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Title: The Stretton Street Affair

Author: William Le Queux

Release date: November 4, 2008 [eBook #27147]  
Most recently updated: January 4, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by D Alexander and the Online Distributed  
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# THE STRETTON STREET AFFAIR

BY

**WILLIAM LE QUEUX**

AUTHOR OF "THE DOCTOR OF PIMLICO," "THE INTRIGUERS,"  
"MADEMOISELLE OF MONTE CARLO"

**NEW YORK  
THE MACAULAY COMPANY**

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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THE DOCTOR OF PIMLICO  
THE INTRIGUERS



**“Gabrielle, my poor niece,” he  
cried. “She’s dead—dead!”**

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PROLOGUE	<a href="#">11</a>
I. INTRODUCES OSWALD DE GEX	<a href="#">20</a>
II. THE SISTER’S STORY	<a href="#">37</a>
III. WHO WAS GABRIELLE ENGLDUE?	<a href="#">48</a>
IV. FACING THE MUSIC	<a href="#">59</a>
V. THE CITY OF THE LILY	<a href="#">69</a>
VI. ANOTHER PUZZLE	<a href="#">80</a>
VII. THE MILLIONAIRE’S APPREHENSIONS	<a href="#">91</a>
VIII. LITTLE MRS. CULLERTON	<a href="#">102</a>
IX. SOME PLAIN SPEAKING	<a href="#">113</a>
X. MONSIEUR SUZOR AGAIN	<a href="#">122</a>
XI. THE ABSOLUTE FACTS	<a href="#">132</a>
XII. “RED, GREEN AND GOLD!”	<a href="#">143</a>
XIII. SOME INTERESTING REVELATIONS	<a href="#">153</a>
XIV. THE GATE OF THE SUN	<a href="#">163</a>
XV. THE INTRUDER	<a href="#">172</a>
XVI. ANOTHER STRANGE DISCLOSURE	<a href="#">182</a>
XVII. WHAT THE PROFESSOR FOUND	<a href="#">192</a>
XVIII. MORE ABOUT THE MYSTERY-MAN	<a href="#">202</a>
XIX. THE TRACK OF DESPUJOL	<a href="#">212</a>
XX. MADEMOISELLE JACQUELOT	<a href="#">222</a>
XXI. AT THE HÔTEL LUXEMBOURG	<a href="#">232</a>
XXII. GABRIELLE AT HOME	<a href="#">243</a>
XXIII. THE DEATH-DRUG	<a href="#">253</a>
XXIV. YET ANOTHER MYSTERY	<a href="#">263</a>
XXV. WHAT THE VALET KNEW	<a href="#">272</a>
XXVI. MORE ABOUT MATEO SANZ	<a href="#">284</a>

XXVII. A CURIOUS STORY	<a href="#">293</a>
XXVIII. LOVE THE CONQUEROR	<a href="#">299</a>
XXIX. ANOTHER PLOT	<a href="#">311</a>
CONCLUSION	<a href="#">316</a>

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## THE STRETTON STREET AFFAIR

[Pg 11]

### PROLOGUE

#### IS ABOUT MYSELF

The whole circumstances of the Stretton Street Affair were so complicated and so amazing from start to finish that, had the facts been related to me, I confess I should never have for a moment given them credence.

That they were hard, undeniable facts, presenting a problem both startling and sensational, the reader will quickly learn from this straightforward narrative—an open confession of what actually occurred.

In all innocence, and certainly without any desire to achieve that ephemeral notoriety which accrues from having one's portrait in the pictorial press and being besieged by interviewers in search of a "story," I found myself, without seeking adventure, one of the chief actors in a drama which was perhaps one of the strangest and most astounding of this our twentieth century.

I almost hesitate to set down the true facts, so utterly amazing are they. Indeed, as I sit in the silence of this old brown room in a low-built and timbered Surrey farmhouse, with pen and paper before me, I feel that it is only by a miracle that I have been spared to narrate one of the most complex and ingenious plots which the human mind, with malice aforethought, ever conceived.

[Pg 12]

I ought, I suppose, in opening to tell you something concerning myself. Hugh Garfield is my name; my age twenty-nine, and I am the son of the late Reverend Francis Garfield, rector of Aldingbourne and minor canon of Chichester. In the war I served with the Royal Air Force and obtained my pilot's certificate. I went to France and afterwards to Italy, and on being demobilized returned to my work as an electrical engineer in the employ of Messrs. Francis and Goldsmith, the well-known firm whose palatial offices are in Great George Street, Westminster, quite close to the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

Though I had obtained my Degree in Science I was at the time employed a good deal upon clerical work. Five years of war had, of course, been something of a set-back to my career, but in our reputable firm our places had been kept open for us—for those who returned, and we were, alas! only three out of twenty-eight.

Perhaps it was that having done my duty and obtained my captaincy and a Military Cross, the loyal, old-fashioned firm regarded me with considerable favour. At any rate, it set its face against anything German, even in the post-war days when the enemy sent its Ambassador to the Court of St. James, and we weakheartedly reopened trade with the diabolical Huns and allowed them to dump in their cheap and nasty goods just as though no war had happened.

Messrs. Francis and Goldsmith was a private firm, and the principals were both fine, patriotic Britons. Though electrical appliances were coming from Germany wholesale, and being put in to the market at prices with which British firms could never hope to compete, yet they stuck to their old resolution when in 1918 they had joined the Anti-German Union of "No German Goods."

[Pg 13]

Would that all other firms, electrical and otherwise, had done likewise!

Before I describe the amazing adventures which befell me I suppose I ought to tell you the exact circumstances. I had an excellent business appointment, with a salary which was quite adequate for my modest needs as a bachelor. Further, my Aunt Emily had died and left me quite a comfortable little fortune in addition. I shared a small flat in Rivermead Mansions, just over Hammersmith Bridge, with another bachelor, a young solicitor—a dark-haired, clean-shaven, alert fellow named Henry Hambleton, who had created quite a good practice, with only small fees of course, at the Hammersmith Police Court and its vicinity.

I first met Hambleton at the front—years ago it seems in these days when events march on so rapidly. For nearly a year we were brother-officers, until I was sent to Italy. We met again after the Armistice and set up housekeeping together, our female "Kaiserin" being a sharp-featured, grey-haired young lady of about fifty-five, who "looked after us" very well, and though she possessed many idiosyncrasies, did not rob us quite so openly as do most housekeepers of the London bachelor's home.

Harry was one of the best of good fellows. He had seen a lot of service ever since he had responded to his country's call and joined up as a private. We always got on excellently together, so we had furnished our pleasant little six-roomed, second-floor flat quite comfortably, and as Harry had looked after the artistic side of its furnishings—aided by a pal of his, an impecunious

[Pg 14]

artist who lived in Chelsea—it certainly was a very passable bachelor’s snuggery.

The small front room commanded a view over the river with works, wharves, and high factory chimneys on the Middlesex shore. To the left, across the long suspension bridge, was Chiswick and Kew, while to the right lay Putney and Chelsea. Before the house flowed the great broad muddy river where once each year the University eights flashed past, while ever and anon, year in, year out, noisy tugs towed strings of black barges up and down the stream.

Away across the high-road to the left were the great reservoirs of London’s water works, a huge open space always fresh and breezy even within a stone’s throw of stifled Hammersmith, with its “tubes” and its dancing-halls. Used as we both had been to years of roughing it, the spot had taken our fancy, and we got on famously together. On most evenings we were out, but sometimes, before we turned in, we would sit and smoke and laugh over our stirring adventures and humorous incidents in the war, and the “scraps” we had been safely through.

Since his demobilization Harry had fallen deeply in love with an extremely pretty girl named Norah Peyton, who lived in a house overlooking the Terrace Gardens at Richmond, and whose father was partner in a firm of well-known importers in Mincing Lane. As for myself, I was “unattached.” Like every other young man of my age I had, of course, had several little affairs of the heart, all of which had, however, died within a few short weeks.

Now it happened that on the evening of the day prior to the opening of this strange series of adventures which befell me, I was in the city of York, whither I had gone on business for the firm, and as my old-fashioned employers allowed first-class travelling expenses, I entered an empty first-class compartment of the London express which left York at six-twenty-three, and was due at King’s Cross at ten-thirty.

[Pg 15]

A few moments later a fellow-passenger appeared, a well-dressed, middle-aged man, who asked me in French if the train went to London, and on my replying in the affirmative, he thanked me profusely and joined me.

“I regret, m’sieur, that I, alas! know so very leetle of your Engleesh,” he remarked pleasantly, and continued in French: “Sometimes my ignorance places me in great difficulty when *en voyage* here.”

Knowing French fairly well we soon commenced to chat in that language. He struck me as a man of considerable refinement and education. Therefore it was no surprise to me when he told me that, as an official at the head office of the Crédit Lyonnais in Paris, it was his duty sometimes to visit their correspondents in the chief commercial centres of Great Britain.

“I am on my way from Glasgow back to Paris,” he said. “But I had to break my journey in York this morning. I shall leave London for Paris to-morrow. I shall travel by the air-route,” he added; “it is so much quicker, and far less fatiguing. I have been backwards and forwards to the Croydon Aerodrome quite half a dozen times of late.”

“Yes,” I remarked. “Travel by aeroplane must be of very considerable advantage to really busy men.”

And thus we chatted until dinner was announced, and we went together along the corridor to the restaurant-car, where we sat opposite each other.

As the train sped along over the flat fertile country through Doncaster and Grantham on that moonlit winter’s night we sat gossiping pleasantly, for I had looked forward to a lonely journey back to London.

[Pg 16]

I have “knocked about” ever since the commencement of the war, but I abhor a lonely four-hour railway journey. I had had enough of slow railway journeys in France and elsewhere. But on that evening I confess I was greatly taken with my fellow-traveller.

He had all the alertness and exquisite politeness of the Parisian, and he compelled me to have a Benedictine at his expense. Then, as a *quid pro quo*, he took one of my cigarettes.

Later, when we had concluded the usual and never-altering meal provided by the Great Northern Railway Company—I often wonder who are the culinary artists who devise those menus which face us on all English trains—we returned to our compartment to stretch ourselves in our corners and to smoke. Grantham we had passed and we were approaching Peterborough, the old fen town with the ancient cathedral.

In French my friend the banker kept up a continuous chatter, even though I was tired and drowsy. He had told me much concerning himself, and I, in turn, told him of my profession and where I lived. I did not tell him very much, for I am one of those persons who prefer to keep themselves to themselves. I seldom give strangers any information. After a time, indeed, I tired of him.

At last we entered King’s Cross—a little late, as is usual on a long run.

“I have to get to the Carlton,” my companion said. “Of course there will be no taxis. But are not you in London very badly served in that respect? We, in Paris, have taxis at any hour. When your stations close I find always a great difficulty in getting a conveyance. By the way! Could you not dine with me to-morrow night?”

[Pg 17]

"I am sorry," I replied. "But I have arranged to visit my uncle in Orchard Street."

Two minutes later the train drew up slowly, and wishing my fellow-traveller *bon soir*, I expressed a hope that one day, ere long, we might meet again. I had not given him my card, as our acquaintance was only upon chance, and—well, after all, he was only a passing foreigner.

Half an hour after I had stepped from the train, I was back again in my cosy little flat in Rivermead Mansions, after a very strenuous day. On the hall table lay a letter from my solicitors. I tore it open eagerly and read that they regretted to inform me that certain investments I had made a year before, with the money which my aunt had left me, had not realized my expectations. In other words, I had lost the whole of my money!

All I possessed was the salary paid me by Messrs. Francis and Goldsmith.

My heart stood still. The blow staggered me. Yet, after all, I had been a fool—a fact which my solicitors had hinted at the time.

I crushed the letter in my hand and passed on into the little sitting-room.

Harry had gone out to a dance, and had left a scribbled note on the table saying that he had his latchkey and would not be back until two or so. He wished me "cheerio." So having smoked a final cigarette I retired.

Next day I went to the office in Great George Street and reported upon the business I had done in York—and good business it was, too, with the Municipal Electric Supply—and in the evening I returned across Hammersmith Bridge at about six o'clock.

At seven our buxom "Kaiserin" put our meal upon the table—a roast, a sweet, and a wedge of Cheshire cheese. The mind of the dear old soul, who had so many relations, never rose above the butcher's joint and apple tart. Alas! that cooking is an art still unknown in our dear old England. We sit at table only by Nature's necessity—not to enjoy the kindly fruits of the earth as do other nations.

[Pg 18]

Yet what could we expect of the 'Ammersmith charlady who looked after us?—and who, by the way, probably looked after her own pocket as well.

The bachelor's housekeeper is always a fifteen puzzle—twelve for herself and the remaining three for her employer. As sure as rain comes in winter, so does the smug and sedate female who keeps house for the unfortunate unattached male place the onus of housekeeping bills upon him and reap the desserts of life for herself.

On that particular evening I felt very tired, for in the five days of my absence many business matters had accumulated, and I had had much to attend to.

Harry, who ate hurriedly—even gobbling his food—told me that he was taking Norah to the theatre, hence, after dinner, I was left alone. I read the evening paper when he had left, and then, at eight o'clock, stretched myself, for it was time that I went out to my uncle's.

The evening was cold and bright, with twinkling stars which on air-raid nights in London would have caused much perturbation among average householders and their families.

Our "Kaiserin" had gone home, so I rose, put on my overcoat, switched off the lights and descended the stairs to Hammersmith Bridge.

Thus, as you, my reader, will realize, I went out in the manner of a million other men in London on that particular night of Wednesday, the seventh of November.

[Pg 19]

And yet all unconsciously I plunged into a vortex of mystery and uncertainty such as, perhaps, no other living man has ever experienced.

Again I hesitate to pen these lines.

Yet, be patient, and I will endeavour, as far as I am able in these cold printed pages, to reveal exactly what occurred, without any exaggeration or hysterical meanderings. My only object being to present to you a plain, straightforward, and unvarnished narrative of those amazing occurrences, and in what astounding circumstances I found myself.

Surely it was not any of my own seeking—as you will readily understand. Because I performed what I believed to be a good action—as most readers of these pages would have done in similar circumstances—I was rewarded by unspeakable trouble, tribulation and tragedy.

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## CHAPTER THE FIRST

[Pg 20]

### INTRODUCES OSWALD DE GEX

I had promised to call upon Charles Latimer, my bachelor uncle, a retired naval captain, a somewhat crusty old fellow who lived in Orchard Street, which runs between Oxford Street and Portman Square. I usually went there twice a week. With that intent I took a motor 'bus from

Hammersmith Broadway as far as Hyde Park Corner.

As I stepped off the 'bus rain began to fall, so turning up the collar of my coat I hurried up Park Lane, at that hour half deserted.

When half-way up to Oxford Street I turned into one of the small, highly aristocratic streets leading into Park Street as a short cut to Orchard Street. The houses were all of them fine town mansions of the aristocracy, most of them with deep porticos and deeper areas.

Stretton Street was essentially one inhabited by the highest in London society. I had passed through it many times—as a Londoner does in making short cuts—without even noticing the name. The Londoner's geography is usually only by the landmarks of street corners and "tube" stations.

As I hurried along through the rain, I suddenly heard a man's voice behind me say:

"Excuse me, sir! But may I speak to you for just one second?"

I turned, and as I halted, a bare-headed young man-servant in livery, with waistcoat of striped black-and-yellow, faced me. [Pg 21]

"I'm sorry, sir," he exclaimed breathlessly, "but will you wait just a moment?"

"What do you want?" I asked, surprised at being thus accosted.

"Would you oblige my master, sir?" inquired the young man eagerly. "He is in some very great trouble. Only a moment, sir. Just come in and see him. Do. Poor fellow! he's in great trouble. Do come in and see him, sir," he begged.

Amazed at this appeal, and my curiosity aroused, I consented, and followed the man back to a great stone-built mansion about fifty yards away. The front door in its deep portico stood open, just as the servant had left it when, apparently, he had dashed out into the street to accost the first passer-by.

"I'm sure my master will be most grateful to you, sir," the young footman said as I crossed the threshold.

We passed through a large square hall and up a great flight of softly-carpeted stairs to the library on the first floor—a big, sombre room, lined with books from floor to ceiling—evidently the den of a studious man.

In the grate there burned a bright log fire, and on either side stood two deep leather arm-chairs. It was a room possessing the acme of cosiness and comfort. Over the fireplace was set a large circular painting of the Madonna and Child—evidently the work of some Italian master of the seventeenth century—while here and there stood several exquisite bronzes.

In the window on the left was set a great carved Renaissance writing-table, and upon it burned an electric lamp with an artistic shade of emerald glass.

A few moments later a man in evening-dress entered hurriedly—almost breathlessly. I judged him to be about forty-five, dark-haired and decidedly handsome, but his complexion was a trifle sallow, and his features had a decidedly Oriental cast. [Pg 22]

He greeted me profusely in a quiet, highly refined voice. Though his appearance was foreign, yet he was certainly English.

"I'm really awfully sorry to trouble you, sir," he said in a tone of profuse apology, "but the fact is that I find myself in a state of considerable perplexity. It is extremely good of you to consent to accompany Horton back here. I only hope that I have not interfered with any appointment you have to keep."

"Not at all," I replied, wondering who my host might be, for the whole affair was so sudden and unexpected that I was bewildered.

"Do sit down, and have a cigar," said my unknown host cheerily, and he took up a large silver box from a side table whereon was set a decanter of whisky, a syphon of soda water and four glasses upon a beautiful old tray of Georgian silver.

I selected a Corona, and sinking into the inviting chair, lit it, while he also took a cigar, and having clipped off the end, lit up as well.

We chatted affably, for my host was certainly geniality itself.

"This is quite an unexpected visit!" I remarked laughing, wondering still why I had been called in.

"Yes," he said. "I should not have had the pleasure of your acquaintance had it not been for the great trouble I have to-night," and he drew a deep sigh, while across his dark face passed an expression of pain and regret. "Some men are happy, others are—are, well, unfortunately unhappy in their domestic life. I, alas! am one of the latter," he added. [Pg 23]

"That is very regrettable," I said sympathetically.

"My wife," he said hoarsely after a pause, "my wife took out my little boy this evening and deliberately left him in Westbourne Grove—just in order to spite me! Then she rang me up from

some call-office and told me what she had done. Put yourself in my place," he said. "Would you not be indignant? Would you not be filled with hatred—and—"

"I certainly should," was my reply. "I'm a bachelor, and sometimes when I see so many unhappy marriages I fear to take the matrimonial plunge myself."

"Ah! Take my advice and remain single as long as ever you can, my dear sir. I—I haven't the pleasure of your name."

"Garfield—Hugh Garfield," I said.

"Mine is De Gex—Oswald De Gex," he said. "You may perhaps have heard of me."

Heard of Oswald De Gex! Of course I had! He was reputed to be one of the wealthiest of men, but he lived mostly in Paris or at his magnificent villa outside Florence. It was common knowledge that he had, during the war, invested a level million sterling in the War Loan, while he was constantly giving great donations to various charities. Somewhat eccentric, he preferred living abroad to spending his time in England, because, it was said, of some personal quarrel with another Member of the House of Commons which had arisen over a debate soon after he had been elected.

I recollected, too, that his wife—whose handsome pictured face so often appeared in the newspapers—was the daughter of a sporting baronet, yet I had never heard any whisper of such matrimonial troubles as he had just revealed to me.

[Pg 24]

He seemed a most easy-going man, whose clean-shaven face under the softly shaded electric light did not now appear so sallow and foreign as at first. His eyes were dark and rather deeply set, while his mouth was narrow and refined, with a dimple in the centre of his chin. His cast of features was certainly foreign, and handsome withal—a face full of strength and character. When he spoke he slightly aspirated his c's, and now and then he gesticulated when enthusiastic, due, of course, to his long residence abroad.

Often I had read in the newspapers of the splendid mediæval castle which he had bought from the Earl of Weymount, a castle perched high upon the granite rocks facing the Channel, between the Lizard and St. Ruan. He had spent a fortune in restoring it, yet he very seldom visited it. The historic place, with its wind-swept surroundings, was given over to his agent at Truro and to a caretaker.

As a matter of fact, I had once seen it while on a summer tour in Cornwall five years before, a great square keep with four towers, storm-worn and forbidding—one of the most perfect specimens of the mediæval castles in England. I had been told by the man who drove the hired car about its history, how in the early fourteenth century it had been the home of William Auberville, a favourite of Edward II. From the Aubervilles the old fortress had passed a century later into the Weymount family, and had been their ancestral home for centuries.

I chanced to mention that I had seen the castle, whereupon the millionaire smiled, and remarked:

"I fear that I've not been there lately. I am so very seldom in England nowadays. Besides, the old place is so cold and gloomy. It is draughty even on a summer's day. My wife liked it when we were married—liked it until somebody told her of a family legend, how Hugh de Weymount, in the fifteenth century, walled up his wife in the north tower and left her to starve to death. Ever since she heard that story she has hated the old place. But," he added with a hard laugh, "it is most probably not true, and if the gallant knight actually did such a thing, perhaps, after all, the lady deserved it!"

[Pg 25]

My friend certainly seemed soured against the opposite sex. And surely he had just cause to be if his wife, in order to spite him, had deliberately lost the heir, little Oswald De Gex, in Westbourne Grove.

It was a strange thing that the heir of one of the wealthiest men in Britain should have been abandoned in Bayswater. As a bachelor, I wondered as to the state of mind of the mother—a mother who could take out her child on a winter's night, without hat or coat, and deliberately cast him adrift just to annoy her husband.

