch's presence in the town, and Miss Temple was able to recall with surprising accuracy dates and places which seemed somehow to connect the Greek with the singular proceedings of a man who, to say the least, must have been personally obnoxious to Mr. Lanson.

Sevastopolo, suave and self-possessed now, an altogether different being from the impassioned orator of the sundial's glade, showed a degree of surprise at Winter's coldness.

"You know who I am?" he said. "With Mr. Davidson and Mr. Trevor I had the honour of sharing Mr. Lanson's complete confidence in most of his affairs."

At that moment the door opened and Furneaux came in.

"I was told you were all gathered here," chirped the little man cheerfully. "I see you have made Mr. Winter's acquaintance, Mr. Sevastopolo. Probably Miss Lanson knows that you and I travelled together from London. . . . Miss Temple, I am sure? . . . Well, now that everybody is on terms with everybody else, I would suggest what our American cousins describe so forcibly as a heart-to-heart discussion of the facts, or absence of facts, to be paraded at the coroner's inquest, which will, I suppose, be opened this afternoon."

"An inquest!" broke in Irene excitedly. "Ridiculous! The death of a great man like my father cannot be investigated by some country doctor or lawyer!"

"That is the law, and it must be obeyed," said Sevastopolo, taking up the girl's challenge before either of the representatives of Scotland Yard could interfere, or at any rate before they answered, which might be a wholly different matter. "If I understand Mr. Furneaux correctly, it is essential that we should decide exactly how far the evidence tendered to the coroner and jury should go, and in what directions our presumably more ample knowledge should be limited if not suppressed altogether."

"We are not talking of suppression," said Winter.

"That is impossible. But to-day's proceedings will be formal—dealing merely with identification and the probable cause of death, so that the interment may take place. The inquiry will then be adjourned for a week and, if necessary, for further periods of seven days each, until the Treasury solicitor is in a position to go fully into the whole matter."

"But, when you find the man who killed my father, will he not be tried by a judge?" went on the girl.

"Yes. Our English justice may be a trifle involved in its methods, Miss Lanson, but it is remorseless in operation."

"I am beginning to doubt that," came the scornful retort. "The Castle has been overrun by detectives and policemen since a few minutes after my father's death, and you have done nothing except scare my poor maid out of her wits."

"We?" said Winter, with a total lack of respect in voice and manner that brought the Greek's eyes on him sharply.

"Well, you or some other official. I was actually told that I could not even be allowed to see her. Why?"

"That is in the discretion of Dr. Macgregor. She was found lying senseless at the foot of the turret stairs, and has hardly recovered yet from the shock. We—the police—are forbidden to question her."

Suddenly the girl's eyes grew strangely distended. She advanced a pace, shaking off Sevastopolo's restraining hand.

"You—you frighten me!" she cried. "You compel me to say the wrong thing. Through all these years you have been waiting—waiting—to torture me!"

Then she burst into tears, and seemed like to collapse altogether had not Dorothy Temple run to her assistance. Sevastopolo opened the door, and the two young women went out; the Greek did not offer to follow.

"Dr. Macgregor must have told you of Miss Lanson's occasional seizures," he said quietly. "She was just giving way to one, but the fit of crying stopped it. When tears come she is safe, and will recover soon. I'll try and persuade her to leave all these distressing matters in your hands, and ours. I suppose those who represent Mr. Lanson—his solicitor, Mr. Glen and, I may add, myself, as Miss Lanson's fiancé—have some right to make themselves heard?"

"Since when have you assumed the right to describe yourself in that way?" demanded Glen rather sternly.

"Oh, we became engaged, secretly, of course, about the same time you and Miss Temple arrived at an understanding. You did not think fit to take me into your confidence, Mr. Glen, so I saw no reason why I should be more communicative."

Sevastopolo smiled. His voice held no trace of rancour. Indeed, his friendly tone tended to rob the words of any veiled significance they might have had otherwise.

But Glen's manner grew even more frosty.

"There can be no sort of comparison between the two cases," he said. "Miss Temple is poor. She is compelled to earn her living by acting as companion to my cousin. I have yet to make my way in the world. Our engagement is free from any taint of intrigue or self-seeking, whereas you—in playing on the emotions of a girl obviously destined to be a great heiress——"

"Gentlemen," broke in Furneaux sharply, "you

are not helping but retarding the work my Chief and I have in hand. The bells must toll for Mr. Lanson's funeral and his murderer's execution before they clang for any weddings!"

Now Glen, for all his artistic irresponsibility—that attitude towards life which appreciates the bubbles in its wine rather than its more recondite qualities—possessed a shrewd brain when he chose to use it. He knew certain things which Sevastopolo did not know, and he believed that the little detective's seeming reproof to the Greek and himself was actually a hint to Winter as to the line he ought to take in the threatened quarrel. So he quite handsomely withdrew the implied taunt.

"I'm sorry," he admitted frankly, "if I said anything to ruffle your feelings, Polo. Of course, you rather startled me, but—all four of us are of an age to know our own minds. I think Mr. Furneaux has put the position quite plainly. This is no time to talk of marriages. We are living under the shadow of death. Let us endeavour to get rid of that dark pall before we make plans for the future."

"I agree with you there, quite unreservedly," said Sevastopolo.

"It will assist both of you if I explain that the ultimate authority rests with me until the criminal side of this mystery is cleared up," said Winter, with a dry deliberateness which compelled attention. "Not only do I represent the police, whose powers in such affairs are far-reaching, but I have been requested by the Foreign Office to take such steps as I think fit to stop this unhappy occurrence from exercising any dangerous influence in international affairs. And, as it happens, I have also a direct mandate from Mr. Lanson himself. He suspected, poor man, that forces hostile to his interests were being exerted close at

home, and gave me a very wide discretion in my efforts to discover and defeat them. Neither he nor I dreamed that an assassin's dagger might play its part in the attack being made on him. Unfortunately, it did. As a consequence, my department assumes sole charge and direction of all matters bearing on the crime and its complete investigation. I shall be glad, Mr. Sevastopolo, if you will exert your influence on Miss Lanson so that she does not interfere further in any way. She has gone to dangerous lengths already. Succeed in that, and you will have accomplished much. Then you should assist Mr. Lanson's legal adviser and your fellow-secretaries in arriving at a thorough understanding of an involved financial situation, which might easily become a menace to the world's money markets. . . . Mr. Glen, you, as the nearest male relative—the only one living, I believe—must look after more intimate personal matters. All this is merely a transitional control until Mr. Lanson's will is read, and the appointed trustees take hold. But there is no room for argument as to the ultimate responsibility until the murderer is found. I believe he is still within these walls, so the comings and goings of any person, from Miss Lanson herself down to the most junior member of the domestic staff, are absolutely subject to the approval or otherwise of the police. Everyone in the Castle will find that I have already issued definite orders to that end. Even the telephone, the mail and telegrams are under my control. It is an unusual state of affairs in a criminal inquiry in this country, but the circumstances are unusual too, nor can I see that any great hardship will be inflicted on individuals. Still, such hardships as are felt must be endured. Mr. Lanson's murder is more than a crime—it is a national calamity, or may become one.

I am stating conditions, not theories, and I look for their full acceptance by all concerned. . . . Will you go now, Mr. Sevastopolo, and explain the position to Miss Lanson? . . . You, Mr. Glen, might relieve Mr. Pinkney for an hour. He is taking charge of telegrams and letters, and is interviewing such callers as the gatekeepers do not feel competent to deal with. Please bear in mind that not a scrap of information is to be given to anyone. The press cannot be excluded from the inquest, but the newspaper men must enter and leave with the coroner."

"Are you establishing a censorship on private correspondence?" inquired the Greek, but the question was put so mildly that it conveyed no touch of criticism or disapproval.

"In the sense that all letters will be opened and read by me or my deputy before they are given to the addressees—yes."

"I do not protest. But—forgive the suggestion—is such a practice quite legal?"

"I neither know nor care."

Sevastopolo bowed and followed Glen, who had quitted the room without a word. Winter, who had not dared even to steal a glance at Furneaux while delivering the most pretentious speech he was ever known to have made, turned to his friend almost truculently when the door was closed.

"That fellow needed bouncing," he said, "so he got it. I suppose he imagined we'd grovel when we heard he was marrying Lanson's millions."

Probably he meant to forestall the impish comment which many years of close comradeship warned him was the next thing to be looked for from his colleague. But Furneaux's face was unusually grave, and no jibe came from his thin lips. When his eyes met Winter's, they were heavy with thought.

"The real point is, James—where are we?" he said.

"I cannot even guess. Talk about floundering in a morass!"

"Worse than that. We're swimming blindly in deep water. You haven't begun to feel the ground beneath your feet yet. I managed to bump into a rock a few minutes since, but by accident, which is only reasonable where rocks are concerned."

"What sort of rock?"

"Oh, the slippery variety on which thrones are founded. I'm not going to give you reasons for my opinion, because you might laugh at them, and that would hurt. But I'm convinced that you have just been ticking off the prospective King of the Hellenes."

"Sevastopolo!—that pip-squeak?"

"You're mistaken, James. He's an uncommonly clever chap. He has suffered enough nerve-shocks during the past few hours to cause any ordinary man to howl for a rest cure, yet he did not bat an eyelid when you as good as told him he was under suspicion long before Lanson died. That was the acid test and no mistake, but he stood it like a Spartan. *Misère de Dieu*, I've hit it! He *is* a Spartan! That's Article I in his proclamation. Article II will be supplied by Lanson's money. The thing's as good as done. He has dazzled Irene by promising to make her Queen of Greece. And why not? If a pair of cheap Germans could mount the throne of Hellas, what's wrong with a full-blooded Greek candidate, backed by a shipload of gold? Oh, Lordy, I'll laugh till my sides ache if you're told off to safeguard royalty at the coronation of Ramon the First and Queen Irene!"

"I'll have 'em both in jail first," raged Winter.

"Perhaps they'd be safer there. But I'm on the right track, Chief. You can bank on that. Never before have I been more certain of anything without being able to give chapter and verse for my belief. But don't you see how that solution of the problem opens up the path before us? We must tread warily, I admit——"

"Are you assuming that Irene Lanson connived at her father's murder?"