But the gentler sex in these days of drugs and dancing are, it must be admitted, strangely abnormal. Women with crazes abound everywhere. That women are emancipated from the almost Oriental thralldom in which they lived in the days of Victoria the Good is a bright sign of our times—the times of discovery, refinement, and mutual happiness of all classes. But certain circles—those circles wherein women take drugs to enable them to dance the better, circles where opium is smoked, and where morals do not count, where religion is scoffed at and relegated to the limbo of an out-of-date fiction, and where only the possessor of money counts, there is a strange and mysterious phase of Society indescribable by the pen. Only those who know of them by personal experience—the experience of "fast living"—can understand it. And even the man-about-town stands aghast at the ultra-modern crazes.

[Pg 26]

As we sat chatting in that quiet comfortable room, I confess that I became rather fascinated by my host. Perhaps he was a trifle too cynical at times, but his matrimonial trouble no doubt accounted for it.

Suddenly he rose and stretched himself rather wearily, I thought. The thin, delicate hand which

held his cigar was long and tapering, and upon his finger was an antique Florentine ring in the form of a small emerald moth. I particularly noticed it as of very unusual pattern. I recollected seeing one of the same design in the Louvre Museum in Paris several years before.

"Ah!" he sighed. "I shall very soon leave London again—thank goodness! Next week I return to Fiesole for the winter. I am no great lover of London—are you, Mr.—Mr. Garfield?"

"My business as an electrical engineer keeps me in London," was my reply. "Besides, I have recently sustained a very heavy financial loss. If, however, I were independent I should certainly live in the country. London has, to me, become unbearable since the war."

"Ah! I quite agree," replied my host. "All our fine British traditions seem to have gone by the board. That, at least, is my own view. But there—perhaps I am getting an old fogey."

"I don't think so," I replied. "Everyone who knows you, Mr. De Gex, is well aware of your up-to-dateness, and your great generosity."

"Are they?" he asked, smiling wearily. "Personally I care very little. Popularity and prosperity can be manufactured by any shrewd press-agent employed at so much a year. Without publicity, the professional man or woman would never obtain a hearing. These are the days when incompetency properly boomed raises the incompetent to greatness—and even to Cabinet rank. Neither would the society woman ever obtain a friend without her boom," he went on. "Bah! I'm sick of it all!" he added with a sweep of his thin white hand. "But it is refreshing to talk with you, a stranger."

[Pg 27]

He was certainly frank in his criticisms, and I was not at all surprised when he commenced to question me as to my profession, where I lived, and what were my future plans.

I told him quite openly of my position, and that I lived in Rivermead Mansions with my friend Hambleton; and I also mentioned again the financial blow I had just received.

"Well," he said lazily, "I'm greatly indebted to you, Mr. Garfield, for deigning to come in and see a much-worried man. Ah! you do not know how I suffer from my wife's hatred of me. My poor little Oswald. Fancy abandoning him in order that the police might find him. But happily he is back. Think of the publicity—for the papers would have been full of my son being lost." Then, after a pause, he added: "I hope we shall see each other again before I go back to Italy."

At that moment, the butler, Horton, entered with a card upon a silver salver, whereupon I rose to leave.

"Oh! don't go yet!" my host urged quickly, as he glanced at the card.

"Is he waiting?" asked Mr. De Gex, turning to his servant.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well. Yes, I'll see him," he said. And then, excusing himself, he rose and left, followed by the man.

Why, I wondered, had I been invited there? It seemed curious that this exceedingly rich man was bursting to confide his domestic troubles to a perfect stranger.

[Pg 28]

I glanced around the handsome, well-furnished room.

Upon the writing-table lay a number of letters, and upon the red blotting-pad was a big wad of Treasury notes, under an elastic band, cast aside heedlessly, as rich men often do.

As I sat there awaiting my host's return, I recollected how, in the previous year, I had seen in the pictorial press photographs of the handsome Mrs. De Gex attired in jersey and breeches, with knitted cap and big woollen scarf, lying upon her stomach on a sleigh on the Cresta run. In another photograph which I recollected she was watching some ski-ing, and still another, when she was walking in the park with a well-known Cabinet Minister and his wife. But her husband never appeared in print. One of his well-known idiosyncrasies was that he would never allow himself to be photographed.

At the end of the room I noticed, for the first time, a pair of heavy oaken folding-doors communicating with the adjoining apartment, and as I sat there I fancied I heard a woman's shrill but refined voice—the voice of a well-bred young woman, followed by a peal of light, almost hysterical, laughter, in which a man joined.

My adventure was certainly a strange one. I had started out to visit my prosaic old uncle—as I so often did—and I had anticipated a very boring time. But here I was, by a most curious circumstance, upon friendly terms with one of the richest men in England.

Further, he seemed to have taken an unusual fancy to me. Probably because I had been sympathetic regarding the rescue of little Oswald De Gex. But why he should have confided all this to me I failed to realize.

As I sat there by the cheerful fire I heard the voices again raised in the adjoining room—the voices of a man and a woman.

[Pg 29]

Suddenly a sweet perfume greeted my nostrils. At first it seemed like that of an old-fashioned *pot-pourri* of lavender, verbena and basalt, such as our grandmothers decocted in their punch-



bowls from dried rose-leaves to give their rooms a sweet odour. The scent reminded me of my mother's drawing-room of long ago.

Gradually it became more and more pungent. It seemed as though some pastille were burning somewhere, for soon it became almost sickening, an odour utterly overbearing.

At the same time I felt a curious sensation creeping over me. Why I could not tell.

I was both agitated and annoyed. I had only half finished my drink, and it was certainly not alcohol that was affecting me. Rather it seemed to be that curious old-world perfume which each moment grew more pungent.

I struggled against it. What would my newly-found friend think if he returned to find me overcome?

I gained my feet with difficulty and managed to walk across the carpet, holding my breath.

Certainly my night's adventure was, to say the least, a curious one.

Yet in our post-war days in London the man who ventures about town after dark can easily meet with as strange occurrences and narrow escapes as ever were described by the pioneers of Central Africa. The explorer Stanley himself declared that the African jungle was safer than the crossing of the Strand.

I suppose I must have remained in the chair into which I again sank for a further ten minutes. My head swam. My mental balance seemed to have become strangely upset by that highly pungent odour of lavender and verbena. I could even taste it upon my tongue, and somehow it seemed to paralyse all my senses save two, those of sight and reason. [Pg 30]

I had difficulty in moving my mouth, my fingers, and my shoulders, but my sense of smell seemed to have become extremely acute. Yet my muscles seemed rigid, although my brain remained perfectly clear and unimpaired.

It was that scent of verbena—now terrible and detestable—a million times more potent than any bath soap—which filled my nostrils so that it seemed to choke me. I longed for fresh air.

By dint of persistent effort I rose, dragged myself across the room, drew aside the heavy silken curtain, and opening the window leaned out into the cold air, gasping for breath.

Where was Mr. De Gex?

For about five minutes I remained there, yet even the night air gave me little relief. My throat had become contracted until I seemed to be choking.

By the exercise of greater effort I staggered back, aghast at the sudden and unaccountable attack, and pressed the electric bell beside the fireplace to summon my host or the estimable Horton. Then I sank back into the arm-chair, my limbs paralysed.

How long I remained there I cannot tell for that pungent odour had, at last, dulled my brain. I had heard of cocaine, of opium, and of other drugs, and it occurred to me that I might be under the influence of one or the other of them. Yet the idea was absurd. I was Mr. De Gex's guest, and I could only suppose that my sudden seizure was due to natural causes—to some complication of a mental nature which I had never suspected. The human brain is a very complex composition, and its strange vagaries are only known to alienists. [Pg 31]

I seemed stifled, and I sat clutching the arms of the big leather chair when my host at last entered, smiling serenely and full of apologies.

"I'm awfully sorry to have left you, Mr. Garfield, but my agent called to do some very urgent business. Pray excuse me, won't you?"

"I—I'm awfully sorry!" I exclaimed. "But I—I don't feel very well. I must apologize, Mr. De Gex, but would you ask your man to order me a taxi? I—well, I've come over strangely queer since you've been out."

"Bah! my dear fellow," he laughed cheerily. "You'll surely be all right in a few minutes. Stay here and rest. I'm sorry you don't feel well. You'll be better soon. I'll order my car to take you home in half an hour."

Then he crossed to the telephone, rang up a number, and ordered his car to be at the house in half an hour.

Then he rang for Horton, who brought me a liqueur glass of old brandy, which at my host's suggestion I swallowed.

Mr. De Gex, standing upon the thick Turkey hearthrug with his cigar between his lips, watched me closely. Apparently he was considerably perturbed at my sudden illness, for he expressed regret, hoping that the brandy would revive me.

It, however, had the opposite effect. The strong perfume like *pot-pourri* had confused my senses, but the brandy dulled them still further. I felt inert and unable to move a muscle, or even to exercise my will power. Yet my sense of sight was quite unimpaired.

I recollect distinctly how the dark keen-faced aristocrat-looking man stood before me alert and eager, as he gazed intently into my face as though watching the progress of my seizure which had so completely paralysed me.

[Pg 32]

Of a sudden a loud shriek sounded from the adjoining room—a woman's wild shriek of terror.

My host's thin lips tightened.

The scream was repeated, and continued.

"Excuse me," he exclaimed as he left the room hastily.

I sat with ears alert. It was surely most strange that the well-known millionaire, whose name was on everyone's lips, had confided in me as he had done. Why had he done so?

The screams of terror continued for about half a minute. Then they seemed stifled down to heavy sobbing. They seemed to be hysterical sobs, as of someone who had suffered from some great shock.

I was full of wonderment. It was unusual, I thought, that such noises should be heard in a sedate West End mansion.

There was a long-drawn-out sob, and then silence. A dead silence!

A few moments later Mr. De Gex came in looking very flushed and excited.

"My troubles are ever on the increase," he exclaimed breathlessly. "Come, Mr. Garfield. Come with me."

He assisted me to my feet and led me out into the corridor and into the adjoining room.

To my surprise it was a great handsomely furnished bedroom with heavy hangings of yellow silk before the windows, and a great dressing-table with a huge mirror with side wings. Along one side were wardrobes built into the wall, the doors being of satinwood beautifully inlaid.

In the centre stood a handsome bed, and upon it lay a young and beautiful girl wearing a dark blue serge walking dress of the latest mode. Her hat was off, and across her dark hair was a band of black velvet. The light, shining upon her white face—a countenance which has ever since been photographed upon my memory—left the remainder of the room in semi-darkness.

[Pg 33]

"My poor niece!" Mr. De Gex said breathlessly. "She—she has been subject to fits of hysteria. The doctor has warned her of her heart. You heard her cries. I—I believe she's dead!"

We both moved to the bed, my host still supporting me. I bent cautiously and listened, but I could hear no sound of breathing. Her heart has ceased to beat!

He took a hand mirror from the dressing-table and held it over her mouth. When he withdrew it it remained unclouded.

"She's dead—*dead!*" he exclaimed. "And—well, I am in despair. First, my wife defies me—and now poor Gabrielle is dead! How would you feel?"

"I really don't know," I whispered.

"Come back with me into the library," he urged. "We can't speak here. I—well—I want to be perfectly frank with you."

And he conducted me back to the room where we had been seated together.

I had resumed my seat much puzzled and excited by the tragedy that had occurred—the sudden death of my host's niece.

"Now, look here," exclaimed Mr. De Gex, standing upon the hearthrug, his sallow face pale and drawn. "Your presence here is most opportune. You must render me assistance in this unfortunate affair, Mr. Garfield. I feel that I can trust you, and I—well, I hope you can trust me in return. Will you consent to help me?"

"In what way?" I asked.

"I'm in a hole—a desperate hole," he said very anxiously. "Poor Gabrielle has died, but if it gets out that her death is sudden, then there must be a coroner's inquiry with all its publicity—photographs in the picture-papers, and, perhaps, all sorts of mud cast at me. I want to avoid all this—and you alone can help me!"

[Pg 34]

"How?" I inquired, much perturbed by the tragic occurrence.

"By giving a death certificate."

"But I'm not a doctor!"

"You can pass as one," he said, looking very straight at me. "Besides, it is so easy for you to write out a certificate and sign it, with a change of your Christian name. There is a Gordon Garfield in the 'Medical List.' Won't you do it for me, and help me out of a very great difficulty? Do! I implore you," he urged.

"But—I—I—"

"Please do not hesitate. You have only to give the certificate. Here is pen and paper. And here is a blank form. My niece died of heart disease, for which you have attended her several times during the past six months."

"I certainly have not!"

"No," he replied, grinning. "I am aware of that. But surely five thousand pounds is easily earned by writing out a certificate. I'll write it—you only just copy it," and he bent and scribbled some words upon a slip of paper.

Five thousand pounds! It was a tempting offer in face of the fact that I had just lost practically a similar sum.

"But how do I know that Miss—"

"Miss Engledue," he said.

"Well, how do I know that Miss Engledue has not—well, has not met with foul play?" I asked.

[Pg 35]

"You don't, my dear sir. That I admit. Yet you surely do not suspect me of murdering my niece—the girl I have brought up as my own daughter," and he laughed grimly. "Five thousand pounds is a decent sum," he added. "And in this case you can very easily earn it."

"By posing as a medical man," I remarked. "A very serious offence!"

Again my host smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, after a pause. "Here is the certificate for you to copy. Reject my offer if you like; but I think you must agree that it is a most generous one. To me, money is but little object. My only concern is the annoying publicity which a coroner's inquiry must bring."

I confess that I was wavering. The shrewd, clever man at once realized the position, and again he conducted me to the chamber where the young girl was lying cold and still.

I shall ever recollect that beautiful face, white and cold like chiselled marble it seemed, for *rigor mortis* was apparently already setting in.

Back again in the library Oswald De Gex took from his safe a bundle of hundred-pound Bank of England notes, and counted them out—fifty of them.

He held them in his hand with a sheet of blank notepaper bearing an address in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square, and a blank form. Thus he tempted me—and—and at last I fell!

When I had written and signed the certificate, he handed me the bundle of notes.

I now remember that, at that moment, he took some pastilles from his pocket and placed one in his mouth. I thought perhaps they were throat lozenges. Of a sudden, however, the atmosphere seemed to be overpoweringly oppressive with the odour of heliotrope. It seemed a house of subtle perfumes!

[Pg 36]

The effect upon me was that of delirious intoxication. I could hear nothing and I could think of nothing.

My senses were entirely confused, and I became utterly dazed.

What did it all mean?

I only know that I placed the wad of bank notes in the inner pocket of my waistcoat, and that I was talking to the millionaire when, of a sudden, my brain felt as though it had suddenly become frozen.

The scent of verbena became nauseating—even intoxicating. But upon Oswald De Gex, who was still munching his pastille, the odour apparently had no effect.

All I recollect further is that I sank suddenly into a big arm-chair, while my host's face grinned demoniacally in complete satisfaction. I slowly lapsed into blank unconsciousness.

Little did I at the time dream with what amazing cleverness the trap into which I had fallen had been baited.

But what happened to me further I will endeavour to describe to you.

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## CHAPTER THE SECOND

[Pg 37]

### THE SISTER'S STORY

A strange sensation crept over me, for I suddenly felt that my brain, dazed by that subtle odour of *pot-pourri*, was slowly unclouding—ever so slowly—until, to my amazement, I found myself seated upon a garden chair on a long veranda which overlooked a sloping garden, with the blue-green

sunlit sea beyond.

Of the lapse of time I have no idea to this day; nor have I any knowledge of what happened to me.

All I am able to relate is the fact that I found myself in overcoat and hat seated upon a long terrace in the noon sunlight of winter.

I gazed around, utterly astonished. The clothes I wore seemed coarse and unfamiliar. My hand went to my chin, when I found that I had grown a beard! My surroundings were strange and mysterious. The houses on either side were white and inartistic, with sloping roofs and square windows. They were foreign—evidently French!

The shrill siren of a factory sounded somewhere, releasing the workers. Far away before me a steamer away on the horizon left a long trail of smoke behind, while here and there showed the brown sails of fishing boats.

I rose from my seat, filled with curiosity, and glanced at the house before which I stood. It was a big square building of red brick with many square windows. It seemed like a hospital or institution.

That it was the former was quickly revealed, for a few moments after I had risen, a nursing-sister in a tri-winged linen head-dress appeared and spoke kindly to me, asking in French how I felt on that glorious morning.

[Pg 38]

"I am quite all right," was my reply in French. "But where am I?" I inquired, utterly dazed.

"Never mind, m'sieur, where you are," replied the stout, middle-aged woman in blue uniform and broad collar. "You have only to get better."

"But I am better," I protested. "I lost consciousness in London—and now I awake here to find myself—where?"

"You are in good hands, so why trouble?" asked the Sister very kindly. "You are upset, I know. Do not worry. Take things quite easily. Do not try to recall the past."

"The past!" I cried. "What has passed—eh? What has happened since I went through Stretton Street the other night?"

The Sister smiled at me. She seemed inclined to humour me—as she would a child.

"Do not perturb yourself, I beg of you," she said in a sympathetic voice. "There is really no need for it. Only just remain calm—and all will be right."

"But you do not explain, Sister," I said. "Why am I here? And where am I?" I asked, gazing vacantly around me.

"You are with friends—friends who have looked after you," was her reply. "We are all very sorry for your motor accident."

"Motor accident!" I echoed. "I have had no motor accident."

Again the dark-eyed woman smiled in disbelief, and it annoyed me. Indeed, it goaded me to anger.

[Pg 39]

"But you told us all about it. How you started out from the Quay at Boulogne late at night to drive to Abbeville, and how your hired chauffeur held you up, and left you at the roadside," she said. "Yet the curious fact about your strange story is the money."

"Money! What money?" I gasped, utterly astounded by the Sister's remark.

"The money they found upon you, a packet of bank notes. The police have the five thousand pounds in English money, I believe."

"The police! Why?" I asked.

"No," she said, smiling, and still humouring me as though I were a child. "Don't bother about it now. You are a little better to-day. To-morrow we will talk of it all."

"But where am I?" I demanded, still bewildered.

"You are in St. Malo," was her slow reply.

"St. Malo!" I echoed. "How did I get here? I have no remembrance of it."

"Of course you have not," replied the kindly woman in the cool-looking head-dress. "You are only just recovering."

"From what?"

"From loss of memory, and—well, the doctors say you have suffered from a complete nervous breakdown."

I was aghast, scarce believing myself to be in my senses, and at the same time wondering if it were not all a dream. But no! Gradually all the events of that night in Stretton Street arose before me. I saw them again in every detail—Oswald De Gex, his servant, Horton, and the dead

girl, pale but very beautiful, as she lay with closed eyes upon her death-bed.

I recollected, too, the certificate I had given for payment—those notes which the police held in safe custody. [Pg 40]

The whole adventure seemed a hideous nightmare. And yet it was all so real.

But how did I come to be in St. Malo? How did I travel from London?

“Sister,” I said presently. “What is the date of to-day?”

“The eleventh of December,” she replied.

The affair at Stretton Street had occurred on the night of November 7th, over a month before!

“And how long have I been here?”

“Nearly three weeks,” was her answer.

Was it really possible that I had been lost for the previous ten days or so?

I tried to obtain some further facts from my nurse, but she refused to satisfy my curiosity.

“I have been ordered by the doctors to keep you very quiet,” she said. “Please do not ask me to break my promise. You will be much better to-morrow—and they will tell you everything.”

“But mine is a strange case, is it not?” I asked.

“Very strange,” she admitted. “We have all been much puzzled concerning you.”

“Then why not tell me all the circumstances now? Why keep me in suspense?” I urged.

“Because you have not yet quite recovered. You are not entirely yourself. Come,” she added kindly, “let us take a little walk. It will do you good for the weather is so lovely to-day.”

At her suggestion I strolled by her side through the pleasant grounds of the hospital, down into St. Malo, the busy streets of which were, however, entirely unfamiliar to me. Yet, according to the Sister, I had walked in them a number of times before. Still, I had no recollection of doing so. [Pg 41]

“I am taking you for your favourite stroll,” she said, as we went down one of the steep, tortuous streets to the little Place Châteaubriand in front of the ancient castle, which, she told me, was now a barracks.

Presently she mounted to the ramparts, and as we strolled round them, I admired the beautiful view of the sea, the many islets, and the curious appearance of the town. The tide was up, and the view on that sunny December morning was glorious.

At one point where we halted my nurse pointed out the little summer town of Dinard and St. Enogat, and told me the names of the various islets rising from the sea, Les Herbiers, the Grand Jardin, La Conchée, and all the rest.

But I walked those ramparts like a man in a dream. A new life had, in that past hour, opened up to me. What had occurred since I had accepted that bundle of bank notes from the millionaire’s hand I did not know. I had emerged from the darkness of unconsciousness into the knowledge of things about me, and found myself amid surroundings which I had never before known—in a French hospital where they evidently viewed me as an interesting “case.”

I stood against the wall and gazed about. My habit was to carry my cigarette-case in my upper waistcoat pocket. Instinctively I felt for it, and it was there. It was not my own silver case, but a big nickel one, yet in it there were some of my own brand.

I looked inquiringly at my nurse.

She smiled, saying:

“You haven’t many left. Why can’t you smoke some other brand? You always insist upon that one. I had so much difficulty in getting them for you yesterday!” [Pg 42]

“They are my own particular fancy,” I said, tapping one of them upon the case before lighting it.

“I know. But here, in France, they are most difficult to get. The other day you said you had smoked them all through the war, and even when you were in Italy you had had them sent out to you from London.”

That was quite correct.

“Well, Sister,” I laughed. “I have no recollection of saying that, but it is perfectly true. It seems that only this morning I regained consciousness.”

“Professor Thillot said you would. Others gave you up, but he declared that after careful nursing your memory would regain its normal balance.”

“Who is Professor Thillot?”

“The great nerve specialist of Paris. The police engaged him to come to see you. He was here ten days ago, and he put you under my charge.”

I laughed.

"Then I am still an interesting case, Sister—eh?"

"Yes. You certainly are."

"But do tell me more of what I am in ignorance," I implored. "I want to know how I came here—in France—when I lost all consciousness in a house just off Park Lane, in London."

"To-morrow," she said, firmly, but kindly. She was a charming woman, whose name she gave me as Sœur Marie.

We strolled back to the hospital, but on the way along the Quai Duguay-Trouin—I noticed it written up—I became again confused. My vision was not as it should have been, and my memory seemed blurred, even of the happenings of the past hour.

My nurse chatted as we walked together through the streets, but I know that my answers were unintelligible. I felt I was not myself. All my senses were keen as far as I could gauge—all save that of my memory of the past.

[Pg 43]

As I ascended through the pretty grounds of the hospital, the Sister beside me, I felt a curious failing of my heart. I experienced a sensation which I cannot here describe, as of one who had lost all interest in life, and who longed for death.

There may be some among my readers who have experienced it, perhaps. I cannot describe it; I merely explain that I felt inert, inefficient, and bored with life.

No such feeling had ever fallen upon me before. Hitherto I had been quick, alert, and full of the enjoyment of living. At Rivermead Mansions Harry Hambleton and I had prided ourselves on our post-war alertness.

Where was Harry? What was he doing? Would he be wondering why I was absent from our riparian bachelor home?

I was reflecting upon all this when suddenly, without any apparent cause, I once more lost consciousness. We were at that moment entering the door of the hospital and the Sister had just exclaimed:

"Now, do remain quite quiet and not worry over the past. It will all be right to-morrow," she urged.

I know not what words I uttered in reply. A curious sense of oppression had fallen upon me, a hot, burning feeling as though my skull was filled with molten metal, while at the back of my neck was a sharp excruciating pain which caused me to hold my breath.

The Sister apparently noticed my sudden relapse, for she expressed a hope that I was not feeling worse. I tried to reassure her that I was all right, but I know I failed to do so, for once again I lost all knowledge of things about me.

[Pg 44]

After that I recollect nothing more. Probably I walked on mechanically back to my bed.

When my lapse had passed, and I again regained consciousness, I found myself in bed gazing up at the ceiling. On either side of me were men, also in bed. They were talking in French.

I listened, and in a few seconds I recollected the events of the previous day. Then a sharp-featured nurse, whom I had not seen before, told us it was time to dress. I obeyed, but my clothes were entirely unfamiliar. They were coarse and did not fit me.

While I washed I burst out laughing. The humour of the situation struck me as distinctly amusing. At one hour I was myself; at the next I was another being!

Was my case that of Jekyll and Hyde?

I knew, and I felt keenly about it, that I had accepted a bribe to perform an illicit service. I had posed as a medical man and given a certificate of death. But my one and only object in life was to see Mr. De Gex and demand of him a full explanation of the amazing and suspicious circumstances.

My lapses were intermittent. At times I was fully conscious of the past. At others my brain was awl and aflame. I could think of nothing, see nothing—only distorted visions of things about me.

Apparently twenty-four hours had passed since I walked in the sunshine.

The men in the hospital ward were all Frenchmen, apparently of the lower class. At one end of the room a heated argument was in progress in which four or five men were gesticulating and wrangling, while one man was seated on his bed laughing idiotically, it seemed, at his own thoughts.

[Pg 45]

Presently a tall thin man in spectacles entered, and addressing me, asked me to follow him.

I obeyed, and he conducted me to a small kind of office in which two men were standing. Both were middle-aged, and of official aspect.

Having given me a chair they all seated themselves when the thin man—who I rightly judged to be the director of the hospital—commenced to interrogate me.

“How do you feel to-day?” was his first question, which he put in French in a quiet, kindly manner.

“I feel much better,” was my reply. “But yesterday my nurse revealed to me some very extraordinary facts concerning myself.”

“Yes. You have been seriously ill,” he said. “But now you are better these gentlemen wish to put a few questions to you.”

“They are police officers, I presume.”

The director nodded in the affirmative.

“We wish to ascertain exactly what happened to you, monsieur,” exclaimed the elder of the pair.

“I really don’t know,” I replied. “I must have lost all consciousness in London, and——”

“In London!” exclaimed Monsieur Leullier, the Prefect of Police, in great surprise. “Then how came you here in St. Malo?”

“I have not the slightest idea,” was my reply. “I only presume that I was found here.”

“You were. A fish-porter passing along the Quay St. Vincent at about two o’clock in the morning found you seated on the ground with your back to the wall, moaning as though in pain. He called the police and you were removed on the ambulance to the hospital here. The doctors found that you were in no pain, but that you could give no intelligible account of yourself.”

[Pg 46]

“What did I tell them?”

“Oh! a number of silly stories. At one moment you said you had come from Italy. Then you said that you had hired a motor-car and the driver had attacked you in the night. Afterwards you believed yourself to be in some office, and talked about electrical engineering.”

“That is my profession,” I said. And I told them my name and my address in London, facts which the police carefully set down.

“You told us that your name was Henry Aitken, and that you lived mostly in Italy—at some place near Rome. We have made inquiries by telegraph of a number of people whom you have mentioned, but all their replies have been in the negative,” said the police official.

“Well, I am now entirely in possession of my full senses,” I declared. “But how I got to France I have not the slightest knowledge. I lost consciousness in a house in Stretton Street, in London. Since then I have known nothing—until yesterday.”

“In what circumstances did you lapse into unconsciousness?” asked the doctor, looking intently at me through his glasses, for mine was no doubt an extremely interesting case. “What do you remember? Did you receive any sudden shock?”

I explained that being on a visit to a friend—as I designated Oswald De Gex—his niece died very suddenly. And after that I became unconscious.

The Prefect of Police naturally became very inquisitive, but I preferred not to satisfy his curiosity. My intention was to return to London and demand from De Gex a full explanation of what had actually occurred on that fatal night. I was full of suspicion regarding the sudden death of his niece, Gabrielle Engledue.

[Pg 47]

The police official told me that from my clothes all the tabs bearing the tailor’s name had been removed, and also the laundry marks from my underclothes. There was nothing upon me that could possibly establish my identity, though in my pocket was found five thousand pounds in bank notes—which he handed to me. They were intact—the same notes which De Gex has given me in return for the false death certificate I had signed.

I sat utterly aghast at the story of my discovery, of the many attempts made to establish my identity, of the visit of the British Vice-Consul to the hospital, and of his kindness towards me. It seemed that he had questioned me closely, but I had told an utterly fantastic story.

Indeed, as I sat there, I felt that neither of my three interrogators believed a single word of the truth I related. Yet, after all, I was not revealing the whole truth.

Certain recollections which I would have forgotten came to me. I had, I knew, committed a very serious criminal offence in posing as a medical man and giving that death certificate. Possibly I had been an accessory to some great crime—the crime of murder!

That thought held me anxious and filled me with fear.

The Prefect of Police seemed entirely dissatisfied with my explanation, nevertheless he was compelled to accept it, and an hour later I was released from the hospital. Before leaving, however, I was shown the register in which I had signed my name as “Henry Aitken.” This I erased and substituted my own name.

Then I thanked the tall, thin director and walked out into the streets of St. Malo a changed man.

### WHO WAS GABRIELLE ENGLDUE?

What, I wondered, had happened during my month of unconsciousness? I wandered into a café and sat pondering. Afterwards I walked about the town aimlessly and rather hungry. My own clothes had been returned to me, but before I assumed them I saw that every mark of identity had been purposely removed. Even the trousers buttons—which had borne the name of my tailor, a reputable firm in New Bond Street—had been substituted.

But by whom?

On the following afternoon I arrived in London and drove straight to Rivermead Mansions. I entered with my latchkey, and on glancing around saw signs that my friend Hambledon was still living there. The fire in the sitting-room had been lit by the "Kaiserin" ready for his home-coming, and everything seemed bright and cosy.

It was then about four o'clock, and Hambledon would certainly not return till six. Therefore after a good wash, a shave, and a clean collar, I set forth for Stretton Street to interview Oswald De Gex.

The house in the dusk was just as I recollected it on that eventful night when I was so unexpectedly called inside.

I rang the bell three times, until at last the door opened and a tall, stalwart man appeared.

I inquired for Mr. De Gex, whereupon he replied:

"Mr. De Gex is in Italy, sir."

[Pg 49]

"Oh! When did he leave town?"

"About a month ago, sir," the man answered.

"You are, I suppose, the caretaker?" I asked. "Now, I wonder if you will do me a very great favour. You may think me a thief or a burglar," I laughed, "but the fact is I have a great desire to see Mr. De Gex's house. I've heard so much about its beauties. I wonder if you would show me the drawing-room and the library?"

The man hesitated, saying:

"Well, sir, I've no orders to show anyone over. Have you a card?"

I at once produced one from my cigarette-case, and added that I was a personal friend of the millionaire's. He read my name and looked again at me. I assured him that I was not prospecting with a view to burglary.

"I'm only asking you to do me a favour," I went on, and I put a couple of Treasury notes into his hand. "You can inquire about me at my office to-morrow, if you like. They will tell you, I expect, that I have been away on a month's leave."

The little palm-oil no doubt propitiated him, for he invited me in. Then he switched on the light in the hall, and as he did so, said:

"I don't know what trouble I'd get into with the master. He's a very eccentric man—as you, of course, know."

I laughed as we ascended the soft carpeted stairs. I recollected the pattern.

A few moments later we were in the library. Yes. It was just as I remembered it. Nothing had been altered. There was the writing-table whereon I had copied out the death certificate; the big fireplace, now empty, and the deep chair in which I had sat.

There was the window, too—the window which I had opened in order to gasp for air after that suffocating odour of *pot-pourri*.

[Pg 50]

As I stood there—the watchful caretaker with his eye upon me, wondering no doubt—I again took in every detail. My return held me more than ever puzzled.

"What is the room beyond?" I asked.

"Oh! That's the mistress's bedroom," he replied. "A curious fancy to have her room next to the library. But it's one of the best rooms in the house. The master hates London. He lives all the time in Italy, and is only over here just for a week or two in spring, and a week or so before Christmas."

"I'd like to see that room," I said, affecting ignorance.

He took me in.

In a second I saw that nothing had been changed since I had stood there at the death-bed of



Gabrielle Engledue a little over a month ago.

There was the handsome bed-chamber with its inlaid cupboards, its great dressing-table, and its fine bed—the bed upon which the beautiful young woman had been lying dead. But now the bed had been re-made and its quilted coverlet of pale pink silk was undisturbed.

The corpse had been removed and buried upon my certificate!

I sniffed to see whether I could detect that curious odour of *pot-pourri*, but in vain. The air seemed fresh and not stifling as it had been on that well-remembered night.

Upon a side table stood a large photograph in a silver frame. I bent to look at it, whereupon the caretaker said:

“That’s a good photograph of Mr. De Gex, isn’t it, sir?”

“Excellent,” I said, for it was a really fine portrait. “Does your mistress come over from Italy often?” [Pg 51]

“Oh, yes, and she brings the little boy over with her. She is frequently here, while her husband stays at Fiesole. I send on his correspondence every day to Mr. Henderson, his secretary.”

I stood gazing around the room. Upon that bed the beautiful girl lay dead, and I had certified the cause of her death! Yet I had, later on, been the victim of some devil’s trick of which I knew nothing.

I was there to investigate. Yet though I questioned the caretaker very closely, I confess that I met with little success. He was an old and trusted servant of the family. Hence to many of my inquiries he remained dumb.

“When do you expect your master back?” I asked at last.

“Oh, not for another six months or so.”

“Where is Mrs. De Gex?”

“Ah! That I can’t quite make out,” he replied. “It’s a bit of a mystery. One night she went away quite unexpectedly and, as a matter of fact, nobody knows where she is. Her husband doesn’t know—or pretends he doesn’t,” he said with a knowing grin.

“Then she has disappeared!” I exclaimed.

“That’s just it. And they were always such a devoted pair. Little Oswald was the only thing she lived for.”

“Lived!” I echoed. “Then do you think she’s dead?” I asked quickly.

“Dead! Why should we think so? If she were, we should surely have seen it in the papers?”

“But your master has very funny fits sometimes,” I said. “I’ve heard about his eccentric ways.”

“Of course he has. He’s overburdened with money—that’s what it is. Mr. Henderson looks after all his affairs. Mr. De Gex has no regard for money. Mr. Henderson attends to everything. Phew! I wish I were a millionaire! I find it hard enough nowadays to pay the butcher and baker and make both ends meet.” [Pg 52]

“And so do I,” I said, laughing. “But, tell me, where is the young lady who used to live here—Mr. De Gex’s niece?”

“His niece! I don’t think he has a niece.”

“Miss Gabrielle Engledue.”

“Who’s she? I’ve never heard of her,” was the man’s reply.

I described her, but he shook his head.

“To my knowledge Mr. De Gex hasn’t got a niece,” he said.

“Were you here five weeks ago?” I inquired.

“Five weeks ago? No. I and my wife went away down to Swanage to see her sister. The master gave us a fortnight’s holiday. Why?”

“Oh—nothing,” I replied. “I merely inquired as I want to clear up a mystery—that’s all.”

“What mystery?”

“The mystery of Miss Engledue—your master’s niece,” I answered.

“But I’ve never heard of any niece,” he said.

“A young lady of about twenty-one with dark hair and eyes, and a beautiful complexion,” I said.

But the old servant’s mind was a blank.

“Of course, sir, many people come to visit Mr. De Gex. Horton would know them, but I don’t.

When the master is in town the servants are here, and I'm down in Cornwall at the castle."

"Then you are only here as caretaker when the family is away?"

"That's it, sir," he said. "But what is the mystery about this young lady? You said you knew Mr. De Gex, and yet you wanted to look over the house." [Pg 53]

"Yes," I responded with a laugh. "I have my own object—to clear up the mystery of Mr. De Gex's niece."

"Well, as far as I know, he has no niece! But you could easily find out, I suppose!"

The man was evidently no fool.

"Of course I don't know who comes here, or who stays here when the family is in town," he went on. "I simply come up and look after the place with my wife."

"Then you were away in Swanage during the first week of November?" I asked very seriously.

"Yes, we went down on the last day of October, and we were back here in the middle of November. My wife's sister was very ill, and her husband didn't expect her to live. So I remember the dates only too well."

"Then the family were in town on the date I mention."

He considered a moment.

"Oh! Of course they were. They must have been."

I glanced again around the room, full of amazement and wonder.

The man's failure to give me any details regarding the extremely attractive girl who had died upon his mistress's bed held me gripped in uncertainty. The mystery was even more puzzling now that I had started to investigate.

As I stood in that room a thousand strange reflections flashed across my mind.

Why had I, a mere passer-by, been called in so suddenly to be taken into the intimacy of the millionaire's household? Was it by mere accident that I had been invited in, or was it by careful design? I had lost five thousand pounds by foolish speculation, and yet I had regained it by being party to a criminal offence.

Again, who was the pretty, dark-haired girl who had first uttered those hysterical screams, and then, while fully dressed, had died upon Mrs. De Gex's bed? Further, if the mysterious dead girl had been niece of the millionaire surely my friend the caretaker would have known her? [Pg 54]

I confess that I now became more bewildered than ever.

That a girl named Gabrielle Engledue—whoever she might have been—had died, and that I had forged a certificate showing the cause of death were hard, solid facts. But the mystery of it all was complete.

That I had been the victim of some very carefully prepared and subtle plot was apparent, and it had become my own affair to investigate it and bring to justice those who were responsible for the poor girl's death.

Time after time I questioned the caretaker regarding the existence of the millionaire's niece, Miss Engledue, but it was plain to me that he had no knowledge of any such person.

"Was there not a death in this house—about five weeks ago?" I asked.

"Death?" he echoed. "Why, no, sir. You must be dreaming. If there had been a death while I was away, either my wife or I would certainly have heard about it." And he looked suspiciously at me as though he believed I had taken leave of my senses.

An hour later I was back at Rivermead Mansions, where Harry, for whom I had left a note, was awaiting me.

As we sat together before a cheerful fire I told him of my lapse into unconsciousness, of my loss of memory, but I did not explain all that had happened, for, as a matter of fact, I had no desire that anyone should know of my guilt in posing as a medical man and thus becoming implicated in the mysterious death of Gabrielle Engledue. [Pg 55]

My friend sat and heard me, smoking his pipe in silence.

"Extraordinary!" he said. "You ought to go to the police, Garfield. You were doped—without a doubt. But what was the motive? I've been very worried about you. When you had been missing a week they sent over from your office, and I then went to the police at Hammersmith. They made every inquiry and circulated your description. But they could discover no trace of you. I'll have to report that you've been found."

"Yes, do so to-morrow morning," I urged. "I don't want the police following me about—thank you," and I laughed, rather grimly perhaps.

During the hours that I lay awake that night a thought suddenly crossed my mind—an idea which

next day I promptly put into execution.

I went to Somerset House, and there searched the register of deaths. At first my efforts were in vain, but at last I discovered what I sought, namely an entry that a young woman named Gabrielle Engledue, single, aged twenty-one, of unknown parentage, had died of heart trouble at No. 9 Stretton Street, Park Lane, on the night of November the Seventh, the body having been cremated five days later!

I pursued my inquiries in various quarters that day, and further discovered that the funeral expenses had been defrayed by some person named Moroni. There had been only two mourners, of whom Moroni had been one.

Still feeling very ill, I was compelled—after reporting to the office—to remain at home for the three days which followed.

To the two heads of the firm I fear the story that I told must have appeared somewhat lame, yet they exhibited no disbelief, but on the contrary sympathized with me in my strange and unaccountable affliction. [Pg 56]

In a drawer in my bedroom lay the five thousand pounds in bank notes just as Oswald De Gex had given to me. I, of course, said nothing of them to Harry. But once or twice I drew them from the old envelope in which I had placed them, and turned them over in wonder.

I decided that they would be safer in the bank, but I hesitated to place them to my credit, so I at last put them away in the bottom of an old writing-case which had belonged to my father, resolving to try to forget their existence.

Though perhaps I did at last manage to forget the bribe, yet I could not put from myself the memory of that beautiful girl, the cause of whose death I had certified. The perfect countenance haunted me constantly. In my dreams I often saw her alive and well. The marvellous face was turned towards me, with merry, dancing dark eyes and a tantalizing smile—an enticing smile of mystery.

At last I resolved to go and face Oswald De Gex, so with that object I one morning left Charing Cross for Florence. Travelling by the Rome express from the Gare de Lyon, in Paris, I changed at Pisa, and at last, as the "snail train," as it is known in Italy on account of its slowness, wound slowly up the beautiful valley of the Arno, the old red roofs and domes of Firenze La Bella came into view.

The winter morning was sunny and brilliant with a clear blue sky, and as I drove through the streets, past the marble-built Duomo with its wonderful campanile, the city was agog, for it happened to be the *Festa* of the Befana. [Pg 57]

I had left my bag at the station, and the taxi took me to Fiesole, the high-up little town outside which lived the "rich Inglese"—Oswald De Gex.

Long before we arrived the driver pointed out the huge, mediæval country house situated among the olives and vines, and commanding extensive views over Florence and the Arno, with the blue mountains beyond. It was a great white house with red tiles and overhanging eaves, palatial indeed in its dimensions, and for centuries the summer residence of the head of the great family of Clementini, from whom the English millionaire had bought it fifteen years before, together with all its pictures, tapestries, and antiques, with the farms adjoining.

On entering the great gates of seventeenth century wrought iron, we found ourselves in a glorious old-world Italian garden, with a wonderful marble fountain, and a good deal of antique statuary, and then driving through the extensive grounds—past a lake—I at last rang the bell.

Quickly the great iron-studded door was opened by an elderly Englishman in livery, to whom I gave my card, and asked to see his master.

The man, without hesitation, ushered me through a huge marble-built hall, with a wonderfully frescoed ceiling, into a large room hung with priceless tapestry, and furnished with old gilt chairs covered with faded green silk damask.

I, however, took very little note of my surroundings, so anxious was I to again meet my host of Stretton Street face to face.

Not long did I have to wait before the door opened, and he stood before me.

"Well, Mr. Garfield?" he asked quietly, as he advanced. "To what do I owe the honour of this visit?" [Pg 58]

"Ah!" I cried. "Then you recollect me, I see! You know my name?"

"Yes. It was upon your card," was his quiet reply. "But, forgive me, I do not recollect ever having met you before!"

I held my breath. I tried to speak, but for the moment words failed me, so angry was I at his cleverly pretended ignorance and flat denial.

## FACING THE MUSIC

"Do you seriously mean to say that you have no knowledge of me?" I demanded angrily, looking the millionaire straight in the face.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "I seriously mean what I say. But, tell me," he demanded resentfully, "why are you here to claim acquaintance with me?"

"Do you really deny you have ever seen me before?" I asked, astounded at his barefaced pretence of ignorance.

"Never to my knowledge," replied the sallow-faced man whose countenance I so well recollected.

"Then you forget a certain night not so long ago when I was called into your house in Stretton Street, and you chatted confidentially with me—about your wife and your little son?"

"My dear sir!" he cried. "Whatever do you mean? I have never seen you at Stretton Street; and I have certainly never discussed my wife with you!"

I stood aghast at his continued denial.