"No, no. That would be staging modern Greek tragedy *a la* Grand Guignol. Here is the scheme as I perceive it—dimly perhaps as yet—but it is the only one into which various pieces of the puzzle fit. The reform party in Athens have shunted their latest monarch. He was told that the state of his health called urgently for a prolonged holiday away from Athens. He accepted the advice so readily that he took ship within the hour. Such, at least, is Sevastopolo's news, and I have no doubt it is correct, since he is the force behind the movement. He told me so himself. To-day a number of high-souled Republicans form the government, but they haven't a bean among them, and Greece couldn't raise a national loan of a hundred quid unless by pawning the crown. What a chance for a Greek of good family who has command of practically unlimited means! Now, don't shout at me! I listened patiently to a far longer speech of yours. What bearing has all this on Lanson's death, you ask. Simply this. Let any given number of Greeks—say nine, in deference to the Muses—join in a project for their common benefit, and each man begins instantly to wangle things for himself, without caring a brass farthing how the remaining eight fare. Sevastopolo couldn't act alone. He had to have confederates. One of them, or a group, it may be, found he was double-crossing the Republican

proposition, and cut the wires by knifing Lanson. There's nothing new in that sort of lofty patriotism. It was a recognised principle in the politics of old Rome, and is still popular all over Europe. Even the stolid Teuton is beginning to see its good points, while it actually supersedes the referendum in Mexico and South America."

"Curse all Dagoes! According to your theory, Sevastopolo must know who the murderer is!"

"He could probably name him at the first offer."

"And Denasch?"

"He'd guess well, too."

"How about the girl?"

"No. She has annoyed you, or you wouldn't say that. Sevastopolo will never let her in on that state secret. She was devoted to her father, and he to her, I imagine. She'd turn and rend lover or husband if she knew he had brought about her father's death."

"Then why shouldn't the old man have been willing to make her a queen?"

"Perhaps he was never asked. Can you conceive a Greek conspirator trusting an Englishman?"

"But that was the obvious way out of the difficulty."

"James, you haven't quite got hold of this thing yet. You're worried and flurried. Sevastopolo represented the financial end of the revolution. He was a fervent reformer until he saw the Kingship shining through the mist. Perhaps the idea was not even born in him until a late hour last night. Anyhow, I know now that he broached it to the lady for the first time half an hour ago while she was leaning on a sundial in the west garden."

"Did you hear?"

"No, but I saw."

"What d'ye mean—saw?"

"With a power of vision whose mere existence you deny. And I may claim to have heard, too, in the same occult way."

"You little rat! For a minute or two you had me almost convinced."

"O mound of beef, you only understand that a house is on fire when you see the flames!"

"And you kid yourself you're the star man of the Yard!"

"There's something in a name, after all," and Furneaux's shrill voice dropped suddenly to a complacent squeak.

"Sometimes I wonder how I've kept my temper with you all these years."

"You haven't. When cornered you fall back on British stodginess, and often drive me to frenzy. You're just a walking edition of the Police Manual. One can hear the heavy foot of the London cop clumping through your every spoken thought. I——"

A tap at the door smoothed a make-believe fury from both faces as though by magic.

"Come!" cried Winter.

Mr. Pinkney appeared. He was agitated, and had temporarily shed his butler-like gravity.

"Alice Romer is up and dressed, gentlemen," he said. "She wants to leave the Castle, and Mr. Glen is hard put to it to detain her without using force."

"Good!" said Winter, springing briskly from a chair into which he had subsided while Furneaux and he relieved their surcharged feelings by exchanging a little personal abuse. "That removes the doctor's embargo. Here's a fine subject for your

psychological treatment, Charles. Bite her, boy! Bite her!"

"Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" grinned Furneaux, giving the perplexed butler a reassuring wink.

CHAPTER X

The Admissions of Alice Romer

The detectives found Glen in the hall expostulating with a smartly-attired, slim young woman, whose rather pretty face gained more than it lost in attractiveness if only because her cheeks were flushed and her blue eyes sparkled with anger.

It was evident that the unexpected presence at the door of one whom she recognised as a member of the family alone prevented her from trying to push past two embarrassed policemen, who, if put to the test of a real disturbance, might have quailed before her. These rural constables were hardly to blame if they did not interpret Winter's commands quite literally. They were called in from the district by telephone because nearly all the Sleaford men had been on duty till long after daybreak, and they had little if any knowledge of the peculiar conditions governing life in the Castle just then. So they may have needed, and were certainly given, an object lesson in what is implied by a demand for unquestioning obedience.

Glen smiled his relief when the representatives of Scotland Yard arrived.

"Now," he said to the irritated girl, "you will probably believe what I told you. These gentlemen are detectives from London. You and I, and all of us, are under their orders. I assure you that I myself cannot leave the Castle without their permission."

"But I can, and will!" she cried, with that stamp of the foot which, in certain circles, marks the peak of feminine determination.

"On what errand do you wish to go into the town?" said Winter quietly.

"That is my business," came the prompt retort.

"It happens to be my business, too. Is that the only explanation you offer?"

"Yes, it is. What have I done, I'd like to know, that I shouldn't be allowed to go out when I have my mistress's permission?"

"I'm not mistaken, I suppose, but I had better have your own assurance. Are you Alice Romer?"

"Yes."

"Miss Lanson's personal maid?"

"Yes."

Winter turned to one of the policemen.

"Arrest her!" he said. "Take her to the police-station, and allow no one to communicate with her on any pretext. Enter the charge as being an accessory after the act in regard to the murder of Mr. Lanson. I had better write that down for you. There must be no error in the wording."

"Me!" gasped the girl, blanching with sudden fear and, as both Winter and Furneaux thought, astonishment, a complex of emotions which they hardly looked for.

"Who else?" said Winter nonchalantly, producing a notebook and pencil.

"But what have *I* done?" she shrilled.

"You will hear the evidence against you in due course. If you don't understand the charge I'll explain it to you."

"You tell me I had something to do with Mr. Lanson's death? I hadn't. What a thing to say of a respectable girl!"

Winter, wholly unmoved, commenced writing. Furneaux, by an otherwise unnoticed jerk of his head, motioned to the policeman to come closer to his quarry. Alice Romer, of course, could no more withstand these threatening tactics than a rabbit stalked by a weasel can forbear from bolting. She burst into tears, and when she spoke her utterance was broken.

"It's not fair," she sobbed. "I've been ill—I had an accident—I want to go—to my mother. I've—done nothing, I haven't."

Winter's pencil halted a moment.

"You know that Mr. Lanson was stabbed fatally last night?" he said.

"Yu-yes. I sus-sus-saw something in the library."

"Yet you went straight to the turret and signalled to Victor Denasch in the town?"

"I didn't think I was dud-dud-doing anything wrong."

"You know now, at any rate, yet you try to force your way out of the Castle against Doctor Macgregor's orders, because you are supposed to be ill, and against my orders, when I am trying to find Mr. Lanson's murderer. However——" and the pencil hurried on.

"For goodness' sake don't arrest me," pleaded the girl, whose changed aspect began to justify the doctor's diagnosis. "I—I'll tell you the truth. Indeed I will. I was going to my mother, but I don't deny I meant seeing Mr. Denasch, if possible."

Winter looked at her doubtfully. He consulted Furneaux.

"What do you think?" he said. "Shall we question her now, or let her make her own statement, if she thinks fit, after a night in the lock-up?"

"The doctor says she's ill," pronounced Furneaux judicially. "She really ought to be in her room. Didn't the nurse warn you?" and his black eyes pierced the quavering Alice.

"Yes. But—I felt well enough—to get up," she stammered.

He shook his head disapprovingly.

"You're behaving badly," he said. "You might give her a last chance, Chief," he went on. "She *may* have some sort of a plausible story, and it'll ruin her character if she's arrested."

Winter hesitated. He completed a half-written word.

"Very well," he said, as though yielding in defiance of his better judgment. "Come into the morning-room. I'll question you there."

"By gum, sir," said one of the policemen to Glen as Alice walked off with the detectives, "those fellows mean what they say."

"Of course they do. What are they here for?"

But Glen, pretending to be absorbed in examining a batch of telegrams which were then handed in from the main gate, knew better. He had just seen not one cat, but two, playing with a mouse.

Though Winter was good as his word in leaving any display of psycho-analysis to a past-master in the art, it was due to Furneaux that one who had complete knowledge of the previous night's happenings should tackle a probably reluctant witness first. A young woman of the Alice Romer type would be quick to take advantage of any obvious slip.

He motioned her to a chair, and seated himself opposite. Furneaux lounged against a table between them.

"Now, tell us, in your own words, what took place last night," began the Chief, adopting a more friendly tone.

"Do you mean, sir, after I came upstairs?"

"You can begin where you like."

At that Alice Romer seemed to regain a degree of confidence. She took thought before she answered. She even stooped to arrange her skirt neatly over her ankles, which were slender and well shaped. Her stockings were silk and her shoes of good quality. Her black dress was in perfect taste and well made.

"I came out of the servants' hall at the moment Mr. Pinkney appeared with Mr. Lanson's hot milk," she said. "He was a few feet ahead of me, so I couldn't help seeing him thrown down the stairs by the man who rushed out of the library."

"What man?"

"The man who wore a mask, and is supposed to have killed Mr. Lanson."

"All right. Go on."

"I was alarmed, of course, especially when I saw the man run across the half-landing and bolt up the other stairs."

"Why 'especially'?"

"Because I was going there myself after looking into the drawing-room to see if Miss Irene had left a wrap or a handbag there. She's forgetful, so I generally give a glance around the last thing before going to her room. Naturally I didn't enter the drawing-room last night. You see, Mr. Pinkney and the other men soon found out about Mr. Lanson, and Miss Irene was still there—in the drawing-room, I

mean—with Miss Temple and Mr. Davidson and Mr. Trevor. I was that frightened I hurried straight to Miss Irene's room, and waited there for her, but she didn't come. Then, a few minutes before eleven, remembering my promise to Mr. Denasch that I would give him the first news of anything really important which took place here, I plucked up courage enough to climb the turret stairs and signal to him. I got no reply, but the place was awful lonely, so I didn't dare wait. I had just placed the torch on a table so that I might close the south window, when I heard the ghost——"

"You heard what?"

Winter was undeniably surprised, and his sharp question startled the girl into more animation than she had displayed since entering the room.

"I did, really!" she protested, gazing affrightedly from the one man to the other. "It groaned and clanked its chains, so I raced off like a mad thing, not stopping even to grab the torch, as there was sufficient light to see the head of the stairs. I was more than half-way down when I slipped, and I knew no more till I found Dr. Macgregor slapping me for screaming. I was in bed then, and had a bad go of hysterics, I suppose. Can you wonder at it?"