"But you *did*," I asserted. "And there was another matter—a matter about which I must question you—the—"

"Ah! I see!" he interrupted. "You're here to blackmail me—eh? Well—let me hear the worst," and across his rather Oriental face there spread a mocking, half amused smile.

"I am not a blackmailer!" I protested angrily. "I want no money—only to know the truth."

[Pg 60]

"Of what?"

"Well, the truth concerning the death of Miss Gabrielle Engledue."

"The death of Miss Gabrielle Engledue!" he cried. "I really don't understand you, Mr.—Mr. Garfield!"

At mention of the name I saw that he started, but almost imperceptibly. The man was certainly a most perfect actor, and his protestations of ignorance were, indeed, well-feigned.

"Then you actually deny all knowledge of the young lady!" I said.

"I know no lady of that name."

"But she is your niece."

"I have only one niece—Lady Shalford."

"And how old is she?"

He hesitated for a few moments. Then he answered.

"Oh! She must be about thirty-five. She married Shalford about ten years ago, and she lives at Wickenham Grange, near Malton, in Yorkshire."

"And you have no other niece?"

"None—I assure you. But why do you ask such a question? You puzzle me."

"Not more than you puzzle me, Mr. De Gex," I replied with pique. "It would be so much easier if you would be frank and open with me."

"My dear sir, you seem to me to have a bee in your bonnet about something or other. Tell me, now, what is it?"

"Simply that you know me very well, but you deny it. You never thought that I should make this unwelcome reappearance."

"Your appearance here as a mad-brained person is certainly unwelcome," he retorted. "You first tell me that you visited me at Stretton Street. Well, you may have been in the servants' quarters for all I know, and—"

[Pg 61]

"Please do not be insulting!" I cried angrily.

"I have no intention of offering you an insult, sir, but your attitude is so very extraordinary! You speak of a girl named Engledue—that was the name, I think—and allege that she is my niece. Why?"

"Because the young lady is dead—she died under most suspicious circumstances. And you know all about it!" I said bluntly.

"Oh! perhaps you will allege that I am a murderer next!" he laughed, as though enjoying the joke.

"It is no laughing matter!" I cried in fury.

"Why not? I find all your allegations most amusing," and across his dark handsome face there spread a good-humoured smile.

His was a face that I could never forget. At one moment its expression was kindly and full of *bonhomie*, the next it was hard and unrelenting—the face of an eccentric criminal.

"To me they are the reverse of amusing," I said. "I allege that on the night of Wednesday, November the seventh last, I was passing your house in Stretton Street, Park Lane, when your man, Horton, invited me inside, and—well, well—I need not describe what occurred there, for you recollect only too vividly—without a doubt. But what I demand to know is why you asked me in, and what happened to me after you gave me that money?"

"Money! I gave you money?" he cried. "Why, man alive, you're dreaming! *You must be!*"

"I'm not dreaming at all! It is a hard fact. Indeed, I still have the money—five thousand pounds in bank notes." [Pg 62]

Oswald De Gex looked at me strangely. His sallow face coloured slightly, and his lips compressed. I had cornered him. A little further firmness, and he would no doubt admit that we had met at Stretton Street.

"Look here, Mr. Garfield," he said in a changed voice. "This is beyond a joke. You now tell me that I presented you with five thousand pounds."

"I do—and I repeat it."

"But why should I give you this sum?"

"Because I assisted you in the commission of a crime."

"That's a lie!" he declared vehemently. "Forgive me for saying so, but I can only think that you are not quite in your right mind."

"I have not been in my right mind for a month or more—thanks to your deep plotting," I retorted sharply. "Further, I am telling the truth—as I shall later on tell it before a court of law. I intend to solve the mystery of the death of Gabrielle Engledue."

"Well—I will not hinder you," he laughed grimly.

"You mean that you will not assist me?"

"I mean that I have no knowledge of any such person; nor have I any knowledge of you," he said. "A perfect stranger, you come here, present your card, and at once start a series of most serious allegations against me, the chief of them being that I gave you five thousand pounds for some assistance which you refuse to describe."

"If I tell you, you will only deny it, Mr. De Gex," I exclaimed bitterly. "So what is the use?"

"None. In fact I don't see that any object is to be gained in prolonging this interview," was his quick retort. "If, as you say, I gave you five thousand—which I certainly never did—then what more can you want? I however, suspect that the five thousand exists only in your own imagination." [Pg 63]

"But I have the sum intact—in a drawer at my home in London."

"It would be of interest to see it. Are they the same notes which you say I gave you?"

"The same," I answered, and then I went on to tell him how I had awakened to find myself in St. Malo, and how the French police had taken possession of the money found upon me.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at last. "It all seems quite clear now. You've had a bad illness, my dear fellow! Your brain has become unbalanced, and you are now subject to hallucinations. I regret my hard words, Mr. Garfield," he added in a kindly tone. "I also regret that your mental state is what it is."

"I desire no sympathy!" I protested, raising my voice angrily. "All I want to know is the truth."

"I have already told you that, as far as I am personally concerned."

"No. You have denied everything, and now you try to treat me as one demented!" I declared in a fury. "The existence of the bank notes you gave me are sufficient evidence against you."

"I think not. First, I doubt if they exist anywhere save in your imagination; secondly, if they do, then someone else may have given them to you."

"You did. I would recognize you among ten thousand men. On the night in question you wore a dinner jacket, and now you are in grey. That is all the difference."

"Well, have it your own way," he replied smiling, though I could see that he had become palpably perturbed by my allegations. Whatever had been administered to me—some dope or other, no doubt—it had been intended that I should be cast adrift on the Continent as a semi-imbecile. [Pg 64]

It was that fact which maddened me. The poor girl might not have been his niece, of course, but whoever she had been, this man had had some very strange and distinct motive in getting rid of her.

What it was I had vowed to discover.

It was apparent that De Gex was anxious to get rid of me. Indeed, as we stood together in that fine old room, across the marble floor of which strayed long beams of sunlight, the door opened and a pretty woman came in. She was dressed to go out, and asked:

"Will you be long, dear?"

It was the beautiful Mrs. De Gex! In an instant I recognized her by the many photographs I had seen in the picture papers.

"No. I'll be with you in a minute, dear. Is the car there?" he asked.

"It's been there a quarter of an hour, and if we don't go now we shall be late in meeting Hylda at the station," she said, glancing at me with undisguised annoyance.

Then she left, closing the door after her.

Across my brain ran strange thoughts. I recollected his words in Stretton Street regarding his spiteful wife when I had been called in to listen to his matrimonial troubles. But husband and wife now appeared to be on quite amicable and even affectionate terms.

I confess that I was still bewildered, as you, my reader, in whom I am here reposing confidence, would, I believe, have been, had you found yourself in similar circumstances.

"I see that your wife is eager to go out," I said. "But I fear I must, before I go, press for a direct answer to my questions, Mr. De Gex." [Pg 65]

"My dear sir, I have answered them. What more can I say?" he exclaimed with affected dismay.

"A very great deal. You can tell me the truth."

"I have," he snapped. "Who this girl Engledue is I have not a ghost of an idea. Are you certain she is dead?"

"Positive. I saw her lying dead in the room which adjoins your library."

"What! My wife's room!" he cried. "Oh, come—let us finish all this silly talk."

"When you are, at least, frank with me!"

"I am."

"But do you deny that the young lady, Gabrielle Engledue, died there? Do you not recollect that we both stood at her death-bed?"

"Don't talk such piffle!" De Gex snapped, no doubt believing in the end that he would convince me of his ignorance of the whole tragedy.

Whatever had happened on that November night was, no doubt, to the distinct advantage of the wealthy man who stood before me. Yet I was faced with a difficulty. He had uttered that most ugly word "blackmail." Suppose he called the police and accused me of it! His word—the word of a wealthy financier—would, no doubt, be taken by a jury before my own!

On the other hand, I had up my sleeve a trump-card—the death and cremation of the mysterious Gabrielle Engledue. Probably the poor victim was poisoned—hence the object of her cremation to remove all traces of it! Yet, opposed to that, there still remained my own most serious offence of posing as a medical man and giving a forged certificate concerning the cause of death.

Yes. I was only too keenly alive to my own very precarious position. Yet I was emboldened by De Gex's agitation, and the pallor in his sallow cheeks. [Pg 66]

He was, no doubt, feeling very uneasy. And even a millionaire can feel uneasy when faced with a witness of his own offence.

"Mr. De Gex, I am not talking rubbish," I said in all seriousness. "You appear to forget that night when your wife deserted your son in Westbourne Grove, and then laughed at you over the telephone from a public call-office."

He looked at me very straight with those deep-set eyes of his.

"Really," he exclaimed. "That is quite a new feature in the affair. Let me see, what did I tell you?"

"Your man, Horton, invited me, a mere passer-by, into your house in Stretton Street. He said you were very much worried and asked if I would meet you. Why? I cannot imagine. When we met you were very vague in your statements, and at first I could not for the life of me discover why I had been asked to meet you. But soon you confided to me the fact that your wife, being spiteful towards you, had abandoned your heir, little Oswald, in Westbourne Grove, and had then rung up from a call-office telling you to find him."

"Bosh! My dear fellow! Bosh!" was his reply. "First, you were never there; and secondly, I've never complained of my wife's behaviour to anyone; certainly not to a stranger."

"You did to me. I certainly am not dreaming."

"But you have already admitted that you've been in hospital in St. Malo suffering from loss of memory."

"My memory has now fortunately been restored," I replied.

"Distorted—without a doubt. You would never travel all the way from London to relate these absolutely silly stories to me if you were in your right senses, my dear Mr. Garfield," he said. [Pg 67]

"They're not silly stories, but hard, indisputable facts!" I declared resentfully.

The millionaire had assumed an air of nonchalance, for leaning against a big old buhl table he took out a cigarette from his gold case and slowly lit it, after which he said:

"You must, I think, really excuse me. We have to go down into Florence to meet my sister-in-law, who is coming from London. I'm afraid, Mr. Garfield, that I cannot help you any further."

"You mean you won't!"

"Not at all. If I knew anything of this young lady who, you said, died in my wife's bedroom in Stretton Street, and at whose bedside you and I stood together, I would tell you. But I really don't."

He tossed his cigarette hastily out of the open window.

"No," he added. "I won't hear any more. I haven't the time or the inclination to listen to the wanderings of any insane person. I've had enough!"

"And so have I!" I retorted. "You are trying to mislead me by affecting ignorance of my very existence, but I don't intend that you shall escape!" I added, again raising my voice.

"Hush, please," he said in a calmer tone. "My wife may overhear."

"I don't care!" I cried in desperation. "You never dreamed that I should arise against you, as I have. You are not fair towards me! If you revealed to me in confidence the reason you gave me that bribe of five thousand pounds, then I, on my part, would have played the straight game." [Pg 68]

"My dear sir, play whatever game you like. It is immaterial to me whether straight or crooked. I don't know anything about what you have been talking, and you have only wasted your breath and got out of temper for nothing."

Again I looked him straight in the face. There was no doubt that the strain of his clever denials was telling upon him. His dark complexion had paled; in his eyes there was a fierce, haunted look as that of a man who was straining every effort to remain calm under the gravest circumstances.

"I have no game to play," I declared. "I only demand the truth. Why was I invited into your house in Stretton Street to be present as witness at the poor girl's death?"

"I don't know. Find out for yourself, my dear Mr. Garfield," laughed the rich man. "I have no time to discuss this silly affair further. I'm sorry you have troubled to come out from London to see me. But really yours has been a fool's errand," and he turned towards the door.

"A fool's errand!" I echoed. "I am no fool and my errand is in deep earnestness. You may try to befool me, but I tell you that I will leave no stone unturned to solve the problem which you alone can explain."

"Well, get along with your work," he laughed in open defiance. "I have no further time to waste," and glancing at his watch he opened the door and abruptly left me.

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## CHAPTER THE FIFTH

[Pg 69]

### THE CITY OF THE LILY

Full of indignation I remained for a few further moments in that wonderful old room, the room of faded tapestries with the marvellous painted ceiling.

From the window was afforded a glorious view over the gardens where, even in winter, tangled masses of flowers ran riot, while beyond lay the picturesque old red-roofed Tuscan city. Fiesole is distinctly a village of the wealthy, for the several colossal villas, built in the days of the Medici and even before, are now owned by rich foreigners, many of them English.

Oswald De Gex was one of them.

He had certainly foiled me. I gritted my teeth and vowed that, come what might, I would compel him to accept the inevitable and reveal to me the truth. I left the room and found my way alone across the great marble entrance hall, and out to where my taxi awaited me.

I drove back to Florence, where, at the station, I obtained my bag, and then went to the Savoy Hotel in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, where I engaged a room.

For a long time I sat at my window gazing down upon the busy square below, one of the centres

of Florentine life. The bell of the Duomo was ringing, the shops were mostly closed, and all Florence was out in the streets, it being the Festa of the Befana, one of the greatest of all the ever-recurring festas of Florence. Street urchins were parading the thoroughfares with horns and wildly shouting, and there was an exchange of presents on every hand. At the Befana everyone in Firenze goes mad with good intentions.

[Pg 70]

The artistic side of the ancient Lily City did not interest me. I knew it of old. I had strolled on the Lung Arno, I had long ago with my father on a winter tour looked into the little shops of the coral and pearl merchants on the Ponte Vecchio, and I had taken my *apéritif* at Doney's or at Giacosa's. I was no stranger in Florence. My mind was fully occupied by the deep mystery of Gabrielle Engledue's death, and of the millionaire's flat denial that we had ever met before.

As I sat gazing across the square my anger and indignation increased. That De Gex should have dared to affect such entire ignorance surpassed belief.

I tried to form a scheme for further action, but could think of no way by which to force him to acknowledge our previous meeting. That the beautiful girl had died, and that her body had been cremated upon the false certificate I had given, was beyond all doubt. But what had been the rich man's motive?

How very perturbed and anxious he was I had noticed, though he put such a very brave face upon it and appeared so imperturbable. That he could treat such a serious matter as a joke utterly amazed me. Nevertheless, I recollected that he had long earned the reputation of being highly eccentric.

That afternoon I spent in wandering about the sunny streets of Florence. In the evening I dined at Bonciani's, in the Via Panzani, an unpretentious place at which I well remembered having eaten famously when on my last visit to Florence. Afterwards, having nothing to do, I went to a variety show at the Alhambra.

Florence was full of French and English visitors, as it always is in winter, so next day I formed a plan, and in pretence of desiring to rent a furnished flat, I called at the office of a well-known English house-agent in the Via Tornabuoni. My real object was to ascertain some facts concerning Oswald De Gex.

[Pg 71]

The English clerk became quite enthusiastic when I mentioned him.

"Mr. De Gex is greatly respected here," he hastened to tell me. "Since he bought the Villa Clementini outside Fiesole he has lived here for about eight months out of the twelve. Italians love rich people, and because of his wealth he is most popular. I see a good deal of him, for we act as agents for his property in Italy. He has quite a large estate—mostly wine-growing."

I mentioned that I had met him in London, and then asked in curiosity:

"Do you happen to know anything of his niece, a tall, very handsome, dark-haired girl, Miss Engledue?"

For a moment he reflected. Then he said:

"I recollect when up at the villa just before he went to London—that was about three months ago—seeing a tall, dark-haired young lady. She came into the library while I was chatting with him. But I don't know her name."

"Was she about twenty-one?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes—about that age," was his reply. "But, of course, I have no idea whether it is the young lady you mean."

"Had you seen her before?"

"I think so—once before. She was in the car in the Cascine with Mrs. De Gex."

"I wonder how I could discover more about her?" I asked. "Who would know?"

"Robertson, the butler, or Mr. Henderson, the secretary."

[Pg 72]

"The butler would be best," I said. "How could I approach him, do you think? I don't want to go up to the villa."

"It would be easy. He's often down at the Gambrinus in the afternoon. I frequently meet him there, and we have a drink and a chat."

"Would he be there this afternoon? I do wish you would introduce me," I urged. "The matter is an important personal one concerning myself."

"He might be down this afternoon—about four o'clock," replied the alert young Englishman who spoke Italian so well. "I'll look in there at four, if you will be about."

"I certainly will be there," I said, and then we went along to Giacosa's, where we each had that cocktail-like speciality known as a "piccolo."

At five minutes to four that afternoon I entered the big Gambrinus Café, which was nearly opposite my hotel on the other side of the piazza, and I took a seat just inside the door. The



orchestra was playing, and the place was well filled with a gay cosmopolitan crowd, many of them winter idlers.

I looked around, wondering if the butler, Robertson, had arrived, and waited in patience for the coming of my friend.

Punctually at four he appeared, and greeting me, cast his eyes over the many small tables, until suddenly he exclaimed:

“Ah! There he is!”

We walked to a table some distance away, where a stoutish, grey-haired, clean-shaven Englishman was smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper, with a glass of vermouth and seltzer before him.

“Hallo, Arthur!” he exclaimed as he raised his eyes to my friend.

[Pg 73]

“This is a friend of mine, Mr. Garfield,” my companion said, introducing me, and then we sat down and began to chat. At last I could possess myself in patience no longer, and addressing the millionaire’s butler, told him frankly that I was in search of information concerning the dark-haired young lady who had been guest up at the villa about three months ago.

“Oh! I suppose you mean Miss Thurston—the young American lady, don’t you? But she’s fair-haired!”

“The lady I mean is named Engledue,” I replied.

“Oh! I don’t know anyone of that name,” was his reply. “Miss Thurston has stayed with us in London and down in Cornwall, and has been here several times. I fancy she’s some relation of the mistress’s. She first came to stay about three years ago, when she left school in Paris. Then she went home to America, and after six months came back again to us.”

“You haven’t any idea who her parents are—or where she lived in America?”

“She lived somewhere near Detroit, I believe. That’s all I know about her. I believe her people are motor-car makers and extremely wealthy. At least, somebody said so—and she’s very free with tips to the under-servants.”

“When did she leave here?”

“When the master went to London. I was to go too, but I had influenza and had to remain here.”

“And where was Mrs. De Gex?” I inquired.

“She was already at Stretton Street. She and the little boy went to London early in October, but came back at the end of the month.”

Then I questioned the estimable Robertson concerning the domestic happiness of his master. I said I had heard rumours in London of matrimonial differences.

[Pg 74]

“Well, that’s a lie,” he replied quickly. “There isn’t a pair in the whole of London Society who are more devoted to each other.”

This greatly surprised me after the words that had fallen from the millionaire’s lips.

Again I referred to the mysterious Gabrielle whom I described as minutely as I was able, and apparently my description fitted that of Rose Thurston, save for the colour of her hair.

“You have no idea where she is, I suppose?”

“Not the slightest. Back in America, perhaps. She seems to come over every year.”

“I wonder if you could find out her address?” I asked. “If you could, it would be of very great service to me,” and I handed him my card, expressing a hope that he would refrain from mentioning the matter to his master.

“I’ll try,” he said. “But I fear I shan’t succeed. Mr. Henderson, the master’s secretary, would know, of course.”

The point at issue now was whether the young American girl, who had been the millionaire’s guest at the villa, and Gabrielle Engledue were actually one and the same person. If they were, then I had made one step towards the solution of the enigma.

I confess to utter bewilderment. My brain was still confused. Sometimes my skull seemed wrapped in cotton wool. From a mere unimportant person in the world of electrical engineering I had suddenly become a man upon whom rested a great and criminal responsibility!

In that huge, garish café, with its great arc lamps glowing though night had not yet fallen, and with a noisy orchestra playing selections from the latest crazes of music from the revues in London, I sat with a perfectly open mind. I had been the victim of some extremely clever plot. But of its motive, of its ramifications, or of its conception, I had no knowledge. Even my wildest imagination was at fault.

[Pg 75]

All I knew was that the sallow-faced De Gex—the millionaire who lived up at the huge Villa Clementini—had plotted against the handsome girl, and she had died in his wife’s bedroom in

Stretton Street.

"Well, Mr. Robertson, how can I find out anything more about Miss Thurston? Give me your advice."

"I'll try and see what I can do," he said. "Perhaps I may be able to get a glance at the mistress's address book. I have seen it. I'll try."

"Yes—do!" I said very anxiously. "It means so very much to me."

"Why?"

I hesitated. My intention was to mislead both of my companions.

"Well," I said with a laugh, "the fact is, I—I'm very fond of her!"

Both men exchanged glances. Then they smiled, almost imperceptibly, I know, but it struck them as humorous that I had fallen in love with the daughter of a wealthy American.

"Of course I'm not yet certain whether she is the same lady," I went on. "She may not be. But on calm consideration I believe she is. The description you give of her is exact."

"Well," exclaimed the butler, "I'll see if I can get at the address book. She keeps it in a drawer in her boudoir, which is usually locked. But sometimes she leaves it open. At any rate, I'll see what I can do and let you know."

[Pg 76]

I thanked him and told him that I was staying at the Savoy. Then I was compelled to discuss with the estate-agent's clerk the pretended renting of an apartment out by the Porta Romana, which, he said, was vacant.

On the following day, in order to still sustain the deception, I went and viewed the place, and found it really quite comfortable and very reasonable. But, of course, I was compelled to express dislike of it. Whereupon my friend promised to find me another.

Day after day I waited in Florence, hoping against hope that Robertson would be able to furnish me with Miss Thurston's address. But though I saw him several times he reported that the drawer containing the address book was still locked.

Mr. De Gex had gone to Rome, and was away for three days. The British Ambassador was giving some official function and the millionaire had been invited. Indeed, I read all about it in the *Nazione*.

On the fourth day he returned, for I saw him in his big yellow car driving along the Via Calzajoli. An elegant Italian, the young Marchese Cerretani, was seated at his side, and both were laughing together.

Twice I had been up to the Villa Clementini, and wandered around its high white walls which hid the beautiful gardens from the public gaze. Surely there was no fairer spot in all sunny Italy than that chosen by the rich man as his abode. To the hundreds of visitors of all nations, who came up by train to Fiesole from Florence to lunch or dine at the various pleasant little restaurants, the great imposing place was pointed out as the residence of the rich "Inglese"—the man who possessed more money than any of the most wealthy in the kingdom of Italy.

[Pg 77]

When I thought of that fateful night in Stretton Street, I waxed furious. Was it possible, that, by the possession of great riches, a man could commit crime with impunity? Perhaps what goaded me to desperation more than anything was the foul trick that had been played upon me—the administration of that drug which had caused me to lose all sense of my own being.

That subtle odour of *pot-pourri* had gripped me until I felt faint and inert beneath its perfume, and it often returned to me—but in fancy, of course.

In the winter sunshine I wandered about the busy, old-world streets of Florence, idling in the cafés, gazing into the many shop-windows of the dealers in faked pictures and faked antiques, while often my wandering footsteps led me into one or other of the "sights" of the city, all of which I had visited before—the National Museum at the Bargello, the Laurenziana Library, with its rows of priceless chained manuscripts, the Chiostrò dello Scalzo, where Andrea del Sarto's wonderful frescoes adorn the walls, or into the Palazzo Vecchio, or the galleries of the Pitti, or the Uffizi. I was merely killing time in the faint hope that the good-natured Robertson might get for me the information which, in the circumstances, I was naturally most eager to obtain.

In the course of my erratic wanderings through the grand old city, with its host of monuments of a glorious past, I was one morning passing the great marble-built cathedral and noticed a number of people entering. There seemed to be an unusual number of visitors, so having nothing to do I passed through the narrow door into the sombre gloom of the magnificent old place—one of the most noteworthy and most beautiful sacred buildings in the world.

[Pg 78]

At first, entering from the bright sunshine of the piazza, I could scarcely see, so dim was the huge interior, but slowly my vision, rather bad since my strange adventure, grew accustomed to the half-darkness, and I saw that upon the high altar there were many long candles burning in their brass sconces and before the high altar three priests in gorgeous vestments were kneeling.

In the great cavernous place, with its choir beneath the dome, I heard low prayers in Latin. Men

and women who passed me bowed and crossed themselves while many knelt.

The glorious cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, so called from the Lily which figures in the Arms of Florence—hence “the Lily City”—had always an attraction for me, as it has for every visitor to the ancient Tuscan capital. The stained glass of Ghiberti, the wonderful mosaics of Gaddo Gaddi, the frescoes of angels by Santi di Tito, and the beautiful pictures by the great mediæval masters, all are marvellous, and worth crossing the world to see.

From before the altar a long spiral mist of incense was rising, and about me as I stood in the centre of the enormous interior, many visitors were passing out from the dim religious gloom into the light of the open doorway.

Suddenly my eyes caught sight of a countenance.

I held my breath, standing rooted to the spot. What I saw staggered belief. Was it only a chimera of my unbalanced imagination—or was it actual fact?

For a few seconds I remained undecided. Then, aghast and amazed, I became convinced that it was a stern reality. [Pg 79]

The mystery of the affair at Stretton Street became in that single moment a problem even more than ever bewildering.

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## CHAPTER THE SIXTH

[Pg 80]

### ANOTHER PUZZLE

Kneeling before Donatello’s magnificent picture of the Virgin over one of the side altars, her outline dimly illuminated by the light of many candles, was a slim, dark-haired young woman in deep mourning. Her head was bowed in an attitude of great devotion, but a few moments later, when she raised her face, I stood rooted to the spot.

The countenance was that of the dead girl Gabrielle Engledue!

An involuntary exclamation left my lips, and a woman standing near me heard me, and wondered.

Kneeling beside the girl in black was a thin-faced, black-haired Italian of about forty-five. He was somewhat handsome, though a sinister expression played about his lips.

I watched the pair for several minutes, wondering whether in my brain, unbalanced as it had been, the scene was a mere chimera on my part and that, after all, the girl only slightly resembled the victim at Stretton Street.

The latter I had not seen in life, and death always alters the features. Nevertheless, the sudden encounter was most startling, and from where I stood behind a great marble column I watched them.

At last both rose and crossing themselves piously, walked slowly to the door. I followed them. It surely could not be that the girl whose death certificate I had forged, and whose body had been reduced to ashes, was actually alive and well! I recollected that sum of five thousand pounds, and the strange adventures which had befallen me after I had accepted the bribe to pose as a doctor, and certify that death had been due to natural causes. [Pg 81]

Outside in the bright sunlight of the Piazza, I obtained a full view of her. Her rather shabby black was evidently of good material, but her face struck me as distinctly strange. The expression in her dark luminous eyes was fixed, as though she were fascinated and utterly unconscious of all about her. She walked mechanically, without interest, and utterly heedless of where she went. Her companion’s hand was upon her arm as she crossed to the Via Calzajoli, and I wondered if she were blind.

I had never before seen such a blank, hopeless expression in a woman’s eyes.

The man, on the contrary, was shrewd and alert. His close-set eyes shot shrewd glances from beneath black bushy eyebrows with a keen, penetrating gaze, as though nothing escaped him. He seemed to be trying to hurry her, in fear of being recognized. He had not noticed me, hence in the bustle of the busy street I managed to get up close behind them, when of a sudden, I heard her exclaim:

“Not so fast! Really I can’t walk so fast!”

She spoke in English!

Her companion, uncouth and heedless, still had his hand upon her arm, hurrying her along without slackening his pace. She seemed like a girl in a dream. Truly, she was very handsome, a strange tragic figure amid all the hubbub of Florence, the old-world city of noise and of narrow streets, where Counts and *contadini* rub shoulders, and the tradesmen are ever on the look out to profit—if only a few soldi—upon the innocent foreigner. [Pg 82]

Firenze la Bella—or Florence as the average Englishman knows it—is surely a city of strange people and of strange moods. By the discordant clanging of its church bells the laughter-loving Florentines are moved to gaiety, or to piety, and by the daily articles in the local journals, the *Nazione* or the *Fieramosca*, they can be incited to riot or violence. The Tuscans, fine aristocratic nobles with ten centuries of lineage behind them, and splendid peasants with all their glorious traditions of feudal servitude under the “nobile,” are, after all, like children, with a simplicity that is astounding, combined with a cunning that is amazing.

Along the Via Calzajoli I followed the pair in breathless eagerness. At that hour of the morning the central thoroughfare is always crowded by business men, cooks out shopping, and open-mouthed *forestieri*—the foreigners who come, guide-book in hand, to gaze at and admire the thousand wonderful monuments of the ancient city of Medici. The girl’s face certainly resembled very closely that of the dead girl Gabrielle Engledue. The countenance I had seen at Stretton Street was white and lifeless, while that of the girl was fresh and rosy. Nevertheless, that blank expression upon her face, and the fact that her companion had linked his arm in hers, both pointed to the fact that either her vision was dim, or her great dark eyes were actually sightless. The man was fairly well dressed, but the girl was very shabby. Her rusty black, her cheap stockings, her down-at-heel shoes, and her faded hat combined to present a picture of poverty. Indeed, the very fact of the neglect of her dress was increasing evidence that her vision was dim, for surely she would not go forth with the rent in the elbow of her blouse. Did she know that it was torn?

[Pg 83]

Just as we were passing the ancient church of Or San Michele, with its wonderful armorial bearings by Luca della Robbia, an old man with long white hair and beard, whom I took to be one of the mangy painters who copy the masterpieces in the Uffizi or the Pitti, passed by, and raising his hat, wished the pair: “*Buon giorno!*”

The girl’s companion returned the salute with a slight expression of annoyance, perhaps at being recognized, but the girl took no notice, and did not acknowledge him.

The man uttered some words in the girl’s ear, and then hurried her on more quickly, at the same time glancing furtively around. It was quite plain that he had no wish to be seen there, hence my curiosity became increased.

Every moment I, however, feared that he might realize I was following them; but I did not mean that they should escape me.

In the Piazza della Signorina they halted opposite that great old prison-like building, the Palazzo Vecchio, where several people were awaiting an omnibus, and as they stood there the girl, who bore such a striking resemblance to the dead niece of the millionaire, stared straight before her, taking no notice of anything about her, a strange, statuesque, pathetic figure, inert and entirely guided by the ferret-eyed man at her side.

I was compelled to draw back and watch them from a distance, hoping that I might be successful in following them to their destination. It certainly was strange that the girl who was so much like Gabrielle Engledue should be there in Florence, within a mile or two of De Gex’s villa!

As I watched, yet another person—a well-dressed woman of about forty—recognizing the girl’s companion, smiled as she passed, while he, on his part, raised his hat. The woman who had passed struck me as being either English or American, for there are many English-speaking residents in Florence. For a second I debated within myself, and then a moment later I followed her until she turned a corner in the Via di Porta Rossa. Then I hurried, and overtaking her politely raised my hat.

[Pg 84]

“I trust you will pardon me, Madame,” I exclaimed in English, as she started and looked at me askance. “I presume you are either English or American?”

“I am American,” she replied with a pronounced drawl.

“Please forgive my inquisitiveness, but I seek your aid in a little matter which is of greatest consequence to me,” I went on. “A moment ago, as you crossed the Piazza, you encountered an Italian gentleman and a girl. Could you tell me the gentleman’s name?”

“What, the person I bowed to a moment ago?” she exclaimed. “Oh! that’s Doctor Moroni.”

Moroni! I recollected the name. He was one of the mourners!

“And the girl?” I asked.

“Ah! I do not know. I saw her out with an old woman the other day. But I have no idea who she is.”

“Is Doctor Moroni a doctor of medicine?” I inquired.

“Yes. The people at the *pension* of the Lung Arno where I live, always call him in. I was ill six months ago, and he attended me. He lives in the Via Cavezzo, near the Porta Romona—number six, I believe.”

“I am sure I am extremely obliged to you,” I replied very gratefully. “I have a very strong reason for asking these questions—reasons which concern the young lady,” I added.

The American woman smiled, and then, reiterating my thanks, I raised my hat and left her.

[Pg 85]

At least I had discovered the identity of the girl's companion. He was a doctor, hence it was most probable that she was under his charge. Nevertheless, it was strange that he should take her to the Duomo and pray at her side. Doctors do not usually act in that manner with their patients.

When I returned to the Piazza the pair were nowhere to be seen, therefore I strolled to the nearest café, and sat down with a cigarette to think out the remarkable affair.

One or two features of the problem now became more than ever puzzling. First, in view of the fact that I had seen Gabrielle Engledue lying dead and had, for a bribe of five thousand pounds, signed a death certificate purporting to be from Doctor Gordon Garfield, of Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square, it seemed beyond credence that the girl who had died and been cremated should be led about the streets of Florence by this Italian, Doctor Moroni. Oswald De Gex's denials were, in themselves, only thin, and yet they were all very clever and carefully prepared. The story of how his wife had left his little son in Westbourne Grove to be discovered by the police was no doubt well thought out. De Gex and his wife were actually on most affectionate terms, hence the tale he had told had been purposely concocted, in order to mislead me. Besides, his pretence that the dead girl had been his niece was, of course, a similarly concocted story to mislead me, and also to discredit me if perchance I made any unwelcome inquiries.

That I had been half asphyxiated and then drugged until my mental balance had been upset, was quite plain. And it was equally plain that De Gex did not intend that I should be capable of making inquiries concerning the events of that memorable November night. When I had been thrown out of the motor-car on that French highway, near St. Malo, the bank-notes had been purposely left in my pocket. I had already copied the numbers, and had called upon the millionaire's bankers in Pall Mall, but there was no record that any of them had been issued to him. That payment had evidently been very well concealed.

[Pg 86]

On every hand it appeared quite plain that I had been the victim of some strange and remarkable conspiracy, the motive of which was entirely obscure. Surely I must have been watched, and my habits noted. De Gex had known that I frequently passed his door on my way to visit my uncle, and further, he must have known that I should pass on that fateful night in November when Horton was sent out to entice me within.

But the chief point of that complex puzzle was the fact that there, in Florence, within a mile or two of the millionaire's almost regal residence, I had encountered a living girl who, in every feature, was the exact counterpart of the poor girl whose death and cremation stood recorded in the official registry at Somerset House!

When in London I had been half inclined to call upon Doctor Gordon Garfield and explain the situation. But such confession must, I knew, lead to my prosecution and inevitable imprisonment. I had taken a false step while under the baneful influence of some drug which had stultified my own volition and held me powerless to resist the temptation. I was now endeavouring to seek the truth.

That the amazing adventure in Stretton Street was not the outcome of imagination was proved by the entry in the register at Somerset House, and also by the evidence of the cremation of the body. But that the beautiful girl I had seen lying dead could now be walking about the streets of Florence was, of course, utterly absurd.

[Pg 87]

Was my memory, in my rather weak state of health, playing tricks with me? I began to fear that such was the case.

As I sat over my "bock" watching the tide of Florentine life pass and repass across the great piazza, I began to laugh at myself, and felt half inclined to abandon the inquiry. Still it was all most mysterious and mystifying. Why had I been marked down as a tool to further the millionaire's ends? And who, after all, was the victim?

I tried to dismiss the apparently sightless girl from my mind, but somehow the affair obsessed me. I seemed impelled to go farther and try to elucidate the mystery. I endeavoured to make up my mind to forget it all and return to England and to my work at Francis and Goldsmith's—but all to no avail. My duty, I felt, was to leave no stone unturned until I had discovered whether Gabrielle Engledue had died from natural causes, or as a result of foul play.

The pale, tragic face of the girl I had encountered in the Duomo haunted me. Towards the narrow-eyed Doctor Moroni I felt an instinctive dislike, even though I had no cause to distrust him.

I think it was the strange intuition I experienced at that moment which caused me to decide to act with discretion and caution, and to discover all that I could concerning the doctor and his tragic-faced companion.

With a fixed plan I returned to my hotel, ate my luncheon in the big *salle à manger*, which was crowded with foreigners wintering in Florence. Then, after lunch, I complained to the manager of feeling unwell, and asked him to telephone to Doctor Moroni, in the Via Cavezzo.

"Ah! a most excellent doctor!" remarked the hotel manager. "He has a very large practice among the English and Americans. And he is quite popular. I suppose you know him?"

[Pg 88]

"No. I have only heard of him, and of his cleverness," I said with affected carelessness.

Ten minutes later the manager sent me a message by a page that the doctor would call at three o'clock. So, in my pretended illness, I went to my room and feigned the symptoms of acute indigestion.

Punctually the doctor arrived, and greeted me in his most professional manner. I at once explained that an American lady of my acquaintance had recommended him, whereupon he bowed, smiled, and seating himself before me inquired my symptoms.

His looks were certainly not an index to his character, for though he appeared so stern and taciturn yet at heart he was, I saw, a very humorous, easy-going man, a true Tuscan who showed his white teeth when he laughed, gesticulated violently, and spoke English with a refined accent that was particularly charming.

"It is probably the change of diet," he declared at last, after diagnosing my symptoms. "I see many such cases among foreigners who are unused to some of our rather indigestible dishes. The latter are very toothsome, and they eat heartily—with dire results," and he smiled.

So well indeed did I describe my supposed ailment that before he left he wrote me out a prescription. Afterwards I made pretence of being a perfect stranger in Florence. I longed to speak of Oswald De Gex, but feared to do so because his suspicions might by that become aroused. If so, then all hope of discovering the true facts would instantly vanish.

"I hope you will soon be all right and that you will enjoy your visit to our Tuscany," he said very pleasantly. "Florence is very full of visitors just now. Are you remaining long?" [Pg 89]

"I really can't tell," was my reply. "My business in London may recall me at any time."

Then I thanked him for his visit, and remarked that if the mixture gave me no relief I would probably call upon him.

Indeed, it was for this latter reason that I had called him in. By making his acquaintance in that manner I would, I saw, excite no suspicion, and I hoped to be able to meet the girl who was apparently under his charge.

While I had been consulting him I noticed that he seemed a man of curious moods. At one moment his dark countenance was sullen and sinister, while at the next his face broadened into an expression of easy-going *bonhomie*. He spoke English extremely well, and was apparently a man of considerable taste and refinement. Truly, the situation was so puzzling that I was bewildered.

After he had gone, I re-dressed myself and went across to the Gambrinus, where I had an appointment with Robertson.

I found him seated alone at a table in the corner awaiting me.

"Well?" he said, "I've got that address for you, Mr. Garfield—the address of Miss Thurston," and he handed me a slip of paper upon which was written: Miss Rose Thurston, Cedar Cottage, Overstrand, Norfolk.

"But I thought you said she lived near Detroit?" I remarked.

"She and her mother did live in America, but I have discovered that they now have a house near Cromer," was the butler's reply. So in acknowledgment of his services I passed him a couple of Italian notes, and we then had a drink together. [Pg 90]

While doing so a strange thought crossed my mind.

Could it be possible that the girl I had seen with Doctor Moroni and Rose Thurston were one and the same!

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## CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

[Pg 91]

### THE MILLIONAIRE'S APPREHENSIONS

That same evening I made a number of inquiries concerning Doctor Moroni. On every hand I heard high praise of his skill. He was one of the principal physicians at the great hospital at Gelsomino, and among other of his illustrious patients there had been a Russian Grand Duke and an Austrian princess who lived in a magnificent villa upon the Viale dei Colli.

I went about the wonderful city of art collecting information concerning the doctor, where and when I could, because a startling fact had been revealed to me by Robertson, namely, that Moroni was De Gex's medical attendant.

In the night-time when the narrow ancient side-streets of Florence, with their ponderous prison-like palaces with iron-barred windows are so ill-lit and cavernous, the place seems a city of evil deeds, as indeed it was in the days of the Medici and of the Borgias.

As I trod those streets between the Porta Romana and Santa Maria Novella, I confess that I

became apprehensive of a nervous breakdown.

That a girl had been wilfully done to death in that West End mansion, and that I had accepted a bribe to aid and abet the assassin, were undeniable facts. The wealthy man evidently believed that, for my own sake and in order to escape prosecution, I would not seek to solve the enigma. Now, as I reflected upon my interview at the Villa Clementini, I realized how artful he was in denying everything, and yet allowing me a loophole for escape. He had mentioned blackmail—an ugly word with ugly consequences—well-knowing that I dare not go to the Metropolitan Police and make any statement of what I had witnessed or of how I had acted.

[Pg 92]

I still held that five thousand pounds bribe intact. The accursed notes were at the flat at Rivermead Mansions. My position was now untenable. When that night I retired to my room I realized that the situation was hopeless. How could I support any charge against a man who, being a millionaire, could purchase manufactured evidence—as is done every day—just as easily as he could purchase a cigar?

The evidence given in judicial courts in every European capital in cases where the party, either plaintiff or defendant, is well possessed of this world's goods, is usually tainted. In no place on earth can money work more marvels than in a court of law. Witnesses who make testimony a profession for big fees appear in every Assize court in the world. And some of them are, alas! experts. True it is that every man has his price, and the more so in these hard, post-war days of riot and ruin. Justice and brotherly love departed with the Victorian era. The old game of "Beat-your-neighbour-out-of-doors," played by our grandfathers, seems to be the only one practised in our modern times.

With such thoughts I fell asleep.

Next day I spent in again wandering the old-world streets of Florence, hoping to obtain another glimpse of Moroni and his fair charge. I went to the Duomo and waited near that side-chapel where I had first seen them. Then, as they did not come, I idled before a café in the Via Calzajoli, and again in the Piazza della Signorina. But I saw nothing of them. That afternoon I spent the winter sunshine in the Cascine, the beautiful wood beside the Arno where the Florentines go each day for the *passeggiata*, either in their old-fashioned landaus with armorial bearings upon the panels, in modern motor-cars, or on foot. The afternoon, though it was winter, was glorious, even though the cold wind from the snow-tipped Apennines swept sharply down the valley. Yet everyone was wrapped up warmly, and the fresh air was invigorating.

[Pg 93]

Though I kept my eyes open everywhere, I failed to detect that slim figure in rusty black.

I allowed the following day to pass. Then, at four o'clock in the afternoon, I called at the house of Doctor Moroni in pretence of again consulting him.

Upon the door of the great old house, now converted into spacious flats, was a small, rather tarnished brass plate with the words: "Dr. Moroni, Primo Piano."

So I climbed the wide stone stairs to the first floor, and rang the bell. My summons was answered by a tall, swarthy, dark-eyed Italian maid, who wore a dainty muslin apron, but no cap—as is the custom in Italy. She was a Piedmontese, for in her hair she wore several of those large pins with round heads of silver filigree placed in a semicircle at the back of her head, until they formed a kind of halo.

"The Signore Dottore is at home," was her reply in Italian. "Be pleased to enter."

And she showed me along a narrow hall to what was evidently Moroni's waiting-room. The atmosphere of the place was close on account of the charcoal stove, and the barely-furnished room smelt of some disinfectant.

I had sat there for some moments when I heard a door open, and men's voices sounded speaking in English:

"Very well, signore," I heard the doctor say. "I will be up at the villa at eleven o'clock."

"Good," replied the other. "You will not be troubled by Robertson this time. He will be away. I am sending him on a message to Pisa, as I do not want him about; he is too inquisitive. Besides, you will not come to the house. You quite understand where we shall meet?"

[Pg 94]

"Quite, signore," replied Moroni.