"No, indeed," agreed Winter, glancing at Furneaux, whose opportunity had come now beyond cavil.

"This intrusion of a ghost, at such a moment, is most interesting," said the little man, giving the girl one of his most amiable grins. "I've never seen a ghost, but I believe in them most firmly. What sort of ghost was it—ancient or modern?"

"I saw no ghost, sir—I only heard it."

"Then how did you know it was a ghost?"

"There has always been talk of something that

walked in that part of the Castle. It's supposed to be a monk. Miss Irene says she knows his name. He was Abbot Gervaise, and was stabbed here during the Reformation. He lived in the White Friars."

"One can understand his groans. But why chains? One does not chain an abbot."

"That's what frightened me—the awful groans and the rattling of a chain."

"But you had been greatly alarmed already by a dreadful murder. You were in a state to imagine a groaning abbot, even a bellowing archbishop."

Alice Romer smiled at that.

"No," she said. "It sounds rather cold-blooded, I admit, but at that moment I was really thinking more of letting Mr. Denasch see that I wanted him."

"You actually thought he would come to the Castle at that late hour?"

"Well, sir, I knew the place would be in an uproar; nobody would go to bed for long enough."

"Why, then, did you signal him at half-past ten?"

The question was wholly unexpected. For a moment the girl wavered between admission and denial. But Furneaux's direct gaze, plus an air of complete knowledge, was too compelling.

"I flashed a light at half-past ten to say that all was quiet. As I got no answer, and so much had happened in between, I tried again at eleven."

"But was not that your working arrangement? If he didn't reply the first time you were to make a second effort?"

"Something of the sort, sir."

"What was it that Mr. Denasch was so keen to be kept informed about?"

"Just family affairs, sir. Whether things were going on as usual or not."

"Family affairs? Do you mean that Miss Lanson confided in you?"

"She often talked in confidence, sir. She had no one else."

"Concerning her engagement to Mr. Sevastopolo, for instance?"

Alice Romer opened her eyes widely at that, but she tried to avoid a direct reply.

"Any young woman, no matter how rich she may be, likes to discuss things with another woman," she hazarded.

"Didn't she trust Miss Temple, her companion, and one in her own position in society?"

"Miss Temple disliked Mr. Sevastopolo. Anyone could see it. We all thought——"

"Yes, tell me what you all thought."

"That he really wanted to make up to her first. There, I've said it, but you wormed it out of me."

"You are speaking now of a year ago or more?"

"About that."

"Did Miss Lanson share the general opinion?"

"I think not. I never told her."

"It does not matter greatly. What does matter is your rather extraordinary agreement with Mr. Denasch. When did you meet him first?"

"Four months ago — in London — during the season."

"Were you introduced to him, so to speak?"

"He called to see Mr. Sevastopolo, and met Miss Lanson at that time. Her father was in Paris for a fortnight. Then, one day, I was walking in Hyde Park——"

"Exactly. You two have been good friends ever since. Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Yes."

Most girls, called on to answer such a point-blank question, dealing with the most momentous event in their lives, would have blushed and simpered a little. Not so Alice Romer. She was in deadly earnest.

"Have you accepted him?"

"Yes."

"Has he said anything about a probable date?"

"Yes. He has told me again and again that we would get married as soon as he carried through some big business deal with Mr. Lanson."

"Is Miss Lanson aware of your love affair?"

"No. If I said a word about it everything might go to smash—the business, I mean."

"Now that Mr. Lanson is dead, do you think Denasch will keep his promise?"

"I—I hope so."

"Are you sure this man is free to marry you?"

"What's that?"

"Suppose he has misled you? Suppose he is married already?"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't tell me that!"

The blood fled from her cheeks and left her so wan and woe-begone that Furneaux was moved to pity.

"You had better know the truth," he said gently. "The position is not quite desperate, if you are so set on ruining your life as to want to marry a thorough-paced rascal like Victor Denasch. He *is* married, but his Austrian wife is taking divorce proceedings in Vienna, and will soon be free of him. I wish *you* were."

Alice Romer began to cry, but Furneaux could not

spare her on that account; psycho-analysis is soul-searching work at the best.

"You are safer in our hands than in Denasch's," he said soothingly. "If you insist on his giving you a wedding ring we may be able to help. But we want the truth, and the whole truth. Who was the masked man who ran out of the library when Mr. Pinkney opened the door last night?"

"I don't know! I don't know! I had nothing to do with it!"

"But you do know something. What is it? Who sent him there? Who contrived that he should be hidden in the Castle?"

"I—I can't tell. Things were going on which I didn't understand."

"What things?"

"Everybody was acting queerly—Miss Irene, Mr. Davidson, Miss Temple — even Mr. Lanson himself."

"But who was it who connived at the presence in the library of the man who stabbed your master?"

"If I knew I would tell you. I swear it."

"Then let us hear of the queer things 'everybody' was doing. Begin with Miss Lanson."

"Well, she was backing Mr. Sevastopolo through thick and thin. She said her father misunderstood him—that he was a—what was it?—an idealist, and not a money grubber. And she could never forget that she was a Greek. To hear her talk there's no one like the Greeks."

"True enough, in many respects. But did she do or say anything which could have even the remotest bearing on her father's murder?"

"Oh, no, sir. She thought the world of him."

"I have not made myself clear. Quite innocent

people often bring about unforeseen and serious results by carelessness or sheer ignorance. Looking back from the standpoint of your present knowledge, does any action of Miss Lanson's strike you as unguarded or risky where Mr. Lanson's safety was at stake?"

"Well, sir, one couldn't live here long without realising that no one was allowed to be in the library unless Mr. Lanson or one of his secretaries was there. For some reason Miss Irene broke that rule. She went in at eleven o'clock the night before last, and at the same time the night before that again."

"How do *you* know?"

"I waited in her room. If Bates saw anything I was to make it right with him."

"Did she tell you why she went there?"

"To look at some books, she said."

"Did you believe that?"

"It was no business of mine, sir."

"But it was. You had a code to signal Denasch, remember. When did you receive it? Where is it now?"

A stubborn expression flitted like a shadow across the girl's eyes. She was realising that her tongue was running away with her. Furneaux, warned instantly, saw that he must break new ground even before she answered demurely:

"That was entirely a private arrangement between him and me."

"Well," agreed the detective, without any hesitation, "it is not so very remarkable that a young lady should wish to enter the library in her own home at any hour of the night. . . . Now, as to Mr. Davidson. What did you notice in his conduct that was queer, as you put it?"

"He has not been himself for a long time past.

He seemed to be always watching for things to happen. But, for that matter, so did Miss Temple. She avoided him. She'd make any excuse so as not to be left alone with him."

"But surely any woman knows what that means?"

"Oh, I'm not thinking of love-making. Anyone could see that Mr. Glen and Miss Temple were pairing off."

"But Miss Lanson didn't see it?"

"No, perhaps not."

"Didn't you hint at it in one of your confidential chats?"

"No. I—— No."

"In fact, Denasch warned you not to do it."

Alice was astounded by this divination, which was actually a sheer guess on Furneaux's part.

"How can you possibly know that?" she fluttered.

"It's almost obvious. You were completely under his domination. But—I ask out of mere curiosity—what reason did he give for requesting your silence on such a simple development?"

"Well, he said that Miss Irene was highly something or other——"

"Temperamental."

"Yes, that's the word. You're rather marvellous, aren't you? His belief was that although Miss Irene was so gone on Sevastopolo she wouldn't fancy the notion that she hadn't a chance with her good-looking cousin if she wanted him ever so, and it might have led to a quarrel between her and Miss Temple."

"Capital! Your friend understands the feminine complex. I mean——"

"Oh, I know what you mean all right," broke in the girl bitterly. "He can make a fool of any woman.

Sevastopolo wouldn't have had a look in if Victor got hold of Miss Irene first."

"Um—yes. But let it pass. He did get hold of her, you know?"

"What?"

For some reason the colour ebbed from her face again, but her lips set firmly.

"He has been in communication with her many times of late."

"Not that I know of."

"Is that the absolute truth?"

"Yes."

Both Winter and Furneaux were convinced that the witness was beginning to feel more confident, and was now diverging from the strictly veracious path she had followed thus far. But there could be no gain in alarming her. The vitally important thing was that she should keep on talking.

"Let us go back to the turret," smiled Furneaux. "There we have solid facts—flashes of light and a groaning, chain-rattling ghost. On how many occasions have you signalled Denasch?"

"Last night was the first time."

"Are you sure? Come now, why try and humbug me?"

"I'm not, sir. That's the real truth."

"But how odd! How dangerously, terribly odd! You signal this man twice, at half-past ten and eleven o'clock, and Mr. Lanson is murdered between those very hours!"

Alice began to cry again, with heavy gulps.

"Indeed, sir," she wailed, "that had nothing at all to do with it. Victor sent me the torch only yesterday afternoon. He couldn't get one powerful enough in Sleaford, so he went to Sheffield for it."

"Did he send you an engagement ring at the same time?" put in Winter.

Astonishment stopped the flow of tears. The girl's voice rose to a defiant pitch.

"You seem to know everything between you," she vowed. "He did. Here it is. Of course, I can't wear it in the Castle."

She opened a purse, and produced a very handsome half hoop of diamonds.

"Splendid!" chuckled Furneaux. "That cost a lot of money, without a doubt. Did you try it on while waiting for Miss Lanson to come to her room last night?"

Positive amazement shone in the glistening blue eyes this time.

"Victor isn't the only man living who knows a lot about women," she declared breathlessly.

"I could never afford to give any girl a ring like that," sighed Furneaux. "If I had——" He checked the imminent comment and dropped his voice artistically. "If I had," he went on, "I would not now be a wizened old bachelor. But I don't want to pry too closely into your love affairs. Let us deal with Mr. Lanson. Can you recall any recent action of his which was unusual?"

"He was suspicious, and watching. One 'ud almost think he'd had a warning."

"Do you mean a threatening letter?"

"It's not for me to say, sir. He took to going out alone and meeting people."

"Ah!" said Winter. "What sort of people?"

"I don't know, sir. I only heard from one of the chauffeurs that the master would drive out somewhere in the country, leave the car for an hour and come back, looking worried all the time."

"Did you tell this to Denasch?"

"Well, I may have mentioned it to him."

"How could you regard it as quite fair to your employers that you should discuss their comings and goings with a total stranger like this man?"

"But he wasn't quite that, sir."

"To put it plainly," insinuated Furneaux in a matter-of-fact tone, "you were encouraged by Miss Lanson to keep Denasch posted in matters generally?"

"I didn't say that," she cried with manifest unease. "Somehow I felt that Victor was working for my mistress, and not against her, and I tried to help—that is all."

"Was he greatly interested when he heard of Mr. Lanson's secret excursions, shall we call them?"

"No. He just laughed, and said Mr. Lanson wasn't so old that he wouldn't have an eye for a pretty girl now and then."

"Did *you* believe that?"

"Hardly; but men are funny, you know."

"It may assist in clearing your mind of any doubt in that respect if I tell you that three times during the past eight days Mr. Lanson kept private appointments with me in the country," said Winter.

"Have you been here all that time, sir?"

"Yes. Whereabouts were you in the habit of meeting Denasch?"

"In my mother's cottage, in South Street."

"Oh! Is *that* the explanation? Singular how fate can spin her web to ensnare a man's feet. The woman who lives there is not named Romer."

"No, sir. My father died years ago, and my stepfather, Thomas Jefferson, was killed during the war."

"I see. Well, now, Alice—a plain answer to a plain question. Do you want even to appear as though you were sheltering Mr. Lanson's murderer?"

"Lord ha' mercy on us, sir, how could I?"

"You might do so unknowingly. Suppose it turns out that Victor Denasch were concerned in the crime?"

"But he wasn't, sir."

"Come, now, you're a highly intelligent young woman. I asked you to suppose it. If it were so, would you shield him?"

"Never, sir. Bad as things would be, I'd never forgive myself for that."

"In that case I'll send a policeman to pass you through the main gate. You can see your man. But let me advise you strongly not to say too much. You were insensible last night, you know, and he has been told already that we are aware of the identity of the person who signalled him from the turret window. Don't do anything foolish, such as running away, or that sort of thing. In return for your help now we will undertake to warn you when his wife obtains her divorce. Mr. Furneaux has promised to go a little farther, and assist you in bringing Denasch to the church or the registrar's office. Mind you, I'm not asking you to betray or be false to him. But if you have a spark of wisdom in that pretty head of yours, you'll cease acting as his agent within these walls. For one thing, it will be useless. For another, you may land yourself in prison. Between here and the Crown Hotel think carefully over what I have said. What time do you plan returning?"

"I'm free till half-past four, sir."

Neither of the men took advantage of her slip. It was for the mistress, not for the maid, to

explain these strangely confidential relations with Denasch. They stood in the glass veranda, and watched the girl and her escort traversing the court.

"What about it?" muttered Winter moodily.

"No use in arresting Denasch yet," said Furneaux. "Give that baby rope enough and he'll hang himself."

"He won't bolt?"

"Not he. He can't afford to. Bet you a new hat he'll be at the Castle to interview Sevastopolo before the day is out."

"Buy your own new hats!" hissed Winter. "What you need most is a new head."

"Don't get me mad!" squeaked Furneaux. "I pray thee, friend, don't rile me, or I'll apply for a warrant against the only man whose name hasn't cropped up yet—Trevor, the American secretary."

A footman informed Winter that he was wanted on the telephone. The Chief went to the booth, so was just missed by Davidson, who hurried down the stairs from the library. In reply to his inquiry Furneaux indicated Winter's whereabouts.

"I cannot wait," whispered Davidson, whose manner revealed suppressed excitement. "No one else knows yet, and I may be able to keep back the discovery, so to speak, till you gentlemen decide how best to deal with it. A week ago Mr. Lanson received a package of notes from his London bank, half in English currency and half in American, and the total sum was ten thousand pounds. He did not tell me a word about it, and there is no trace of the money either in his desk or in the safe where household cash is kept."

"All right!" said Furneaux. "Now, at any rate, we have one definite reason why he was killed! There may be others!"

CHAPTER XI

Some Peeps into the Unknown

Winter was not detained long at the telephone. He seemed to have cheered up considerably in the interval, but his aspect did not deceive Furneaux in the least. It was the big man's happiest characteristic that when his shoulders ought to bow beneath the weight of responsibility his demeanour became positively jaunty.

"The pot is beginning to boil, Froggie," he said. "The call was from the Foreign Office, which is quite excited. They believe there that the expulsion of the King and the murder of Lanson were part and parcel of the same plan."

"The Foreign Office is always notorious for its faulty information when it wants to get certain doubtful issues cleared up," snapped Furneaux. "Those lads don't play the game. They hear all and say nothing."

"But they've said a mouthful this time. They're convinced that Sevastopolo is the head and front of the offending, and will be glad if we can secure evidence enough to clap him into jail."

"So as to make easy the diplomats' job in Athens. They ought to have told you weeks ago who Sevastopolo's associates were. Whom was he backing? Who was backing him? There are men in Greece and

Germany to-day who could lay bare the whole scheme. I'll bet you—but never mind—you're off hats just now. Mark my words—we're following all sorts of trails, but have not hit on the right one yet."

"You're growing trite, Charles. Let's go and muse in the turret. I want to know more about that ghost."

"Ghosts never walk by daylight. Davidson popped out from the library a minute ago with a bit of real news. Whoever killed Lanson also robbed him of ten thousand pounds!"

The Chief had hardly time to master the details of this new phase before the library door opened and Mr. Hassall and the three secretaries appeared.

"I want you to keep this key for the time being, Mr. Winter," said the lawyer. "We're adjourning for lunch, which, Mr. Davidson tells me, is ready. Won't you two join us? We can soon get rid of the servants. . . . Mr. Glen, are you coming?"

Glen, from the other side of the hall, said he had only just finished breakfast and was on duty. Winter merely nodded and walked with the others along the right-hand corridor on the ground floor. Here the windows of a spacious dining-room opened out on to a beautiful English garden. Its flower-beds and parterres covered a full acre, and the grimness of the Castle walls was hidden by the trained branches of fruit-bearing trees. The weather was still gloriously fine—an English September at its best—so at that hour, nearly two o'clock, the solitary shadow cast over the glowing prospect was that of the two-storied library; it ran in a clean-cut line at a right-angle from the centre one of three windows.

Mr. Hassall sat in the chair which the man now lying dead upstairs had occupied the previous day.

"Age has its tasks as well as its privileges," he said sadly, as he noted the place to which the butler ushered him. "At any rate, Mr. Pinkney, let us have no vacant chairs. Mr. Glen is engaged, and I take it the ladies do not wish to appear?"

"No, sir. Miss Temple rang a few minutes since for a light meal to be served in Miss Lanson's room."

As it was impracticable to discuss at once the tragic business which brought those six men together at a well-spread table in Sleaford Castle, the conversation took a general turn. When the two detectives declined soup and cutlets Mr. Hassall showed his concern.

"Why is neither of you eating?" he asked. "Mr. Furneaux, perhaps, does not require much sustenance, but you, Mr. Winter——"

The Chief explained smilingly that he had breakfasted late. Furneaux asked for a cup of tea and some thin bread and butter.

"I have often envied those Indian mystics who exist all their lives on a few grains of rice and a small lotah of water daily," he said. "They spend their time pondering the eternal verities. Some have been known to pass forty years in solitary contemplation and die without uttering a word."

"Rather a fierce effort, wasn't it?" said Trevor.

"Tremendous. Think what they *could* have said."

"You'll never die like that," smiled Winter. "Your last dying speech and confession will be: 'I knew it all the time, but that fat oaf, Winter, would not believe me.'"

"If it's a fair question, Mr. Furneaux, what is it that mainly excites Mr. Winter's incredulity?" This from Trevor, who was now becoming acquainted for the first time with the little man's queer turn of speech.

"The fact, which he disputes, that all recorded history is untrue."

"That's a stiff proposition, I'll allow."

"And one peculiarly calculated to get the goat of any honest-to-God American."

"I'm it. Where do I get off?"

"Nowhere. Like my magnificently proportioned Chief, you are classed as a respectable citizen, one who has a profound reverence for Magna Carta and the American Declaration of Independence—two parchments he has never read. Believe me, as you say in New York, kingdoms and republics are not founded by documents signed and sealed. Do you doubt? When did Napoleon first dream of an empire? How did Diaz become perpetual President of Mexico? What is the man doing to-day who in ten years' time will rule Russia? We have an even more immediate instance to hand. Mr. Sevastopolo will tell you that the King of the Hellenes was chucked out bag and baggage this morning, yet who in this room can name his successor?"

Sevastopolo paused in the dissection of a cutlet. Three men present showed their surprise, and Winter tried to look mildly interested.

"You are modest," said the Greek after a slight pause. "It would be more exact to say that you and I shared a well-grounded anticipation."

"It is not the crude facts of history that I cavil at," went on Furneaux. "A king goes off the map, a president dies, or worse, dreams of a Third Term. Where is the next king or president coming from? There's the rub. How is he born politically? When he appears, and the trumpets blow, biographers write reams tracing his rise to eminence. Rubbish, all of it! You might as well try to explain how a curly-headed infant becomes a pirate."

Mr. Hassall, senior partner in a leading firm of London solicitors, had met Furneaux before in connection with the sensational disappearance and death of the wife of a well-known baronet. He sensed now that the eccentric Jersey man was not talking merely for effect.

"It might assist," he said, "if you would tell us how an eminent detective blossoms into a philosopher."

"Oh, I mean to write my 'Recollections' some day," chirped Furneaux. "When that happens, and the book appears in its unexpurgated form, my publisher and I will spend the rest of our days in prison, but drawing fabulous revenues from the sale."

"You'd have a mighty good time for a few months out of the serial rights," said Trevor, who was beginning to enjoy what he regarded as Furneaux's morbid humour.

"You certainly have succeeded in interesting your present audience," put in Davidson.

"So I perceive," replied Furneaux, grinning cheerfully. He, too, was aware that one of the footmen waiting at table was more intent on his words than on passing dishes. "Thus far, however, I have said nothing that has what journalists call 'a news value.' For instance, the deposition of the Greek King is being placarded by every evening newspaper in the land."

"Is that actually the case?" demanded Sevastopolo.

"Yes. So we hear by telephone from London. I suppose, from some points of view, you might be inclined now to deem the event rather premature?"

"No. Anyone aware of the internal condition of Greece must have known it was inevitable."

"What was his glaring defect?" put in the lawyer.

"His line has not proved fortunate for my country."