By the mode in which the doctor addressed his visitor, and the mention of Robertson, it was plain that he was speaking with Oswald De Gex. Why was the butler to be sent to Pisa? I wondered.

I sat breathless, listening to the footsteps along the hall, and to Moroni wishing his visitor good afternoon.

A few moments later he opened the door brusquely and with a pleasant smile apologized for keeping me waiting. Then he conducted me to his consulting-room, a gloomy, frowsy little apartment much over-heated, as is usual in Florentine houses in winter.

"Well?" he asked. "And how do you feel now, Mr. Garfield?"

My reply was the reverse of satisfactory. The mixture had done me good, I said, but I still felt excruciating pains after eating. In consequence, he felt my pulse and took my temperature, while

I, on my part, strained my ears listening for any feminine voice. Was the girl whose secret I sought still there?

Once I heard a woman's voice, but she cried in Italian to a fellow-servant named Enrichetta, hence she was probably the maid who had admitted me.

Moroni, after he had concluded his examination, seemed a little puzzled. No doubt I had, in my ignorance, described some imaginary symptom which was not in accordance with what he expected to find. He, however, gave me another prescription, and as he wrote it I wondered how he would act if he knew that my object in becoming his patient was to probe the mystery of the affair in Stretton Street.

[Pg 95]

I had at least gained knowledge of his intended visit to the Villa Clementini unknown to the butler, Robertson. He was to be there either at eleven o'clock that night or at eleven next morning. It occurred to me that I might possibly learn something of interest if I watched the doctor's movements at the hours indicated.

"Your symptoms rather puzzle me," said the doctor at last, eyeing me from beneath his bushy black brows. "To tell the truth, I fancy you must have eaten something poisonous at one of the restaurants. They sometimes use tinned food which is not quite good, and it sets up irritant poisoning. I had a case very similar to yours last week. The climate here did not suit him, and he has returned to England."

"Oh! I hope to be better in a few days, doctor," I said cheerfully, for I was anxious for another opportunity to visit him. I wanted to see, and if possible speak in secret with the girl who bore such a striking resemblance to the dead Gabrielle Engledue.

On returning to the hotel I rang up the Villa Clementini and inquired for Robertson. In a few moments I spoke to him, asking if he were coming down to the Gambrinus.

"I'm sorry," he replied. "I have to go to Pisa by the eight o'clock train. But I shall be back tomorrow morning."

By that I established the fact that Oswald De Gex had an appointment with Moroni at eleven o'clock that night, and not on the following morning.

I ate my dinner at Bonciani's, near the station, a place little patronized by foreigners, but where one obtains the best Tuscan cooking—and after an hour or so over coffee at the Bottegone, I took a taxi up to Fiesole. The night was cold but dry and moonlit. As we ascended the steep hill a glorious panorama spread before us, for below lay the valley of the Arno with the twinkling lights of the ancient city, and the great pale moon upon the shimmering river rendering it like a scene from fairyland. And as we went up beyond San Domenico, through those lands which in spring and summer are so fruitful with their vines and olives, two peasant swains passed, chanting one of the old *stornelli*, those quaint love-songs of the Tuscan *contadini*—the same which have been sung for centuries in and about old Firenze:

[Pg 96]

Acqua di rio.  
Teco sarò di luglio e di gennaio  
Dove tu muori te, morirò anch'io.

Tuscany is essentially a land of love, where the fierce flame of affection burns in the hearts of all the people, and where a hot word is quickly followed by a knife-thrust, and jealousy is ever cruel and unrelenting.

Arriving at last in the little piazza, at Fiesole, where a number of people were awaiting the last tram to take them back into Florence, I alighted, paid the man, and continued my journey on foot, still climbing the high road which led through the chestnut woods of Ricorbico, until at last I found myself at the corner of the grounds of the Villa Clementini, close to a pair of gates of mediæval wrought-iron which closed the south entrance to the magnificent domain.

On either side of the road were high walls with tall cypresses behind which cast their deep shadows over the highway, rendering it dark around the entrance. I glanced at my luminous wristwatch—a relic of my war service—and found that it still wanted ten minutes to eleven.

[Pg 97]

Therefore I drew back beneath the wall, and in the black shadow awaited the millionaire's visitor to pass on to the main entrance.

I suppose I had been there ten minutes or so when I detected approaching footsteps in the darkness, and presently the doctor's familiar figure appeared in the patch of moonlight, only to be swallowed up in the black shadows a moment later. Approaching the great iron gates which were a side entrance to the grounds, he drew a key from his pocket, unlocked them easily, and passed in without, however, re-locking them after him. His visit there was undoubtedly a secret one, or De Gex would not have given him the key of the entrance he used himself, nor would he have sent away his butler, Robertson.

The visitor's footsteps suddenly ceased, for he was undoubtedly crossing the grass. In consequence, I stole on tiptoe up to the gates, and entering, saw in the moonlight that Moroni was stealing along in the opposite direction to the great country mansion, many of the windows of which were illuminated. As I halted my ears caught the strains of orchestral music. A waltz was being played, for, as I afterwards knew, a gay ball was in progress, the cars entering and



leaving by the main carriage road.

A few seconds later I crept on in the direction the doctor had taken. At first I feared that, as is so often the case in Italy, savage dogs might be kept there at night to attack any thief or intruder. But as Moroni had entered so boldly, it was evident that if any were kept there they were that evening locked up. Hence, I went forward in confidence until I came to the edge of a beautiful lake lying unruffled in the moonlight, and surrounded by many pieces of ancient statuary, most of them moss-grown and lichen-covered.

[Pg 98]

As I turned a corner there came into view a large white summer-house with a domed roof, supported by columns—a kind of temple such as one often finds in the gardens of ancient Italian villas. The marble-built summer-house, with carved escutcheons, was a fashion of the seventeenth century. As I peered forward I saw Moroni walking in the full light, approaching the place, from which a dark figure emerged and came forth to meet him.

Instantly I again halted, and straining my eyes recognized that the man who was in evening dress was the owner of that palatial home.

They retired into the summer-house together. What, I wondered, was the object of that secret meeting?

It struck me that perhaps if I succeeded in approaching the spot I might overhear some of their confidential conversation, therefore I stole forward, always keeping in the shadow, and treading upon the grass, my eyes ever upon my goal.

The stillness of the night was unbroken, save by the harsh clanging of the convent bell down at San Domenico, and the howl of a distant dog, while ever and anon bursts of dance music from the villa reached my ears.

At last, by skirting a shrubbery in almost pitch darkness, and scratching my hands and face badly, I succeeded in gaining the rear of the little marble temple, and on hearing De Gex's voice I drew back and waited, scarce daring to breathe. I could hear my own heart beat as I listened intently to certain words distinctly audible.

"Then you think he has suspicions—eh, Moroni? What you tell me is interesting, but also alarming."

"I feel certain he has. He would not have consulted me for an imaginary ailment were it not so."

[Pg 99]

"Then he must have seen her somewhere in Florence and recognized her! I was a fool to suggest that she should be brought here—so near to me! I was a fool to allow him to slip through my fingers!"

"I pointed that out to you at the time," remarked the Italian doctor with a sigh. "But what you have just shown to me is amazing. I never dreamed of that!"

He had evidently shown him something in the moonlight.

"Well, I don't intend that this fellow shall pry into my affairs," snapped the millionaire. I recognized that hard metallic voice of his, and it recalled to me all those strange happenings on that November night.

"I do not really see, if we act boldly, what we have to fear," said the doctor in his very fair English.

We! Then they were both implicated in the plot, whatever its nature.

"Fear!" echoed De Gex. "Suppose he made some very compromising statement to the London police."

"And in doing so he would compromise himself! He posed as a medical man, and gave the death certificate in return for payment—five thousand pounds. Beyond, he committed forgery by signing the name of Gordon Garfield. No, Mr. De Gex, I feel sure he will never court prosecution. He may busy himself in trying to solve what no doubt appears to him a complete enigma—as indeed it is to us. But he will never expose us—*never!*"

The millionaire grunted dubiously.

"Well, what are we to do now? What do you suggest, Moroni? Your brain is always so fertile where crooked business is concerned."

"I have no suggestion. I came here to learn yours."

[Pg 100]

"Yes. I called you here to show you what I have shown you, and also because I have a certain person here as guest at my wife's dance to-night—you know whom I mean."

"Certainly. She is equally dangerous. You asked me to bring the little tube. Here it is. But I urge you to use it with extreme caution. When you break the glass be certain that none of the jelly inside touches your fingers. If it does, wash them instantly in carbolic. It is highly contagious."

De Gex gave vent to a queer laugh of satisfaction, as, no doubt, he took the mysterious glass tube in his hand.

"I am not yet certain whether to try the experiment—or not," he remarked with hesitation.

"It is, to say the least, a highly dangerous one."

"You mean dangerous from the point of view of discovery—eh?"

"No, not at all. Your act cannot be discovered, but it may be dangerous for yourself and those about you—highly dangerous. I have obeyed your orders, signore, as I always do, and I have brought it. But my suggestion is that you should not break that tube and disperse its contents."

"You seem to be growing unusually apprehensive, my dear Moroni. The appearance in Florence of this young electrical engineer seems to have quite upset you!" he laughed harshly. I could hear every word.

"I confess his presence here has not inspired me with confidence. We do not know the extent of his knowledge, or what he has discovered," replied the doctor. "If he establishes one fact—you know to what I refer—then he will become a very grave menace to us both."

"But surely he won't dare to reveal anything for his own sake. That is why I made the bribe a substantial one." [Pg 101]

"If he established that one fact to which I have referred, then it would be quite within the bounds of possibility that he might face the music, and lay bare the whole facts of the mystery of Stretton Street," Moroni remarked in a rather lower tone. "At present I think he will keep a still tongue."

"Then one thing is quite plain," said the millionaire. "He must not be allowed to prosecute his inquiries any further. And it is for you, Moroni, to rid us of this ever-growing menace. If he is allowed to go on, then we shall one day awake to find our secret revealed."

"I quite agree. But how shall we act?"

"Ah! I leave that to you," replied De Gex. "You have many ways and means within your power. He is a patient of yours," he added grimly.

"Yes. But I happen to know that he is sufficiently wide awake not to take any of my mixtures."

"Ah! Then he suspects you! You must act with greatest caution, Moroni. Act as you will, but we must, at all costs, get rid of this fellow."

"I suggested that after the affair at Stretton Street. It would then have been so very easy."

"I know! I was a fool! I did not foresee the consequences if he met and recognized the girl. Even now we do not know where and how he met her. But the menace to us is the same. We must get rid of him—and quickly, too! The trap must be baited—and what better bait than the girl herself?"

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## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

[Pg 102]

### LITTLE MRS. CULLERTON

For nearly half an hour Oswald De Gex and the Italian doctor, Moroni, sat chatting in the darkness.

De Gex apologized to his visitor for not offering him a cigarette, remarking that the striking of a match might reveal their presence to anyone strolling in the grounds, for guests at dances frequently have that habit.

"Indeed, after you have gone, Moroni, I am meeting the lady whom I mentioned, and shall walk with her outside here. I want to speak with her in private."

"But surely that is dangerous!" exclaimed the doctor instantly.

"Why?"

"If you intend to act as you say you should not hold any clandestine meeting with her," Moroni suggested.

"I shall take your advice and preserve this little tube intact," and he paused, "intact at least for the present," he added. "Hence there can be no harm in leaving the ballroom and coming out into the fresh air—eh?"

"In that case I see no risk."

"The only risk we run is in allowing young Garfield to make inquiries here, in Florence. When he saw me, I, of course, denied everything. But I know that he must have noticed how upset I was at his reappearance."

"Well, we have decided to suppress him, have we not?" said Moroni briefly. "And now it is getting late and my taxi is awaiting me down in Fiesole. So I had better be going."

"Have a care that the fellow does not meet her—not until you are quite prepared," the millionaire urged. "And lose no time in making ready. Each day's delay is increasingly dangerous." [Pg 103]

"I do not disregard the fact, signore," replied the Italian, and next moment they emerged from the little Greek temple, and having walked a short distance, they parted, De Gex returning to the house, while Moroni made his way back past the lake to the gate.

When the mysterious millionaire had disappeared, I approached the broad terrace which ran along the side of the house from which such a wonderful panorama of the Apennines was to be obtained. If he brought his lady guest out, as was his intention, then he no doubt would descend from the terrace, for I saw two couples walking there as I approached.

Beneath a tree I took cover and waited—waited to establish the identity of the person whom he had marked down as his next victim.

That night I had gained much knowledge of intense interest, yet it all served to puzzle me the more.

That Tito Moroni was his accomplice I had established beyond doubt, and equally that there had been a grave and deep-laid conspiracy against me. And further, it seemed to be intended that I should again meet the mysterious pale-faced girl in black, and that the meeting was meant to be fatal to me.

Fortune had certainly been upon my side that night, otherwise I might have acted in good faith and fallen into some cleverly-baited trap. That the doctor of the Via Cavezzo was a dangerous malefactor was proved by the airy manner in which he had brought to his rich client that little glass tube which I, of course, had not seen, but which he had no doubt put into the hands of his wealthy and unscrupulous host. [Pg 104]

The more I reflected as I stood beneath the great oleander, the more puzzled did I become. What was it that De Gex had shown the doctor beneath the pale light of the moon? It was evidently something which greatly surprised Moroni, and yet he had made but little comment concerning it.

But the chief mystery of all was the whereabouts of that poor inert girl Gabrielle Engledue. I waited, eager for the return of the tall, well-set-up man in evening clothes, the man who so much in the public eye was engaged in such a strange career of wickedness and crime.

It seemed incredible that the immensely rich man whose name was so constantly in the papers as a generous patron of the arts, and a pious philanthropist, should be implicated in such devil's doings as those of which I had already proved him to be the author.

The discordant clanging of that convent-bell again aroused me to a sense of my surroundings. I saw upon the terrace before me several men strolling, smoking cigarettes, and with them their fair partners wrapped in rich cloaks and furs. They had come out after supper to admire the wonderful moonlit scene, for before them rose the snow-tipped mountains in a long serrated range, the high Apennines which divide the Adriatic from the Mediterranean.

Suddenly, almost before I was aware of it, a man and a woman passed close to me. The figure revealed by the cold bright moon was that of De Gex, who had now put on a light coat, while at his side walked a slim, tall young woman wrapped warmly in a rich fur coat. The diamonds in her fair hair gleamed in the moonlight, but unfortunately she had passed into the shadow before I could gain a glimpse of her features. [Pg 105]

So that was the intended victim—the woman to whom the dangerous contents of that tiny glass tube was one day, sooner or later, to be administered.

They went forward towards the edge of the placid lake, hence I sprang upon the grass and followed them as noiseless as a cat. Little did the owner of the great Villa Clementini dream that I was lurking in such close vicinity.

They halted beside one of the ancient statues of yellow marble, a heavy-limbed representation of Bacchus crowned with vine leaves, where they admired the fairy-like scene. It was indeed glorious. Beneath the pale moonlight lay the placid lake like a mirror, for no breath stirred from the mountains, and beyond in the mystic light rose the snow-capped peaks far away beyond the chestnut forests of Vallombrosa.

There is a charm in all seasons and at all hours about those ancient villas of Tuscany; those country mansions of the nobles which have seen the tramp of men in armour and in plush, and bear upon them the crumbling escutcheons of races which have been rulers for five centuries, and whose present descendants are perhaps waiters in Paris, London, or New York.

The English visitors to Florence see outside the Florence Club effeminate elegants in English-made suits of blue serge, and brown boots, and they sigh to think that such specimens of humanity are the representatives of a noble race. Disguise it as you may, poor Italy is sadly decadent. Her glory has passed, her *nobile* are ruined and her labour enemies are, alas! bent upon putting her into the melting-pot. The gallant Italian army fought valiantly against the Tedesci. It saved Venice from the heel of the invader and it protected Dalmatia, where the population are Italians. But Italy to-day is not Italy of pre-war days, thanks to its paid agitators and its political scandals. [Pg 106]

With the bright moon shining across the huge oleander beneath which I had again taken cover, I listened intently. But De Gex speaking with his guest was too far off for me to distinguish anything he said.

That he treated her with the greatest courtesy was apparent. And that he spoke to her with the most entire confidence I realized by my own observation.

At once I stole noiselessly forward from one bush to another until I was close to where the pair stood. I trod softly upon the grass, my ears strained to catch any word.

The words I at last caught were few and uncertain, for De Gex was speaking in a low and highly confidential tone.

At last, however, on approaching a little nearer, I heard him exclaim:

"Jack, your husband, is a young fool! He has no discretion. He gambles on the Stock Exchange without any expert knowledge. He came up here to me yesterday afternoon and told me that he must have ten thousand pounds to tide him over, and prevent him being hammered. I sent him away, but I shall see that he has the money."

"How really good of you, Mr. De Gex!" exclaimed the girl—for as far as I could see she was hardly a woman. "I don't know how to thank you sufficiently. I know Jack is a born gambler. His father was on the Stock Exchange before him, and I suppose games of chance are in the breed of the Cullertons."

"Not in you, I hope, Dorothy," replied the millionaire. "You have had the misfortune to marry a gambler, and—well, my dear girl—I pity you. Gambling is worse than drink. The drunkard can be sickened and put off, but the gambler never. Now I want you to promise me one thing." [Pg 107]

"What is that?" she asked.

"I shall see that he has the money. But it will come through a second party, not through me. I do not wish to appear to lend him money, otherwise he will still continue his speculations, feeling that he has me behind him. Now you know the truth, Dorothy. But you must promise me to say nothing. Nobody must know—not even my wife."

"Oh! how very good of you to help Jack out of a hole!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll remain silent. But it really is awfully kind of you. I don't know how to thank you."

"I will do it for your sake, Dorothy," said De Gex, bending to her in confidence. "I am indebted to *you*—remember!"

"Ah! no!" cried the young woman, whose name apparently was Cullerton. "No! Please don't refer to that terrible affair!"

Her voice betrayed emotion and apprehension, while at that moment, as she turned her face to the light of the moon, I was able to get a full view of it. It was that of a very beautiful young woman of about twenty-three, rather *petite*, with fair bobbed hair, regular features, and sweet lips. But the expression upon her countenance was one of fear and apprehension.

"I have no desire to remember it," said her host. "We agreed at the time that it should be silence for silence. It was a bargain which we have kept ever since. You have married Jack Cullerton, and you are happy except that your husband is a born gambler. And of that he must be cured." [Pg 108]

"I know. I know!" she said hastily. "But earlier this evening you promised to tell me about Gabrielle. I must see her. She seems to have disappeared. Where is she?"

"In London, I believe."

"In London! Yet the last time you spoke of her you said she was in Turin, on her way here, to Florence."

Oswald De Gex laughed lightly.

"Yes. She came to Florence for a few days, but she has returned to London. Why are you so anxious to see her?"

"I want to see her about a matter which concerns Jack and myself—that's all," replied young Mrs. Cullerton.

"May I not know?" asked her host.

"It is a purely private matter," was her reply.

Then from the conversation that followed, it seemed as though the millionaire was apprehensive lest she should meet the mysterious Gabrielle, and I wondered whether it was in order to prevent them meeting that he entertained designs upon her life.

I recollected that little glass tube which he was carrying in secret in his pocket, and which the scoundrelly Italian had urged him to refrain from using because he might place his own life in jeopardy.

I listened to every word. De Gex was evidently most anxious to know why she sought Gabrielle so eagerly. And Gabrielle, I could only surmise, was the girl I had seen stark and dead in that

handsome room in Stretton Street.

That night of watchfulness had borne fruit. I had learnt from De Gex's own lips that another deep and subtle trap was to be laid for me—a trap baited with the tragic-faced girl herself. Further, I had established that he intended that, sooner or later, an accident should befall the dainty little woman in that rich ermine cloak, the woman with whom he was chatting so affably. Also I had learned her identity, and it now remained for me to forewarn her of what was intended.

[Pg 109]

The rich Englishman had talked for about a quarter of an hour with Dorothy Cullerton, when at last they returned to the house, while I made my way in the darkness back to the gate. When I arrived, however, I found that Moroni had locked it after him. I was therefore compelled to climb the wrought ironwork, and after several unsuccessful attempts succeeded in regaining the road.

It was long past midnight ere I found myself back in Fiesole, but I discovered a belated cab, and in it I drove back to Florence, full of grave reflections.

On the following day I bought in the Via Tornabuoni an English newspaper which publishes weekly a list of visitors to Florence, and from it discovered that Mr. and Mrs. Cullerton were living at the Villa Tassi, out at Montaguto, about three miles from the Porta Romana, on the opposite side of Florence. That same morning I took the steam tram from the Piazza della Signorina, and after three miles of dusty road, alighted at a spot beyond the little village of Galluzzo in the Val d'Enza. Crossing the brook I soon began to ascend the hill of Montaguto—a pretty eminence clothed with cypresses and olives—and was not long in discovering the neat, newly-built little villa, one of a number which are let furnished each season to wealthy foreigners. I noted as I passed that it was well-kept, that the garden was bright with flowers, even though it was winter, and that in the garage was a small light car which at the moment was being washed by an English chauffeur.

[Pg 110]

I longed to have some excuse to call upon Mrs. Cullerton, but could think of none. Therefore I returned to Florence and pursued fresh tactics. The afternoon I spent making inquiries regarding the Cullertons, and soon discovered that they were intimate friends of Monsieur Rameil, the French Consul, and his wife.