"His chief drawback seems to have been shortness of cash," said Furneaux. "He expected the Greeks to pay him. They want a king who will pay them, or some of them, at any rate. It may sound absurd, but I'm sure I could mount the throne of Hellas within the month if I had command of a few millions sterling."

"You have a low opinion of my fellow-countrymen, I fear," said Sevastopolo, almost heatedly.

"On the contrary, I admire them. I think mine is a splendid idea. I have always shuddered at that arbitrary question: 'Under which King, Bezonian? Speak or die!' I'd far rather have some decent fellow come along and say, 'Furneaux, my boy, I want to be king. Here's a million drachmas for you.' I call that the purest form of graft."

A servant came in with Furneaux's tray, and Mr. Hassall caught the butler's eye, whereupon Mr. Pinkney withdrew with his assistants. The lawyer waited a few seconds to give the Greek a chance of replying if he thought fit, but Sevastopolo knew he was being baited, so took a cigarette and lighted it. Apparently he regarded this banter as not in good taste. So Mr. Hassall asked the others to draw their chairs closer.

"Now for business," he said briskly. "We have only a few minutes to spare. The inquest is timed to open at three o'clock."

Furneaux happened to be the farthest away. He rose, cup in hand, and took the opportunity to glance into the garden. With all his pretence of exercising an almost superhuman omniscience, he would admit in his candid moments that luck plays the chief part in the detection of crime, and events instantly proved

the truth of the axiom. He was merely admiring the colour scheme of an oval flower-bed when a rapidly-moving shadow hovered for a second beyond the straight outline of the library. Someone was out there on the roof, and he believed it was a woman!

"Pardon me," he said. "There is something I must attend to before the inquest. Besides, my Chief will tell you that my presence at such conclaves is only a hindrance. I simply cannot keep to the point." And he hurried out.

"A remarkable little man," said Mr. Hassall. "One is apt to appraise him wrongly at first, but——"

"He certainly does interrupt any serious conversation," broke in Winter. "I would suggest that the line to be followed at the inquest should be distinctly non-committal. Indeed, if the coroner is agreeable, I would like a verdict to-day. 'Murder by some person or persons unknown.' Why wait? It may be the same finding in a week or a fortnight."

"You surprise me," cried the lawyer, obviously meaning what he said. "Do you tell me there is a prospect of days and even weeks elapsing before this mystery is solved?"

"That is my opinion," said Winter firmly.

"But why? The crime would be an almost incredible one if it were not unhappily an accomplished fact, but it does seem to me that some unerring clue to the murderer must soon be discovered."

"I say it with all reserve, Mr. Hassall, but Mr. Lanson's death is connected with the dynastic upheaval in Greece——"

"Nonsense!" vowed Sevastopolo, in a voice shrill with sudden anger. "You must forgive me, but that is sheer rubbish! Get that idea out of your head, or it will obsess you and cloud your judgment. I know why it appeals. It is no secret that Mr.

Lanson and I fell out because I tried to persuade him to finance a reform party in Athens. We were arguing strenuously about it only a few minutes before he was killed. Miss Lanson was aware of the dispute, which was nothing more nor less than a divergence in view between two men thoroughly acquainted with the disastrous condition of Greece, each being anxious to mend it, but by methods varying widely. You, Davidson, and you, Trevor, though not directly concerned, can bear me out in this. No other human being in this Castle had any inkling of the matter. I did not murder my employer, for I was in London. You don't suspect his daughter, I suppose? It is equally absurd to mention Davidson and Trevor in that respect. Who, then, known to any or all of us, could have such an overwhelming interest in Greek affairs that he thought he could help one party or the other, or one of six contending parties, in Athens by killing Mr. Lanson in Sleaford?"

"If I knew, Mr. Sevastopolo, I would have these on his wrists within ten seconds," said Winter, producing a pair of handcuffs from a pocket.

It was a melodramatic action, singularly unlike the well-ordered, common-sense methods for which the Chief was noted. Furneaux, when he heard of the incident afterwards, likened it to the trick by which a conjuror extracts a live rabbit out of a borrowed hat. But Winter was not to be bounced by any Greek, even a Spartan.

"Sorry if I startled you," he went on, seeing that his critic's olive-tinted complexion had assumed the greenish-yellow pallor with which Furneaux was familiar already. "If I am mistaken, my error is shared in high quarters. But let us rule out politics. To find a motive we are driven back on three prime

causes of crime—jealousy, arising from sexual passion, revenge, and common theft. Robbery with violence accounts for by far the largest percentage of murders. The *crime passionel* ranks next. Killing for mere revenge is rare, though, in Mr. Lanson's case, he must have made many enemies by his phenomenal success in finance. Now, his life was exemplary in its placid orderliness, so sexual jealousy goes out of the count. Revenge and theft are possible alternatives. Which do you favour?"

"If you force a decision—theft," and Sevastopolo grew calmer.

"Very well. Let us review the known facts. A tall, strongly-built man, by means not yet explained, hid himself in the library not later than a quarter to nine, because at that hour Mr. Lanson returned there after dining with his household. The murderer was there while Mr. Glen quarrelled with his uncle, as we may describe Mr. Lanson. He was there, too, while you and Mr. Lanson had what you term a 'strenuous argument' over the telephone. Soon afterwards he struck. But why not after Mr. Glen had gone out? He was far more likely to escape unseen, or at any rate unnoticed. Surely you see how one's theorising works round to the dynastic dispute? Waiving that for the moment, we come to the appearance on the scene of the butler, carrying the nightly ration of hot milk. The murderer is ready for Mr. Pinkney. He even retains his mask, the very sight of which gives away his purpose. He is seen by five men and one woman, all of whom are so well acquainted with the lawful inhabitants of the Castle that no mere face-mask could provide a disguise which none among them could pierce. They all declare the man was a complete stranger. I believe them. He was a stranger to them. Yet he knew the Castle and its ways so

intimately that he not only gained an entry into the one room remarkably well protected from unwarranted visitors, but was able to vanish as though into thin air. And he must still be in the building, unless I have overlooked some means of getting out of it not ascertainable by the ordinary eye. I might suggest that the criminal was no mortal man, but the complaining ghost which walks here at midnight, I am told. If I did that, however, you might be tempted once more to say I was talking nonsense."

"I hope you will forget that," was the humble answer. "It was a stupid comment, and I apologise for it. My excuse is my exasperation at the mad fantasy which assumes that Mr. Lanson's untimely death could possibly benefit the cause of any political party in Greece."

"Think again, Mr. Sevastopolo," said Winter, rising. "It might not suit your purposes, or your friends', or those of some of your enemies, if you have any. But there may easily be some people on the map who think they will gain by the removal of a great financier who had Greek sympathies and, it may be, plans for Greek regeneration. But we must all meet again after the inquest. It is time now we gathered in the hall."

Owing to the excitement, no one seemed to notice that Furneaux had not returned. Sevastopolo, however, looked for him among a small group of men standing at the foot of the stairs. The doctor was there, and Superintendent Wood, and a lawyer-like person who must be the coroner, together with half a dozen jurors selected from prominent townsfolk. But Furneaux was not visible. The Greek wondered what had become of him. He feared Furneaux. In his heart of hearts—to misquote Shakespeare—he realised that the little detective peered into the secret places

of men's minds—and women's, too, it might be—and the belief was disturbing.

When Furneaux quitted the dining-room he hurried to the hall, and summoned Glen by a hooked finger.

"Tell me," he muttered in a low tone, "how I can reach the roof of the library."

"You mean the outside of it?"

"Yes, the roof, not the ceiling."

"It's a trifle hard to explain. I'll save time by showing you."

Glen rushed him to the lift, which was of the self-acting type, and ran him up to the second storey. Then, at the back of a small service room, he pointed to a door.

"By Jove!" he cried, "someone is outside. That door is always kept locked and bolted. My uncle used to insist that if people wanted to admire the view they must either go to the turret or the walls. The parapets on the rest of the Castle are very low, and one might fall over easily."

"Thanks. Will you leave me now? I wish to be alone."

"But——"

"Don't worry! I'll travel faster than a champion sprinter if I see a big fellow wearing a mask. Ten to one he's armed like a Sicilian brigand."

Glen obeyed. Still, he thought fit to remain within call, though, when the detective closed the door, he did not open it again, but lighted a cigarette, and waited, and listened.

Furneaux found himself on a broad leaden sheet, sloping slightly from the centre to get rid of rain, which covered the two wings and the ends of the oblong formed by the main building. To the south rose the turret, that strangely-shaped stone shaft

with its deep crevices and round windows, the latter being some thirty feet above the roof.

The library, some eight feet higher than the general level, was accessible by a stout wooden ladder, with wide steps and protecting rail. A glance showed that the remaining expanse held no other human being, so he hastened to the ladder, climbing noiselessly, and halting the instant his eyes could sweep this new vista.

He had not erred. Standing in the centre of this smaller but wider carpet of lead was Irene Lanson, with hands outstretched toward the ruins of White Friars. In her present position she could not be seen from any part of the walls or gate, but the town of Sleaford appeared in the middle distance of the landscape. Beyond its spires and chimneys were the walls of the dismantled Abbey, now brown and gold in the brilliant sunlight.

The girl's lips were moving, and she was speaking aloud, but in the hushed voice of one who addresses some object not discernible by mortal vision. Try as he might, Furneaux could not distinguish a word, so, knowing something of the ways of self-induced hypnosis, he went on, and approached in such manner that she must see him if in her normal senses. But she was obviously in a trance, a mental absorption which did not affect her physical faculties, because she turned and looked at him and cried, in a flute-like voice tuned to an altogether different key from that of her ordinary rather crisp and strongly accentuated utterance :

"Do you not hear, Brother Ranulphus? They are calling, calling!"

"Who are calling?" said Furneaux.

"He who designed it, and he who made it, and he whose tomb it became. But they are all dead—

their flesh is dust and their bones withered. I see them as in a cloud. I hear their voices as raindrops falling in a great sea."

"And they are saying?"

"Ah, something strange and woeful, but I, who am finite and material, cannot yet understand the spiritual and ethereal."

Furneaux crept closer. He wanted to scrutinise her face.

"Are they near?" he asked.

"Many are there beneath the tumbled stones and the grassy mounds. One is here, close at hand."

"Can you not tell me what *he* says. Strain your ears. You may catch a word."

She seemed to listen intently. Her expression was rapt, her body rigid for the moment. The pupils of her eyes were dilating and contracting in a manner that would be painful for any ordinary man to witness. But Furneaux was not an ordinary man. His tiny frame contained a human dynamo which vibrated energy from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He recked nothing of the absurdity of his present situation. Here was an ultra-modern detective —to whom the wonders of wireless telegraphy and the subtleties of that much-debated pseudo-science, psycho-analysis, alike offered means of crime investigation— bent on catching the slightest hint of meaning in the rambling words of a distraught girl. His sane intelligence would, of course, reject any such nebulous mouthings as unworthy of the name of evidence. But he did not refuse their aid. They might stimulate thought, throw light on hidden but none the less active influences, bring him face to face with actualities through the barrier of negation which yet shrouded every side of the mystery enfolding Charles Lanson's death. He would no sooner refuse to recognise the

possibilities of Irene Lanson's hypnotic obsession because of a supposed abnormality than a hound would ignore the scent of game because the huntsman's organs of smell could not assimilate it.

After a strained silence the girl spoke again.

"Yes," she almost whispered. "I hear! I hear!"

"Repeat the words!"

"He says—that men—have never known his fate. He sinned—as others have sinned—but he did not deserve—Ah, kind Heaven! It is the gaping jaws of a skeleton which utter these terrible things!"

She cowered, hid her face in her hands, staggered forward limply, and sank to her knees. But Furneaux was in no mind to spare her. He remembered what Alice Romer had told him of her mistress's belief that she could communicate with some long-forgotten Abbot Gervaise. Poor soul! Could he, at least, not rest in peace after these four centuries? What had he to do with the Near Eastern problem which the Great War itself left unsolved?

"Listen again!" hissed Furneaux, stooping over the girl's crouched body. "What are these terrible things? How do they affect the manner of your father's death?"

She quivered as if the command had in it the quality of a lash from a whip.

"He complains," she moaned, "that even to-day his solitude is disturbed. Has he not suffered enough? Is not the tomb itself a sanctuary?"

"Where is his tomb? Ask him! He will tell you!"

There was a little pause, and the girl sighed forlornly.

"He is mumbling Latin, and I do not understand. I have caught some words—*vento meridionale aperta est.* Surely it means that something is open to the south wind?"

"But who is the man who has broken his rest?"

Again a brief interval, which ended in a piercing shriek, and Irene Lanson collapsed in a faint, or, it might be, yielded to death itself. Then Furneaux recovered his own senses. He knelt, lifted the limp head, and raised an eyelid, for she had striven to close out whatever the horrid vision was that her overwrought brain had conjured up from the realm of the unknown. She was still living, he felt sure, and a convulsive effort to breathe determined him. Laying her flat on the warm surface of the leaden floor, he ran to the door of the service room, and there found Glen.

"Good job you're here still," he wheezed, for the excitement was beginning to tell on him. "Rush for the doctor! Miss Lanson is in one of her trances. Bring him, quick, to the library roof."

Hurrying back, he was relieved by seeing that the girl's cheeks had lost the ghastly tint which had so alarmed him. He was chafing her hands and wrists when Dr. Macgregor arrived. That hardy Scot was not a nervous subject. He merely felt the patient's pulse and noted her respiration.

"She'll be sitting up in a minute or two," he announced. "Her heart is sound as a bell and, if she took a probationer's job in a busy hospital, she'd be that tired every night when she went to bed, if she got there at all, that these tantrums would soon stop. But what the devil are you two doing here? This is no place for a lady to topple over in a faint. She might have fallen into the courtyard or the east garden. And who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Furneaux, and I came from Scotland Yard, which is six hundred miles sooth of Aber-r-deen."

So Furneaux was himself again. But the doctor eyed him grimly.

"Aye," he said. "I ken weel by yer cut that yer address is the only thing Scotch aboot ye. Now, take my advice, Mr. Furneaux. If anything you have said or done is responsible for Miss Lanson's present attack, don't remain here till she revives, or there may be more trouble. Leave her to Mr. Glen and me. We'll see her safe to her rooms, inside which she ought to be locked, with day and night nurses, for the next few days."

"I'll be ganging the noo," retorted Furneaux. "But, if it will assist your diagnosis, doctor, you ought to know that Miss Lanson was here alone when I came on her, and she was already in a condition of complete hypnosis. If she goes to a hospital it should be as a patient. Scrubbing floors as a tonic for auto-catalepsy would hardly commend itself to the faculty at the Salpetrière, where Charcot raised the study of the disease to a science half a century ago."

"That little mannikin is a bit of a wasp," said the doctor to Glen as Furneaux made for the ladder. "Now, you talk to your cousin. She's nearly all right, and the very sound of your voice will reassure her."

CHAPTER XII

Dorothy Temple unburthens her Mind

Furneaux took the stairs in preference to the lift, so it chanced that he came on Dorothy Temple emerging from the corridor which contained Irene Lanson's suite and her own.

"Oh, Mr. Furneaux!" she cried at once, an air of

relief chasing away the alarmed expression clouding her charmingly patrician features. "I am so glad I have met you. Everybody else seems to be at the inquest. Have you any notion where Miss Lanson is?"

"Yes," he said. "On the upper floor. Mr. Glen is now escorting her to her room."

"Mr. Glen?"

For the life of him the little detective could not lose an opportunity of calling into being a ripple of emotion in a woman's face, and he was not disappointed now, for Dorothy Temple was in no mood to hear complacently of her lover dancing attention on the girl who had been arbitrarily allotted to him, so to speak, as his wife.

"And Dr. Macgregor, I should have added," he went on, with glib disregard of that whiff of displeasure. "Miss Lanson gave way to one of her curious seizures. I found her on the library roof, and was forced to summon help. Those two were the first people available."

For an instant the girl surveyed him with the deep-seeing eyes of candour. She wondered, probably, if it were really conceivable that this dapper little man should be trying to annoy her. But feminine curiosity conquered any feeling of pique.

"On the library roof?" she repeated. "What in the world was she doing there?"

"Holding converse with Abbot Gervaise and his contemporaries. What element of truth is there in this ghost business, Miss Temple? You, I believe, have lived here practically all your life. Have you ever heard or seen anything suggesting spooks or the supernatural?"

"The story runs through the history of the Castle for hundreds of years," was the thoughtful reply. "I

certainly have heard strange noises, but have always put them down to birds, or rats, or both."

"Very sensible on your part. What record is there of a veritable ghost, if one may so describe something which is physically impossible?"

She turned and indicated the length of the corridor with a graceful gesture.

"On a day like this," she said, "one can almost distinguish a tiny moth or blue-bottle fly which has come in through that last open window nearly sixty yards distant. But late at night, when the electric lights are out, if one saw a dark figure flitting across the end of the passage there, or, from the opposite point of view, towards the staircase, it might be rather startling. That has happened, I know. Then, in earlier years, when the place was crammed with guests for the Hunt Ball or some other festivity, the practical joker of the party would surely have heard of the groaning Abbot, and tried to mystify people in neighbouring rooms. I remember how one young officer from Leeds scared his own colonel, and we had to make up all sorts of bogey yarns next day to protect the poor boy from the consequences. We were too successful. Some of our best efforts grew into legends in the servants' hall."

"Was your groaning Abbot ever accompanied by the clanking of chains?"

"No. That is something new. Artistic verisimilitude, I suppose. But why do you ask?"

"I attach some degree of importance to this detail. Did anything you yourself ever heard suggest chain-clanking?"

"No. Why should it? Yet, by the way, Abbot Gervaise is reputedly the last of his order who wore armour and rode to battle. That may account for it. The unhappy man—so says our local historian—defied

Henry the Eighth's Commissions, and came here for protection. He was lodged in the turret, and was found there by soldiers sent by Thomas Cromwell to arrest him. Being a warrior, he resisted, it is written, and was killed, but no one ever knew where he was buried. One would have thought that such things could not happen in the Sleaford of to-day, yet here we have quite as terrible a tragedy right in our midst, without the excuse of lawless times to explain it. . . . Is this Miss Lanson and the others whom I hear coming downstairs now ? "

" I expect so."

" Then I do not wish to meet her. Are you going to the hall ? "

" Yes."

They sped down the marble staircase together and were soon out of sight of anyone remaining on the floor above. By a sort of tacit agreement, as it were, they passed out into the courtyard. Furneaux pointed to a passage opposite to that leading to the west garden.

" What lies beyond ? " he inquired.

" The tennis lawns and racquet court."

" Will you come there with me ? "

" I cannot spare many minutes."

" I shall not detain you long."

No more was said until they were clear of the buildings, with the library on their left, and the old walls in front and on the right. Here was a fine spread of turf, with every indication of daily use, though the nets were not in position, and a number of garden chairs had been stacked in a summer-house which backed on to the servants' quarters. Probably the men in charge of this section of the grounds thought it unseemly that the signs of yesterday's tennis playing should remain in evidence while their employer was lying dead.

"Why were you looking for Miss Lanson if you wanted to avoid meeting her?" was Furneaux's first question.

"I was anxious to discover her whereabouts, and acquaint someone in authority with certain facts. Then I was going to my room to finish packing."

"Do you mean that you are leaving the Castle?"

"Yes. I have no option—well, to put it bluntly—I am dismissed."

"By whom?"

"By Miss Lanson herself."

"Did you quarrel?"

"No. Not exactly, that is. I ventured to remonstrate with her, and she flew into a rage, saying she was her own mistress, also that she was tired of being dictated to. Though beggars cannot be choosers, I have my own notions of self-respect. If I must put up with contumely of any kind I prefer it should not be in the house where I was born, and have passed so many happy years. Perhaps, had I kept quiet, the storm might have blown over, but one need not be a Greek to possess nerves, and my nervous system—whatever it may be—has been tried severely by recent events. So I did ask Irene if she implied that my services were no longer required—I remember a cheeky housemaid using the same words to me one day three years ago—and she, Irene, I mean, said exactly what I said to the housemaid—that it would be better for all parties if I went. It's rather amusing in its way. Who are the 'all parties' alluded to by both of us? I suppose I had the butler and housekeeper in mind, so it is likely Irene was thinking of Sevastopolo."

Furneaux smiled. Miss Dorothy's sarcasm lost none of its effect because its shafts were not tipped with venom.

"Will you tell me what occasioned to-day's outburst on your friend's part?" he said.