With this knowledge I lost no time in obtaining an introduction to the French Consul, and three days later received a card for one of Madame's Friday afternoons. Naturally I went, and to my delight Mrs. Cullerton was there also. She was a strikingly pretty young woman, and apparently extremely popular, judging by the manner in which two or three young Italian elegants danced attendance upon her. Shortly before I left my hostess introduced me to her, and naturally I endeavoured to make myself extremely agreeable. But was not the situation a strange one? And this pretty woman had been marked down for destruction by the mysterious millionaire, just as I had been!

Yet had I told anyone of the knowledge I had gained I would not have been believed, any more than would credence have been given to the story of my strange adventure in Stretton Street.

We chatted for perhaps ten minutes. She asked me where I was staying and how long I should be in Florence, and then, expressing a hope that we should meet again, I bowed and left her.

I had accomplished one step towards ascertaining the identity of the girl I had seen dead in London.

Several days passed, during which I kept a good look out in the streets for sight of Doctor Moroni's fair companion. But I was not successful. Perhaps she had gone to London, as my host of Stretton Street had asserted!

[Pg 111]

One afternoon, while haunting the streets, I suddenly encountered Mrs. Cullerton walking in the Via Tornabuoni, and, raising my hat, stopped to speak.

After a few seconds she recognized me, and I walked at her side chatting. Her car was waiting in the Piazza Santa Trinita, but before she entered it she had promised to send me a card for a little "at home" she was giving on the following Thursday.

Now, not until we had parted did it occur to me that De Gex might be also going there. In that case he certainly should not meet me. So I sought Robertson's aid concerning his master's engagements, and discovered that on Thursday morning the millionaire was going to Leghorn to join his yacht for a week's cruise across to Algiers.

Therefore I accepted Mrs. Cullerton's invitation, and found at the villa a number of pleasant, cosmopolitan people, whom I had already met at the French Consul's. I was introduced by my hostess to her husband, Jack, a smartly-dressed man, and a typical young member of the Stock Exchange. Afterwards I succeeded in having quite a long conversation with his wife.

Quite casually I mentioned the Villa Clementini, and its owner.

"Do you know him?" she asked with interest. "He is such a dear, generous old thing."

"I have met him once," I replied with affected unconcern. "They say he's a little eccentric—don't they?"

"His enemies say that," she replied, "but his friends are full of praise of him. He's the most charming and generous of men, and his great wealth allows him to perform all sorts of kind

[Pg 112]

actions. They say that he can't refuse anybody who asks for his influence or help."

I reflected that his influence was certainly a baneful one.

"Ah! I see you are one of his friends, Mrs. Cullerton!" I said, laughing.

"Yes—I confess I am."

"Then would you be surprised if I told you in strictest confidence that he is not your friend, but one of your bitterest enemies!" I said, lowering my voice, and looking straight into her wide-open blue eyes.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Garfield!" she said, also lowering her voice.

"I will explain one day, Mrs. Cullerton—one day when we are alone."

"When?" she whispered, for Madame Rameil was approaching at the moment.

"Whenever you like to make an appointment," I replied. "Only I must first hold you to absolute secrecy."

"That's agreed," whispered the pretty young woman. "To-morrow. I will be here alone at three o'clock," and then she held out her hand, and aloud said:

"Good-bye, Mr. Garfield. So sorry you have to run away so early. Good-bye!"

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## CHAPTER THE NINTH

[Pg 113]

### SOME PLAIN SPEAKING

Punctually at three o'clock next afternoon the buxom Italian maid in dainty apron, ushered me into Mrs. Cullerton's charming *salone*. From the long windows a magnificent view spread away across the green valley of the Ema to the great monastery of the Certosa, a huge mediæval pile which resembled a mediæval fortress standing boldly against the background of the rolling Apennines.

Scarcely had I stood there a moment when my blue-eyed young hostess, in a becoming black-and-cherry frock, entered, and greeting me, closed the door.

"Well, Mr. Garfield? It's really awfully good of you to trouble to come out to see me. I'm all excitement to know what you have to tell me about Mr. De Gex. He's gone yachting—as you perhaps know. Do sit down."

As I did so she passed me the cigarettes, and took one herself. Then, when I had held the match for her and had lit my own, I said:

"Well, Mrs. Cullerton, I really don't know how to commence. Somehow, I felt it my duty to come here to see you. I must admit that I have been manœuvring for several days in order to get an introduction to you, and to obtain an opportunity of seeing you alone. And yet——"

"Yes. I quite see that. I thought by your attitude in the Via Tornabuoni that you seemed very anxious to know me," and her lips relaxed into a pretty smile. [Pg 114]

"That is so. In order to—well, to warn you," I said very seriously.

"Warn me!—of what, pray?"

I hesitated. To be perfectly frank with her was, I saw, quite impossible. She might hear all I said and then inform De Gex. She was his friend. Or perhaps she would dismiss me and my story as pure invention. Hence I resolved to preserve my own secret concerning the Stretton Street Affair.

Looking straight into her face, I said:

"I'm here to warn you of a very grave personal danger."

"You are really most alarming, Mr. Garfield," she said in suspicion. "In what danger am I?"

"You are either in possession of some ugly fact concerning Mr. De Gex which he desires suppressed, or else you bar his way to some ambitious achievement."

Her face changed, and she held her breath. Though it was only for a second I saw that what I had suggested was the truth. Her slim white hand twitched nervously upon her lap.

"Some fact concerning Mr. De Gex!" she gasped in feigned surprise. "Who told you that!" she asked, her face blanching.

"I have not been told. But I know it, Mrs. Cullerton," was my reply. "I know that, though De Gex is assisting your husband out of a financial difficulty and pretends to be your good friend, he views you as his bitter enemy—as a person whose lips must, at all hazards, be closed."

"Really, Mr. Garfield, what you say is too extraordinary—too amazing! I don't understand you!" [Pg 115]

"I know it sounds most extraordinary," I said. "But first tell me if you know a certain Doctor Moroni, who lives in the Via Cavezzo?"

"Certainly. The doctor attends Mr. De Gex and his family. I first met him in London, about a year ago. Mr. De Gex holds him in very high esteem."

"Ah! Then you know the doctor."

"Of course. When he was in London he several times came to our house in Fitzjohn's Avenue."

"And your husband knows him?" I asked, looking her straight in the face. "Please tell me the truth," I urged.

"No. Jack has never met him—not to my knowledge."

I was silent for a few seconds. I had established a fact which I had all along suspected.

"Then he called in the daytime, when your husband was in the City—eh?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me, did you ever have any strange illness after Doctor Moroni had called?" I inquired very seriously.

"Illness? Why, no! Why do you ask such a curious question?"

"I have reasons for asking it, Mrs. Cullerton," was my reply. "I have called here as your friend, remember."

"But all this is most bewildering," she exclaimed with a nervous little laugh. "Why should I be in any personal peril?"

"Because you know something to the detriment of that wealthy and somewhat eccentric man," I replied. "Pardon me if I put another question to you. Are you acquainted with a girl named Gabrielle Engledue?"

"Gabrielle Engledue?" she repeated. "No, I have never heard the name. I know a Gabrielle— [Pg 116]  
Gabrielle Tennison—an old schoolfellow of mine."

"A tall, dark-haired girl?"

"Yes, she is rather tall, and dark-haired."

"Isn't her real name Engledue?" I asked quickly.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Is she not Mr. De Gex's niece?"

"He has no niece, has he?—except, of course, Lady Shalford, whom I know quite well."

"Where is Gabrielle Tennison?"

"In London—I believe."

"Are you certain she is not here, in Florence?"

"Mr. De Gex told me that she came to Florence for a few days——"

"To visit him—eh?"

"I suppose so. But she has returned to London."

"Do you know her address in London," I asked very anxiously. "I ask you this in our mutual interests, Mrs. Cullerton," I added confidentially.

"Yes. She lives with her mother in a maisonette in Longridge Road, Earl's Court, I forget the number, but you could easily find out."

"And she is there now, I presume?"

"I expect so—if what Mr. De Gex has told me is the truth."

"But will he ever tell you the truth?" I queried. "Recollect that although he poses as your husband's friend, he is nevertheless your enemy—because he fears you! Why is that?"

The pretty wife of the young London stockbroker hesitated. I saw that she was much perturbed by my question.

"I suppose he suspects that I know certain things," was her low, hard reply. "But he has been [Pg 117]  
very good to Jack on several occasions. He has prevented him from being hammered on the Stock Exchange, therefore I can only be grateful to him."

I looked the pretty woman straight in the face, and said:

"Grateful! Grateful to a man whose dastardly intention is, when the whim takes him, to send you to your grave, Mrs. Cullerton?"

"I—I really don't know what you mean. Are you mad? Do be more explicit," she cried. "Why do you make these terrible allegations against Mr. De Gex?"

"Please recollect, Mrs. Cullerton, that I am here first in your interests, and secondly in my own. You and I are now both marked down as victims, because both of us are in possession of certain knowledge which would, if exposed, bring obloquy and prosecution upon an exceedingly wealthy man. Your husband, yourself, and myself, are merely pawns in the clever game which this man is playing—a mysterious game, I admit, and one in which he is actively assisted by Doctor Moroni—but also one in which, if we are not both very wary, we shall find ourselves the victims of fatal circumstances."

My words seemed to impress the stockbroker's wife, for she asked: "Well—what shall I do?"

"Be perfectly frank with me," I replied promptly. "Both of us have all to lose if we close our eyes to the conspiracy against us on the part of your friend De Gex and his shrewd and unscrupulous accomplice, Tito Moroni."

"Moroni is one of the most popular doctors in Florence," she remarked.

"I'm perfectly aware of that," was my reply. "But there is no more dangerous criminal than the medical man who is beneath the thumb of a millionaire. There have been several before the assizes in various cities of Europe. Many, thanks alas! to the power of gold, have never been unmasked. There have been cases in Hungary, in France, in Italy, and in Russia—even one case in England which is recorded in a big file at Scotland Yard. But in that case there was no prosecution because money means influence, and influence means the breaking of those in office who dare to oppose it."

[Pg 118]

"Then how do you suggest that I should act, Mr. Garfield?" asked young Mrs. Cullerton. "It is distressing news to me that Mr. De Gex is my enemy—and I confess that at present I can scarcely credit it."

I longed to unbosom myself to her—to tell her of all that had occurred to me since that fateful November night when I had passed through Stretton Street, but I was not yet fully confident concerning her attitude towards me. It might be hostile. She might seek De Gex when he returned from Algiers and tell him of our interview! If she did, then all hope of elucidating the mystery of Gabrielle Engledue's death would be at once swept away.

Yet I held before me the fact that the millionaire, hand-in-glove with that scoundrelly Italian, intended to cast me into my grave. The Italians have all through the centuries been experts in secret assassination. The Doges of Venice, the Borgias, and the Medici have all had secret poisoners in their pay. The gay, careless race which laughs when the sun shines, are just the same to-day, after the war, as they were in the days of His Holiness Rodrigo Borgia. To-day your superstitious Italian criminal enters the church and prays to the Madonna that his *coup*—whatever it may be, from profiteering, picking pockets, or the secret assassination of an enemy—may be successful.

"I allege that Mr. De Gex is your enemy, Mrs. Cullerton," I said. "I have first-hand knowledge of it. Indeed, on the night of the ball at the Villa Clementini, he had in his pocket the wherewithal to bring upon you an illness which must inevitably prove fatal. He had a little glass tube which he had ordered Moroni to prepare, but which the doctor himself urged him not to break for fear of infecting himself and his family."

[Pg 119]

She sat staring at me open-mouthed.

"I—I really can't believe it!" she gasped. "Mr. De Gex would never act in such a dastardly manner towards me. We are friends—old friends."

"You may be, but I happen to know the truth," I declared. "He pretends friendship towards you, but his intentions are that your lips shall be closed. For some reason he fears you."

"Are you really quite serious?" she asked, looking me full in the face.

"I certainly am," I replied. "The reason I am here is to warn you to have a care of yourself. That some evil is intended, I know. Only I rely upon you to keep the information I have given you to yourself. Watch De Gex, but say nothing—*not a word*."

"I have already promised that I will remain silent," she remarked.

"You must also say no word to your husband. He is indebted to De Gex, hence he might tell him what I have said. And further, my name must never be mentioned to De Gex."

"Why not?"

"He would instantly guess the source of your information."

"But what is your motive for all this, Mr. Garfield?"

[Pg 120]

"My motive is a simple one. I am trying to find Gabrielle Engledue, and I am now wondering whether the girl I am seeking is not the same as the young lady you know as Gabrielle Tennison."

"Where did you meet this girl Engledue?" asked Mrs. Cullerton, with a queer inquisitive look.

I paused for a second.



"In London—at the house of a mutual friend."

Her expression caused me to ponder, for I discerned that she was inclined to doubt me.

"And why are you seeking her now?"

"I have a distinct object in view."

"You've—well, perhaps you've fallen in love with her—eh?" she laughed lightly.

"Not at all," I assured her. "I have a private, but very strong, motive in discovering her. I want to put to her certain questions."

"About what, Mr. Garfield? Come, it is now my turn to be a little inquisitive," and she laughed again.

"About a certain little matter in which we are mutually interested," was my evasive answer. Then, after a pause, I looked straight into her eyes, and added very earnestly: "I wonder whether if I should require your help, Mrs. Cullerton, you would assist me?"

"In what way?"

"At present I cannot tell. To be frank, I am striving to solve a great and inscrutable mystery. Just now I am amazed and bewildered. But I feel that you are the only person who could help me—because you and I are equally in peril."

"But, Mr. Garfield, I see no reason why I should be upon the brink of this mysterious abyss!" she cried. "You don't explain the situation sufficiently fully."

"Because at present I cannot do so. No one regrets it more than myself. There is a grim mystery—a very great mystery—and I intend, with your assistance, to escape my enemy and clear it up." [Pg 121]

"Who is your enemy?"

"Oswald De Gex! He is my enemy as well as yours," I said very seriously. "If you were in the possession of such facts as those I have gathered during the past week or so, you would be startled and—well, perhaps terrified. But I only again beg of you to have a care of yourself. You have promised silence, and I, on my part, will carry on my search for the truth."

"The truth of what?"

"The truth concerning Gabrielle Engledue."

The pretty little woman again looked at me very straight in the face for some moments without speaking. Then, with a strange hardness about her mouth, she said:

"Mr. Garfield, take it from me, you will never discover what you are in search of. The truth is too well hidden."

"What? Then you know something—eh?" I cried quickly.

"Yes. It is true!" she answered in a low, hard voice. "I do know something—something of a certain secret that can never pass my lips!"

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## CHAPTER THE TENTH

[Pg 122]

### MONSIEUR SUZOR AGAIN

Mrs. Cullerton's words held me breathless.

At first I believed that I might wring the truth from her lips, but I quickly saw that she intended to preserve her secret at all costs. Whether she actually believed what I had told her concerning her own peril was doubtful. In any case, she seemed in some strange manner held powerless and fascinated by the rich man who had saved her speculating husband from ruin.

I remained there for still another quarter of an hour until her maid announced a visitor, when I was compelled to rise and take my leave.

For a few days longer I remained in Florence; then I left for London. On entering the Calais express at the Gare du Nord in Paris on my way home, I was agreeably surprised to find among my fellow travellers to England the affable French banker whom I had met on that memorable journey from York to London. He recognized me at once, and I inquired why he was not, as usual, crossing by air to Croydon.

"Ah!" he laughed. "The last time I crossed three weeks ago we went into a thick fog over the Channel, and it was not very comfortable. So I prefer the rail just now."

On this occasion we exchanged cards. His name was Gaston Suzor, and between Paris and Calais we discussed many things, for he was a well-informed man and a true hater of the Boches. On the steamer we strolled upon the deck together, and we passed quite a pleasant journey in company. [Pg 123]

He was surprised that I had been in Italy, but I explained that I had been granted long leave of absence by my firm, and that I had gone to Florence upon private affairs.

We parted at Charing Cross, Monsieur Suzor to go to the Carlton, and I home to our little flat in Rivermead Mansions.

A note lay upon the dining-room table. Hambledon was away in Cardiff, and he had left word in case I should return unexpectedly. The place was cold and fireless, and I was glad to go over to the Claredon to have my dinner.

My one thought was of Gabrielle Tennison, who lived with her mother in a maisonette at Earl's Court. So I took a taxi to Longridge Road, and after numerous inquiries at neighbouring shops in Earl's Court Road, I discovered in which house lived Mrs. Tennison and her daughter. The hour was late, therefore I felt that it was useless to keep observation upon the place in the hope of the girl coming forth.

I had no excuse to make a call. Besides, I might, if I acted indiscreetly, destroy all my chances of solving the strange enigma.

Therefore not until ten o'clock on the following morning did I take up my vigilant watch at the end of the road, at a spot from which I had full view of the house in question. My watch proved a long and weary one, for not until three o'clock in the afternoon was my patience rewarded.

The front door suddenly opened, and down the steps came the slim figure of a girl, followed by a woman. As they approached me I saw that it was the girl I had seen with Moroni in Florence, while the woman was, from her dress, evidently an old servant.

The girl of mystery was attired quite smartly in black, her appearance being very different from the shabby figure she presented in Florence. But her beautiful countenance was just as pathetic, with that strange set expression of ineffable sadness. She passed me by without glancing at me, while the stout, homely woman at her side held her arm linked in hers.

[Pg 124]

They turned into Earl's Court Road and walked towards Kensington High Street, while I followed at a respectable distance. I could not fail to notice the grace of carriage of the girl whose listless attitude was so mysterious, and whose exact whereabouts Oswald De Gex was concealing from his friend, Mrs. Cullerton. But the one point which puzzled me sorely was whether the girl walking in front of me all unconscious of my presence was the same that I had seen dead at Stretton Street, and for whom I had given a false certificate to cover up what had evidently been a crime with malice aforethought.

The pair now and then became lost in the crowd of foot-passengers in busy Kensington, but I followed them. Occasionally they paused to look into Barker's shop windows, but the interest was evidently on the part of the serving-woman, for Gabrielle Tennison—or whatever her actual name—seemed to evince no heed of things about her. She walked like one in a dream, with her thoughts afar off, yet her face was the sweetest, most beautiful, and yet the saddest I had ever witnessed. Tragedy was written upon her pale countenance, and I noticed that one or two men and women in passing the pair turned to look back at them. In that face of flawless beauty a strange story was written—a mystery which I was strenuously seeking to solve.

Presently they entered Kensington Gardens, strolling along the gravelled walks beneath the bare, leafless trees that were so black with London's grime. The day was cold, but bright, hence quite a number of persons were walking there, together with the usual crowd of nursemaids with the children of the well-to-do from the Hyde Park and Kensington districts.

[Pg 125]

The pair passed leisurely half-way up the Broad Walk, when they presently rested upon a seat nearly opposite the great façade of Kensington Palace.

I saw that I had not been noticed either by the old servant or by her mysterious young mistress, therefore I sank quickly upon a seat some distance away, but in such a position that I could still see them as they talked together.

Was Gabrielle Engledue living—or was she dead? Or was Gabrielle Tennison and Gabrielle Engledue one and the same person? A living face is different from that of the same person when dead, hence the great problem presenting itself.

It seemed as though in conversation the girl became animated, for she gesticulated slightly as though in angry protest at some remark of her companion, and then suddenly I had a great surprise.

Coming down the Broad Walk I saw a figure in a grey overcoat and soft brown hat which I instantly recognized. He walked straight to where the pair were seated, lifted his hat, and then seated himself beside the girl.

The man was my French friend, Suzor!

That they had gone there on purpose to meet him was now quite clear, for after a few moments the old woman laughed, rose and walked on, in order to leave the girl alone with the Frenchman. What could be the meaning of that clandestine meeting?—for clandestine it was, or Monsieur Suzor would have called at Longridge Road. Possibly they expected that they might be watched, hence they had met as though by accident at that spot where they believed they would not be observed.

[Pg 126]

Gaston Suzor was a shrewd, clever man. But what did this friendship with Gabrielle Tennison denote? As I watched I saw him speaking very earnestly. For some time she sat with her gloved hands idly in her lap listening to his words without comment. Then she shook her head, and put up her hands in protest. Afterwards by her attitude she seemed to be appealing to him, while he remained obdurate and unperturbed.

I longed to overhear their conversation, but in the fading light of that brief wintry afternoon it was impossible to approach closer. I could only sit and watch. My eyes were strained to see every gesture of the pair, now that the stout figure of the girl's companion had disappeared towards the Bayswater Road. In that oasis in the desert of aristocratic London one can obtain quite sylvan surroundings. True, the trees and vegetation are covered with a film of grime from the millions of smoking chimneys of the giant metropolis, still Kensington Gardens ever possesses a charm all its own as a clandestine meeting-place for well-born lovers and ill-born loafers, for nursemaids and soldiers, and for persons of both sexes who wish for a little quiet talk in the open air in order so often to clear a hectic atmosphere.

Such I judged to be the case between Gaston Suzor and Gabrielle Tennison.

At first the girl sat inert with downcast eyes listening to the man. But suddenly she raised her hands in quick protest again, and apparently became resentful—even angry. Then when he spoke some reassuring words she became calmer.

As I sat there shrewdly watching, I could not help reflecting upon a still further problem which now presented itself. The very last person in the world whom I should have suspected of being connected with the strange affair at Stretton Street was my affable friend the French banker. I now began to wonder if my first meeting with him in the express train between York and King's Cross just before my amazing adventure had been simply by chance, or had it any connection between that meeting and the trap which had, without a doubt, been so cunningly prepared for me as I passed through Stretton Street to my uncle's house on the following evening.