"You were in the morning-room when she snapped at Mr. Winter, and then went off into one of her fits—which, by the way, I have always regarded as a form of hysteria——"

"Ah! That is illuminating. 'Self-induced hypnosis,' Doctor Macgregor calls it—quite a different thing from hysteria. Why don't you accept his definition?"

"Well, I know little about either malady, but I have seen a girl fling herself on the floor and begin screaming and kicking, and have noticed always that she stopped quickly enough when someone had the presence of mind to flick her bare skin with a wet towel. But hypnotism is an altogether different thing. A man came to Sleaford last year and gave what he called 'demonstrations in hypnotic power' in the Town Hall. He may have been a sort of quack, but he was undeniably able to render his 'subjects' proof against all ordinary sensations. Our head gardener's daughter suffered from toothache and offered herself for treatment. She was hypnotised on the platform, and a dentist drew a molar tooth with three fangs, extracting each fang separately after the upper part of the tooth was crushed. It was really quite dreadful, and several women in the audience screamed. Yet when the girl was restored to her senses she was obviously annoyed at being made an exhibition of to no purpose, and then showed an overwhelming surprise at finding the tooth gone. I'd like to watch what happened to the dentist if he tried to pull out one of Irene's back teeth while she was 'seeing' Abbot Gervaise, or any other spectre!"

"*O, la, la!*" chortled Furneaux. "You interest me immensely. You must not dream of going away

from Sleaford, Miss Temple. You and I shall hunt together."

The girl smiled too, for Furneaux's grin was highly infectious.

"Isn't it rather impossible that I should remain?" she said.

"You haven't exactly told me why yet. My fault. I interrupted you."

"Miss Lanson recovered rather quickly after I took her to her room, but on my venturing to say that she ought to leave everything in the hands of men well qualified to deal with an extraordinary situation, she hinted that the authorities were favouring Mr. Glen and thrusting Mr. Sevastopolo into the background. I passed that unheeded. A few minutes later, while we were nibbling at a meal we didn't want, Alice Romer came in, dressed for out of doors, and the two held a whispered conversation. Now, I knew that this girl in particular was not expected to visit the town without Mr. Winter's permission, so I called Irene's attention to the fact. Then the storm broke."

"I understand perfectly. By the way, the Chief and I interviewed Alice before she took her walk. Now, will it help you at all if we specifically forbid you from leaving the Castle for another week at least?"

"Help me? In what manner?"

"Supposing the unlikely thing—that Miss Lanson meant what she said—and does not pretend to forget the whole episode, but is surprised at finding you still in residence—wouldn't it ease the position if the police had peremptorily ordered you to remain?"

"Certainly it wouldn't seem then that I was acting rather brazenly."

"Capital! I'll undertake that a horrid-looking blue paper, beginning in old English script, 'Know all men

by these presents,' and issued by authority of 'His Majesty George V, by the Grace of God King of Great Britain' and the rest of it, is served on you giving warning, in the best legal jargon, that you are liable to arrest if you set your foot beyond the main gate."

Dorothy Temple was naturally a cheerful, good-tempered girl, and it cost her an effort to repress a laugh.

"I've had two summonses already," she tittered. "One was for cycling without a light and another for driving to the common danger. Mr. Wood served them himself, and was delightfully apologetic. On each occasion I was the first law-breaker to fall into traps set by the police in obedience to the Chief Constable's orders. But have pity on a poor girl's third offence, Mr. Furneaux! Honestly, I'd rather go."

Furneaux shook his head.

"It can't be done, Miss Temple. I'd collar you myself."

"But what sort of aid can *I* give? You don't realise, perhaps, that my presence here may prove a positive hindrance."

"Explain that remark, please."

She blushed and hesitated before replying.

"I suppose everyone connected with the police ought to know all that concerns this household. Mr. Glen and I are engaged."

"That blissful fact is already proclaimed from the housetops."

"Who told you—Mr. Winter or Felix?"

"Both. Indeed, Mr. Glen gloried in it. But it was no secret. The youngest boy in buttons in the Castle confided it, in strict confidence, to the butcher's boy months ago."

"Surely not."

"Let's ask him!" And Furneaux made as though he would question the first available page without delay.

"And we thought we were being so discreet," murmured the girl.

"You never spoke of it to anyone, of course. Why should you? Did not your every look, your every act, proclaim your love to all the world, except the few people in your own set from whom you tried to conceal it?"

"I wish now," she sighed, "we had been bolder. But we were in an extraordinarily difficult position. Had Mr. Lanson known——"

"You are not to begin taking any degree of responsibility for Mr. Lanson's fate," broke in Furneaux emphatically. "He himself had some premonition of it. Yes, I mean that, but you are not to ask me for an explanation at present. Now, Miss Temple, I want you to race back to your room and remove all signs of packing. I'll see to your official detention, which you need not use unless the occasion arises. Before you go, please answer a few questions. Reverting to the ghost—are its appearances or other manifestations confined to the immediate neighbourhood of the turret?"

"Yes—the noises certainly are."

"Within the turret itself?"

"It is hard to say. Personally I have never heard anything while in the round room at the top, and I have visited it at all hours, because we think we can forecast the weather from there by looking at the moors beyond the valley of the Slea. Whatever the noises may have been, one heard them in the corridor near the staircase door."

"At what time of the day have you noticed these unusual sounds?"

"After dark, invariably."

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No."

"Miss Lanson does, of course?"

"Not in the common or churchyard sort of apparition. I am perfectly certain she has conjured up her Abbot Gervaise and Brother Ranulphus, and the rest, from the pages of a local history. You see, she is curiously proud of being the owner, or daughter of the owner, of a Norman castle, if four walls and a porter's lodge may be regarded as such. She has always been nice and sympathetic to me, the dispossessed one, but does not hesitate to point out that her father paid hard cash for the place, whereas my ancestors admittedly established themselves here by brute force. My position during the past two years has had some unusual features. All the county knew me, but regarded Irene as an interloper. On the other hand, Mr. Lanson paid me handsomely, insisted on buying my frocks, and treated me as a member of the family. I understood exactly what he wanted. His daughter was to be quietly and unostentatiously assimilated by society. She is a very clever girl, well educated, and, until she fell under Sevastopolo's influence, brimful of high spirits. I saw nothing derogatory in my special job, and my own friends were only too glad that life should be made so smooth for me. Of course, I had my little difficulties——"

"I have no doubt that more than one young man was sure he had been created by Providence to share your life for fifty years of undiluted happiness?"

"Well—yes."

"You may be pleased to hear that both Mr. Winter and I approve of your ultimate choice, and we are

no bad judges of prospective husbands. Like should mate with like. And, by the same token, Irene Lanson and Ramon Sevastopolo are a well-matched pair."

"I would be happier if I could agree with you."

"You are measuring them by your own standard. Don't do that. The eyes that have gazed in childhood on the grey North Sea can never fathom the passion and fervour of the love that throbs by the shores of the blue Mediterranean. An Italian organ-grinder will put more rapture into a verse about his Margherita than was ever dreamed of by the most cultured minor poet whose verses are enshrined in a Cambridge anthology. Gee! Antonio can be fierce in his ardour. The four strings of the fiddle or the five of the banjo are not enough for him. He has to twang seven on a mandoline."

Then Dorothy laughed outright, tragedy or no tragedy.

"I had no idea that a Scotland Yard detective could be anything like you," she confessed.

"At times we are almost human. But my tongue will keep harping on that turret. How could Abbot Gervaise have been done away with there by Cromwell's ruffians when the house itself, of which the turret is so obviously a part, is Elizabethan?"

"I don't think it is, really. The proper description is Tudor."

Furneaux rapped his head with clenched knuckles.

"Any man who compiles a guide-book and puts a mistake like that into it ought to be flogged publicly in front of Hampton Court and Hatfield Hall," he cried.

"No. Your guide-book has not erred viciously. The main façade, with some of the public rooms, were built before Henry VIII came to the throne. Then

there was an interval of half a century, and the property changed hands, when the first baronet married the only daughter of a rich merchant at Bristol. The lady's money completed the castle as you now see it, so the library, or banqueting hall, as it was originally, was finished only in time to fête Queen Elizabeth during one of her royal progresses through the country."

"You are a mine of information. Changed hands, you say? What exactly does that mean?"

"The last Earl of Sleaford, direct descendant of the Norman founder, Hugh de Soresnes, fell in the Wars of the Roses. His estate was sequestrated, too. We Temples were on the winning side. Indeed, the transaction was not wholly creditable, I believe, and is not unduly emphasised in the family chronicles."

"So it is quite possible that the new owners were not well posted in the architectural secrets, if any, of the existing buildings?"

"If you are thinking of the 'hidden passage' theory, I'm afraid you must abandon it. My father went to great trouble and expense in that matter, and proved conclusively that no such passage could be constructed between the Castle and the Monastery."

Furneaux glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Turned half-past three!" he announced hurriedly. "The inquest must be nearly over. If I were you, Miss Temple, I'd take a quiet stroll in the west garden. The sundial stands in a most attractive place."

The girl looked him squarely in the eyes, smiled, and blushed.

"I do wish you were here on a less sorrowful occasion," she said. "I am sure you can be very entertaining."

But she went obediently to the west garden. Furneaux made straight for the morning-room, where the

inquest was being held. He found Glen there, seated close to the door.

"You're wanted outside," he whispered.

"What for? There's a row on here," said the artist.

"So I perceive. The smaller and more lawyer-like your coroner, the bigger nuisance he makes himself. But you hook it. Miss Temple is waiting for you near the sundial. She has lots to tell you."

Glen rose so quickly that he kicked his chair. The coroner glanced up angrily from a collection of depositions.

"Really," he cried, "these interruptions are most annoying! Why has Mr. Glen gone out again? I may need his testimony. And who is this person who has just come in?"

"I hold a pass issued by the Criminal Investigation Department and signed by the Chief Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard, London," said Furneaux, speaking with a rapidity that was almost farcical.

"What do you mean, sir, by talking in that fashion? And who are you?" demanded the coroner, roused now to fiery-eyed wrath.

"Detective-Inspector Furneaux, of the C.I.D.," was the icily distinct reply.

"You may be, but you must learn to respect the dignity of this court."

"It was not I, but Mr. Glen, who fell over the chair. He was in a hurry. His cousin, Miss Lanson, is gravely upset by the protracted nature of this inquiry. It may be difficult to restrain her from telephoning a complaint to the Home Secretary."

In a breath, as it were, Furneaux had stuck long and sharp pins into a highly pompous personage. The coroner had no wish to offend the lady paramount of Sleaford, and still less would he relish a rap over the

knuckles from the Home Office. He glared at his tormentor for an instant, but thought better of retorting. Instead, he bent over his papers, and affected to make a correction by striking out the word "the," writing it in again, and adding his initials. Then he addressed Mr. Hassall.

"Contrary to my usual practice," he said, speaking with the air of a judge in the King's Bench Division, "I have contented myself on this occasion with submitting to the jury merely formal evidence. Far be it from me to wish to place difficulties in the way of the police by probing more deeply into this lamentable affair to-day. The inquest stands adjourned until this day week, when it will be resumed at the Town Hall, Sleaford, at 3 p.m. I must request both Dr. Macgregor and Mr. Felix Glen to make such arrangements that they will then be able to give their undivided attention to the proceedings of the court."

As neither Dr. Macgregor nor Mr. Felix Glen was present, no one answered. The coroner filled in a burial certificate, and the room began to empty. Then Winter drew him aside.

"Don't be angry with my colleague, Mr. Furneaux," he said confidentially. "He's an erratic little chap, but he means well, and you may be sure that I personally will represent to the Home Office how willingly you have assisted us. This case may have extraordinary developments. Indeed, its international influence can prove so weighty that you and I, and all of us, may be ordered by the Government to close down on its details. That is the sort of thing which a Lord Chancellor does not forget. Men have figured in the Honours List before to-day for just such services to the nation."

"Ah!" said the coroner, profoundly impressed;

"you saw how quickly I recognised that a good deal of vital evidence was being withheld?"

"Why, of course! It was unfortunate that neither Mr. Hassall nor I had any chance of a confidential chat with you earlier. Let me assure you that no such lapse will occur again."

The coroner took himself off, but it was nearly four o'clock before Winter and Furneaux and the family solicitor could free themselves of the representatives of the press, who clamoured for more explicit information than was put before the jury. Winter, an old hand at the game, drew a dramatic picture of the discovery of the murdered man's body as it lay across the library table. He described the appearance of the room intimately, and was quite outspoken as to the all-night search for the assassin. In effect, he gave the reporters the "good story" they wanted, and hinted that there would be more to come if they refrained from publishing the inaccurate rumours which must reach their ears in the town.

One London correspondent, versed in the methods of Scotland Yard, staged the first awkward question.

"How was it that you were on the ground so quickly, Chief?" he inquired.

"It is one of the strangest coincidences of a crowded life," said Winter frankly. "I had taken a holiday for some partridge shooting, and was staying at the Crown Hotel here. Superintendent Wood, an old friend, sought my assistance the moment he was telephoned for by the butler. Never before, during the whole of my service, has such a thing happened. Not that it mattered a great deal," he added sadly. "I have done nothing which Mr. Wood himself could not have accomplished unaided. You know all that I know. The murderer was seen. He escaped. He

has not been found. That is the story in a nutshell."

"Is it imagined that Mr. Lanson's death has any bearing on the present position of affairs in Athens?" went on the journalist.

"You mean the departure of the King and Queen of the Hellenes this morning?"

"Yes."

"But Mr. Lanson was killed late last night, and Athens is two thousand miles distant."

"There is the telegraph."

"Neither telegram nor telephone message went from Sleaford last night bearing on the murder. I saw to that. No. I can trace no connection of the sort you hint at, and guessing is dangerous in these matters. It is nearly always mistaken."

Of course, that sort of give-and-take interviewing was part of the day's work for both men. The writer knew quite well he was putting questions which Winter would not answer, and Winter knew that he knew it. The singular fact remains that such non-committal statements make good "copy." Many heads would wag wisely next morning over what the press described as "the well-known detective's reticence." People all over the world would draw the very inferences which Winter deprecated. They would be canvassed eagerly in Hamburg and cause dismay in Athens.

At last, eight men were free to gather in the morning-room without much fear of a grave discussion being interrupted. They were the two detectives and the lawyer; Dr. Macgregor, who reported that this time he had put Miss Lanson to sleep for several hours; Superintendent Wood; and the three secretaries. Winter, who headed this conclave, looked around.

"Where is Mr. Glen?" he inquired. "Although

I made him dodge the coroner I want him here now."

Furneaux went to an open window.

"Mr. Glen!" he shouted.

"Hallo!" came a voice from among the trees.

"Rush your farewell! Mr. Winter is clamouring for your presence."

The Chief scowled at his subordinate. Some of the others were obviously puzzled. Davidson alone probably realised who it was that called for Glen's hurried leave-taking.

"Some day soon you'll be plunging the Department into hot water," snapped Winter.

"I spend most of my time in pulling you out," said Furneaux. "Look at what I did for you with the coroner! 'Blow, blow, thou wintry wind! Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude'!"

"Did Miss Lanson really complain about the inquest?"

"Didn't you hear her yourself?"

Winter sought hurriedly for a cigar. By the time he had lighted it, Glen was in the room.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Chief, "although we, the police, have no boast to make as to the success of our efforts thus far to trace Mr. Lanson's murderer, we are faced with one serious obstacle—the absence of a real authority in the Castle. Thus far I have acted with a high hand, but I certainly would like to know to whom I can look for consistent support. Won't you help us, Mr. Hassall? There is no legal reason, I suppose, why the trustees named in Mr. Lanson's will should not take charge of affairs immediately? Will you tell us who they are?"

Sevastopolo raised a hand. When he spoke, his utterance was that of the calmly deliberate man of business.

"Before Mr. Hassall answers—whether or not he gives you the information you seek, Mr. Winter—I have an announcement to make," he said. "My wife and I have decided that no good purpose will be served by withholding any longer the fact of our marriage. Miss Irene Lanson and I were married at Guildford on the 4th of July last. As her husband, I claim——"

Furneaux dispelled the general bewilderment caused by this statement by almost shrieking:

"The Fourth of July?"

"Yes," said the Greek firmly.

"But that date is fatal to kings! Man alive! Why didn't you make it the 3rd or the 5th?"

CHAPTER XIII

The Will

Furneaux's jest seemed to sting the Greek to fury. It had changed a verbal bombshell into a squib. An announcement to which he had given many hours of anxious thought, that it might achieve the maximum effect by being timed to a nicety, was robbed of its full dramatic value by a ridiculous reference to a date. He was so irritated that he ignored every other person in the room.

"I cannot understand how anyone like you can possibly represent a serious Government Department," he said, speaking with bitter emphasis. "I make a statement of grave significance, and you simply

regard it as a fit subject for displaying your crazy humour."

"But why choose that one day in the year when you had three hundred and sixty-four perfectly auspicious dates at your disposal?" persisted Furneaux.

"What do you mean? What difference did it make to my wife or myself? July 4th happened to suit our convenience."

"I should have imagined that Mrs. Sevastopolo, in particular, would be superstitious in such matters."

Mrs. Sevastopolo! The mere sound of the name was curiously significant. If the Greek were telling the truth, and many subsidiary facts leaped to the eye in ready confirmation, Irene Lanson had cut herself off from the British side of her family and was now a Greek subject. Winter alone, among the remaining listeners, grasped the true inwardness of the allusion to monarchies and their hazards. Indeed, Sevastopolo himself had passed it by in sheer wrath at his tormentor's flippancy.

Oddly enough, it was Trevor, the American, who first voiced the general amazement when Furneaux's reference to "Mrs. Sevastopolo" brought home to each hearer's critical faculties the new complexities of a problem already so difficult that it was taxing many astute minds to the limit of their capacity.

"I suppose," he said, looking fixedly at the Greek with the bright, clear eyes of the typical New Yorker, "you are telling us something we've got to believe?"

"If you allude to my marriage, yes. None but a fool would make such a statement if it were not correct."

"I never took you for a fool, Polo, but I do know

now for sure that you are a knave, a regular low-down son of a female dog."

The Greek paled, but kept his temper. He could deal far more easily with this sort of bludgeon attack than with Furneaux's subtle thrusts which, like wounds inflicted by phenomenally sharp weapons, sank deep before their extent was even feared.

"You puzzle me, Trevor," he said quietly. "Can you possibly have been an unsuspected rival?"

"No. I'm not that sort of skunk. I saw through your game, of course, but I did think you were man enough to come out into the open. You were treated here as one of the family, as we all were, but you knew perfectly well that your position and your salary were given for services rendered. Yet you took advantage of your opportunities not only to wheedle that poor girl into believing in you, but to trick her into marriage. By ——, if she were my relative, and I had you in America, I'd shoot you like the yellow cur you are!"

Trevor's cold, unemotional tone merely accentuated the force of his words. The Greek's pallor darkened to a scowl, and his eyes blazed; still he exercised a self-restraint that was remarkable in the conditions.

"This matter is beyond argument," he said, "so the expression of your crude opinions leaves me unmoved."

"I want to associate myself with every word Mr. Trevor has uttered," broke in slow-spoken Davidson.

"And I, as your distant cousin by marriage, would joyfully kick you all round the main court if I could do it without causing poor Irene further trouble," added Glen.

"Gee!" chortled Furneaux. "I wish we were all in Athens!"

Again he succeeded where direct insults failed. Sevastopolo sprang to his feet.

"I call on you, Mr. Winter, to keep your subordinate in order. If I am not wanted here——"

"But you are," said Winter sharply. "I must request Mr. Furneaux and the rest of you to attend strictly to the business in hand. Until proof is forthcoming we can accept Mr. Sevastopolo's word for his marriage. He began by claiming a prior right to authority in his wife's behalf. How far is that claim justified, Mr. Hassall?"

The lawyer appeared to be undisturbed by these few moments of tense excitement. He waited for some seconds before replying. Even then he did not answer Winter's question.

"I, like Mr. Winter, take it for granted you are legally married to my old friend's daughter, Mr. Sevastopolo," he said. "Now, it is not usual, nor do I purpose departing from the accepted practice, that testamentary dispositions should be made known until after the funeral of the testator. To-day, however, we have to deal with exceptional and tragic circumstances. I am sufficiently well acquainted with the provisions of Mr. Lanson's will to summarise them accurately. If you, representing the chief beneficiary, Irene Lanson, request me to give such details as may be needed, I see no valid reason for refusing."

A longer pause ensued. No man could say why, but each of Mr. Hassall's hearers felt that the cautious legal mind had suggested something which might create difficulties for, if it were not altogether detrimental to, the "chief beneficiary's" husband. Of course, the phrase itself revealed a good deal. Still,