[Pg 127]

The fact that I had again met the mysterious Suzor at the Gare du Nord, in Paris, just as I was on my way back to London to pursue further inquiries was, in itself, suspicious. I confess that I sat utterly bewildered. One thing was plain, namely, that he had no suspicion that I was keeping such close observation upon Gabrielle. I knew where she lived, and to me he had given his hotel address.

At last, after quite twenty minutes of serious conversation, the stout, flat-footed servant returned, and after a few pleasant words with her, Suzor rose, and raising his hat, left them.

Instantly it occurred to me that, as I knew the girl's abode, it would be more useful perhaps to watch the movements of my friend the French banker.

He took the path which skirted the lake, and then cut down the straight way which leads to Alexandra Gate into Rotten Row, while I followed him far behind though I kept him well in sight. He went swiftly at a swinging pace, for he had apparently grown cold while seated there in the north wind. The ground was hard and frosty, and the sky grey and lowering, with every evidence that a snowstorm might be expected.

He walked the whole length of Rotten Row, that leafy way which is so animated when social London disports itself in the season, and which on a black wintry afternoon, when the smart set are on the Riviera or in Egypt, is so dull and deserted. At Hyde Park Corner he turned along Piccadilly, until he hailed a passing taxi, to the driver of which he gave deliberate instructions.

[Pg 128]

I glanced around, and very fortunately saw another disengaged taxi, which I entered, giving the man instructions to keep the other in view, with a promise of double fare. Instantly the man entered into the spirit of the enterprise, and away we went towards the Circus, and thence by way of Oxford Street to the Euston Road, where before a small private hotel quite close to the station Suzor descended, and, paying the man, entered.

For three hours I waited outside, but he did not emerge. Then I went to the Carlton, and from the reception-clerk ascertained that Monsieur Suzor was staying there, but he did not always sleep there. Sometimes he would be absent for two or three nights. He went away into the country, the smart young clerk believed.

Hence I established the curious fact that Gaston Suzor when in London had two places of abode, one in that best-known hotel, and the other in the obscurity of a frowsy house patronized by lower-class visitors to London.

What could be the motive, I wondered?

I returned to the Carlton at midnight and inquired for Monsieur Suzor. The night-clerk told me that he had not yet returned.

So I went back to the cold cheerlessness of Rivermead Mansions, and slept until the following morning.

At each turn I seemed to be confronted by mystery which piled upon mystery. Ever before my eyes I saw that handsome girl lying cold and lifeless, and I had forged a certificate in the name of a well-known medical man, upon which her body had been reduced to ashes! That I had acted as accomplice to some cunning and deliberate crime I could not disguise from myself. It was now up

[Pg 129]

to me to make amends before God and man, to strive to solve the enigma and to bring the guilty persons to justice.

This was what I was endeavouring, with all my soul, to accomplish.

Yet the point was whether Gabrielle Engledue was really dead, or whether she still existed in the person of Gabrielle Tennison. That was the first fact for me to establish.

Next morning I rose early and gazed across the cold misty Thames to the great factories and wharves upon the opposite bank. The outlook was indeed dull and dispiriting, I stood recalling how Moroni had walked with the beautiful girl in the streets of Florence, unwillingly it seemed, for he certainly feared lest his companion be recognized. I also recollected the strange conversation I had heard with my own ears, and the curious attitude which little Mrs. Cullerton had adopted towards me, even though she had revealed to me the whereabouts of Gabrielle Tennison.

My breakfast was ready soon after eight o'clock, and afterwards I went to Earl's Court to watch the house in Longridge Road. By dint of careful inquiries in the neighbourhood I was told that Mrs. Tennison had gone away a few days before—to Paris, they believed.

"The young lady, Miss Tennison, appears to be rather peculiar," I remarked casually to a woman at a baker's shop near by, after she had told me that she served them with bread.

"Yes, poor young lady!" replied the woman. "She's never been the same since she was taken ill last November. They say she sustained some great shock which so upset her that her mind is now a little affected. Old Mrs. Alford, the servant there, tells me that the poor girl will go a whole day and never open her mouth. She's like one dumb!"

[Pg 130]

"How very curious!" I remarked. "I wonder what kind of shock it was that caused such a change in her? Was she quite all right before November?"

"Perfectly. She was a bright clever girl, and used often to come in here to me for chocolate and cakes. She was full of life and merriment. It is really pathetic to see her as she is nowadays. She seems to be brooding over something, but what it is nobody can make out."

"Very remarkable," I said. "I've noticed her about, and have wondered at her attitude—like many others, I suppose."

"Yes. Her mother has taken her to a number of mental specialists, I hear, but nobody seems to be able to do her any good. They say she's suffered from some shock, but they can't tell exactly what it is, because the young lady seems to have entirely lost her memory over a certain period."

"Is Mrs. Tennison well off?" I asked.

"No—the reverse, I should think," the baker's wife replied. "I've heard that Mr. Tennison was a very rich man, but when he died it was found that he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the widow was left very poorly off."

It is curious what intimate knowledge the little tradespeople glean about their neighbours, even in London. From the woman I gathered one or two facts of interest.

I inquired if Mrs. Tennison had many visitors, whereupon she replied in the negative, and added:

"There used to be an Italian gentleman who called very often a few weeks ago. He often walked out with the young lady. Somebody said he was a doctor, but I don't know if he was."

[Pg 131]

I asked the woman to tell me what he was like, when she gave me an accurate description of the mysterious doctor of the Via Cavezzo!

So Moroni had visited her there—in Longridge Road!

I tried to ascertain if Gaston Suzor had been there also, but my informant had no knowledge of him. She had never seen him walking with Gabrielle Tennison, as she had so often seen the Italian.

I remained for nearly half an hour chatting, retiring, of course, when she was compelled to serve customers, and then I left her and walked round to the house in Longridge Road, where I watched a little while, and then returned to the Carlton.

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## CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

[Pg 132]

### THE ABSOLUTE FACTS

"Monsieur Suzor has not yet returned," was the reply of the smart reception-clerk when I inquired for the French banker. "But he is often away for two or three days."

I left the hotel, and taking a taxi to the Euston Road made a thorough examination of the high shabby house with its smoke-grimed lace curtains, a place which bore over the fan-light the words "Private Hotel." In the broad light of day it looked a most dull, uninviting place; more so

even than its neighbours. There are many such hotels in the vicinity of Euston Station, and this seemed the most wretched of them all, for the windows had not been cleaned for many months, while the steps badly wanted scrubbing.

After I had thoroughly examined the place in front, I went round to the back, where I discovered, to my surprise, that the house had an exit at the rear through a mews into a drab, dull street which ran parallel. Then, for the first time, the thought occurred to me that on the previous day the Frenchman might have entered by the front door and passed out by the back into the next street!

I waited an hour idling about, and then I went boldly to the door, and knocked.

A black-haired, slatternly woman in a torn and soiled apron opened the door slightly.

"We're full up," she snapped before I could speak. "We haven't any room to let."

[Pg 133]

"I don't require a room," I replied politely. "I've called to see the French gentleman you have staying here—Monsieur Suzor."

I thought she started at mention of the name, for she still held the door ajar as though to prevent me from peering inside.

"We've got no French gent a-staying 'ere," she replied. "You've made a mistake."

"But I saw him enter here last night."

"You must 'ave been mistaken," the woman said. "'E might 'ave gone next door. They 'ave a lot of visitors."

"But you are full up—eh?"

"Yes—with our reg'lar residents," she answered promptly. But from her nervousness of manner I knew she was not telling the truth. I was positive that Suzor had entered there, but she denied all knowledge of him. Why?

Without a doubt, while I had waited for him to emerge, he had passed out by the back way. If so, was it possible that he had seen and recognized me, and wished to escape unseen?

The house was certainly one of mystery. The woman was palpably perturbed by my inquiry, and she seemed relieved when I turned away with feigned disappointment.

"Try next door," she suggested, and disappeared.

As I walked along Euston Road in the direction of Tottenham Court Road, I fell to wondering whether that frowsy house was one of those which exist in various quarters of London where thieves and persons hiding from the police can find sanctuary, and whether Suzor, knowing that I had seen him, had escaped me by passing through to the back and thus getting away!

[Pg 134]

I longed to know the character of the serious conversation he had had with Gabrielle Tennison. That indeed was my object to discover, hence that afternoon I still pursued my bold tactics and at about three o'clock I rang the bell in Longridge Road.

That act, the true consequences of which I never dreamed, eventually brought upon me a strange and sensational series of complications and adventures so remarkable that I sometimes think that it is only by a miracle I am alive to set down the facts in black and white.

The old woman-servant, Mrs. Alford, opened the door, whereupon I said:

"I trust you will excuse me, but as a matter of fact I am desirous of a few minutes' private conversation with you."

She looked askance at me, and naturally. I was a perfect stranger, and servants do not care to admit strangers to the house when their mistress is absent.

"I know that this is Mrs. Tennison's house," I went on, "and also that you are left in charge of Miss Gabrielle. It is about her that I wish to consult you. I think I may be able to tell you something of interest," and I handed her my card.

Mrs. Alford read the name, but at first she seemed rather disinclined to admit me. Indeed, not until I had further whetted her curiosity by again telling her that I could give her some interesting information, did she show me upstairs to the cosy maisonnette on the first floor. It was a large house which had been divided into two residences, one the basement and ground floor, and the other the first and second floors. It was in the latter that Mrs. Tennison lived.

She ushered me into a pretty drawing-room, small, but very tastefully furnished. In the adjoining room someone was playing a piano; no doubt it was Gabrielle.

[Pg 135]

"Well, Mrs. Alford," I began. "I have ventured to call here because I have learned of Miss Gabrielle's unfortunate mental condition, and perhaps I may have a key to it."

"What—do you know something, sir?" asked the stout buxom woman, for the first time impressed by my seriousness. "Do you know anything of what happened?"

"Perhaps," was my non-committal reply. "But first, I wish you to respect my confidence. I know

you'll do that in the interests of the poor young lady."

"I'll do anything in her interests, sir," she replied, and invited me to take a seat, she herself remained standing, as a servant should.

"Well, then, say nothing to your mistress, or to anyone else regarding my visit. First, I want you to answer one or two questions so as to either confirm or negative certain suspicions which I hold."

"Suspicions of what?" she asked.

"I will reveal those in due course," I replied. "Now, tell me what happened to Miss Gabrielle that she should be in her present mental state?"

"Nobody can tell, sir. She went out one evening in November to go to her dancing lesson, and was not seen again until six days later, when she was found on the Portsmouth Road half-way between Liphook and Petersfield. She had evidently walked a considerable distance and was on her way towards London, when she collapsed at the roadside. A carter discovered her, gave warning to the police at Petersfield, and she was taken to the hospital, where it was found that her memory had entirely gone. She could not recognize her mother or anyone else."

[Pg 136]

"On what date did she disappear?" I asked breathlessly.

"On November the seventh."

I held my breath. It was on the day of my startling adventure.

"Would you describe to me the exact circumstances?" I asked eagerly. "I may be able to throw a very interesting light upon the affair."

The woman hesitated. Perhaps it was but natural.

"Well," she said at last. "My mistress is away. I think you ought to see her, sir."

"Why, Mrs. Alford? You are the trusted servant of the family, and surely you know the whole facts?"

"I do," she answered in a low, tense voice. "They are most remarkable."

"Then tell me all you know, and in return I will try to explain some matters which are no doubt to you and to Mrs. Tennison a mystery."

"Well, after tea on the day in question, the seventh of November, Miss Gabrielle went out to go to Addison Road to Mrs. Gill's dancing class. She was in the best of health and in high spirits because she had that morning received an invitation to go and stay with her cousin Leonora at Newmarket on the following Wednesday. As far as we know she had not a single trouble in the world."

"She had no admirers—eh?"

"Yes, several. But she had no serious flirtations, as far as we can make out," replied Mrs. Alford. "Her mother had gone to pay a visit, and when Miss Gabrielle went out she told me that she would be home at nine o'clock. Though we waited till midnight she did not return. We remained up all night, and next morning when I went to Mrs. Gill, in Addison Road, I found that she had left there at half-past six to return home. We then went to Kensington Police Station, and gave her description to the police."

[Pg 137]

"What was their theory?" I asked.

"They thought she had left home of her own accord—that she had a lover in secret. At least, the inspector hinted at that suggestion."

"Of course her mother was frantic," I remarked. "But had you no suspicion of any person posing as her friend?"

"None. It was not till six days later—about one o'clock in the day, when a constable called and told Mrs. Tennison that a young lady answering the description of her daughter had been found at the roadside, and had been taken to the cottage hospital at Petersfield. We both took the next train from Waterloo, and on arrival at the hospital found the poor girl lying in bed. But so strange was her manner that she was unable to recognize either of us. All she could say were the words 'Red, green and gold!' and she shuddered in horror as though the colours terrified her. These words she constantly repeated—'red, green and gold!'—'red, green and gold!'"

"What was the doctor's opinion?"

"He was as much puzzled as we were, sir. Apparently my poor young mistress was found early in the morning lying in the hedge on the main Portsmouth Road. Her clothes were wet, for it had rained during the night. Her boots were very muddy, and her clothes in an awful state. She seemed as if she had wandered about for hours. But all she could say to us were the words: 'Red, green and gold.'"

"Did not she recognize her mother?" I inquired.

"No, sir. She hasn't recognized her—even now!"

"Doctors have seen her, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, half a dozen of them—including Doctor Moroni, the great Italian doctor. He took her to Florence for treatment, but it did her no good—none in the least."

"How did you know Moroni?" I asked quickly.

"I think he became interested in her through one of the doctors to whom Mrs. Tennison took her."

"Mrs. Tennison did not know Moroni before this affair?" I inquired.

"No, sir. Not to my knowledge. He's a very nice gentleman, and has been awfully kind to Miss Gabrielle," replied Mrs. Alford. "Like all the other doctors he thinks that she has sustained some very severe shock—but of what nature nobody can tell."

"What other doctor has seen her?" I asked.

"Oh!—well, Sir Charles Wendover, in Cavendish Square, has taken a great interest in her. He has seen her several times, but seems unable to restore her to her normal state of mind."

Sir Charles was one of our greatest mental specialists, I knew, and if he had been unable to do anything, then her case must be hopeless.

"But Doctor Moroni took her away to Italy," I said. "For what reason?"

"He took her to Professor Casuto, of Florence—I think that's the name—but he could do nothing, so she was brought back again."

"Now tell me frankly, Mrs. Alford," I said, looking the stout, well-preserved woman full in the face. "Have you ever heard the name of De Gex—a rich gentleman who lives in Stretton Street, just off Park Lane?"

"De Gex!" she repeated, her countenance assuming a blank expression. "Yes, I've heard of him. I've read of him in the papers. He's a millionaire, they say." [Pg 139]

"You have never heard of him in connexion with Miss Tennison? Is she acquainted with him?"

"Not to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

"I have a distinct reason for asking," was my reply. "Remember that I am seeking to solve the enigma of your young mistress's present extraordinary state of mind. Any information you can give me will assist me towards that end."

As I spoke I heard a sweet contralto voice in the adjoining room break out into a song from one of the popular revues. It was Gabrielle's voice, I knew.

"All the information I possess, sir, is at your disposal," the woman assured me. "I only wish Mrs. Tennison was here to answer your questions."

"But you know as much as she does," I said. "Now tell me—what is your theory? What happened to your young mistress during the time she disappeared?"

Mrs. Alford lifted her hands in dismay.

"What can we think? She went away quite bright and happy. When she was found wandering on the road between London and Portsmouth her memory was a blank. She was haggard, worn, and much aged—aged in those few days of her absence. She could remember nothing, and all she could repeat were those strange words 'Red, green and gold.'"

"I wonder why those colours were so impressed upon her memory?" I remarked.

"Ah! That is what puzzles the doctors so. Each evening, just as it grows dark, she sits down and is silent for half an hour, with eyes downcast as though thinking deeply. Then she will suddenly start up and cry, 'Ah! I see—I see—yes—that terrible red, green and gold! Oh! it's horrible—bewildering—fascinating—red, green and gold!' The three colours seem to obsess her always at nightfall. That is what Doctor Moroni told me." [Pg 140]

I paused for a few moments.

"You've never heard her speak of Mr. De Gex? You're quite sure?"

"Quite," was Mrs. Alford's reply. "My young mistress was studying singing at the Royal Academy of Music. Hark! You hear her now! Has she not a beautiful voice? Ah, sir—it is all a great tragedy! It has broken her mother's heart. Only to think that to-day the poor girl is without memory, and her brain is entirely unbalanced. 'Red, green and gold' is all that seems to matter to her. And whenever she recollects it and the words escape her drawn lips she seems petrified by horror."

What the woman told me was, I realized, the actual truth. And yet when I recollected that I had seen the dark-eyed victim lying dead in that spacious room in the house of Mr. De Gex in Stretton Street, I became utterly bewildered. I had seen her dead there. I had held a mirror to her half-open lips and it had not become clouded. Yet in my ears there now sounded the sweet tuneful strains of that bird-song from "Joy Bells."

Truly, the unfortunate girl possessed a glorious voice, which would make a fortune upon the

concert platform or the stage.

I did my level best to obtain more information concerning the Italian doctor and the man De Gex, but the woman could tell me absolutely nothing. She was concealing nothing from me—that I knew.

It was only when I mentioned the French banker, Monsieur Suzor, that she started and became visibly perturbed.

"I have no knowledge of the gentleman," she declared. Yet had I not seen them together in Kensington Gardens? [Pg 141]

"I don't know whether he is known to you as Suzor," I said. Then I described him as accurately as I could.

But the woman shook her head. For the first time she now lied to me. With my own eyes I had seen the man approach her and the girl, and after they had greeted each other, she had risen and left the girl alone with him.

Curiously enough when the pair were alone together they seemed to understand each other. I recollected it all most vividly.

To say the least it was strange why, being so frank upon other details, she so strenuously denied all knowledge of the affable Frenchman who had been my fellow-traveller from York almost immediately preceding my strange adventures in the heart of London.

My conversation with her had been, to say the least, highly illuminating, and I had learnt several facts of which I had been in ignorance. But this fixed assertion that she knew nothing of the elusive Frenchman aroused my suspicions.

What was she hiding from me?

I felt that she was concealing some very essential point—one that might well prove the clue to the whole puzzling enigma.

And while we spoke the girl's clear contralto rang out, while she herself played the accompaniment.

At length I saw that I could obtain no further information from the servant, therefore I begged to be introduced to her young mistress, assuring her of my keen interest in the most puzzling problem.

Apparently relieved that I pressed her no further regarding the handsome but insidious Frenchman, the woman at once ushered me into the adjoining room—a small but well-furnished one—where at the grand piano sat the girl whose eyes were fixed, though not sightless as I had believed when in Florence. [Pg 142]

She turned them suddenly upon my companion, and stopped playing.

"Ah! dear Alford!" she exclaimed, "I wondered if you were at home." Then she paused. She apparently had no knowledge of my presence, for she had not turned to me, though I stood straight in her line of gaze. "I thought you had gone out to see Monsieur—to tell him my message." She again paused, and drew her breath.

I stood gazing upon her beautiful face, dark, tragic and full of mystery. She sat at the piano, her white fingers inert upon the keys.

She wore a simple navy blue frock, cut low in the neck with a touch of cream upon it, and edged with scarlet piping—a dress which at that moment was the mode.

Yet her pale, blank countenance was indeed pathetic, a face upon which tragedy was written. I stood for a moment gazing upon her, perplexed, bewildered and breathless in mystery.

I spoke. She rose from her seat, and turned to me.

Her reply, low and tense, staggered me!

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## CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

[Pg 143]

### "RED, GREEN AND GOLD!"

"I know you!" she cried, staring at me as though transformed by terror. "They told me you would come! You are my enemy—you are here to kill me!"

"To kill you, Miss Tennison!" I gasped. "No, I am certainly not your enemy. I am your friend!"

She looked very hard at me, and I noticed that her lips twitched slightly.

"You—you are Mr. Garfield—Hugh Garfield?" she asked, her hands quivering nervously.



"Yes. That is my name," I replied. "How do you know it?"

"They—they told me. They told me in Florence. The doctor pointed you out. He told me that you were my worst enemy—that you intend to kill me!"

"Doctor Moroni told you that?" I inquired kindly.

"Yes. One day you were in the Via Tornabuoni and he made me take note of you. It was then that he told me you were a man of evil intentions, and warned me to be wary of you."

I paused. Here was yet another sinister action on the part of Moroni! Besides, I was unaware that he had realized I had watched him!

"Ah! yes, I see," I replied, in an attempt to humour her, for she was very sweet and full of grace and beauty. "The doctor tried to set you against me. And yet, strangely enough, I am your friend. Why should he seek to do this?"

"How can I tell?" replied the girl in a strange blank voice. "But he evidently hates you. He told me that you were also his enemy, as well as mine. He said that it was his intention to take steps to prevent you from seeking mischief against both of us."

[Pg 144]

This struck me as distinctly curious. Though the poor girl's mind was unbalanced it was evident that she could recollect some things, while her memory did not serve her in others. Of course it was quite feasible that Moroni, on discovering that I was on the alert, would warn her against me.

Suddenly, hoping to further stir the chords of her memory, I asked:

"Have you seen Mr. De Gex lately?"

"Who?" she inquired blankly.

"Mr. Oswald De Gex—who lives in Stretton Street."

She shook her head blankly.

"I'm afraid I—I don't know him," she replied. "Who is he?"

"Surely you know Stretton Street?" I asked.

"No—where is it?" she inquired in that strange inert manner which characterized her mentality.

I did not pursue the question further, for it was evident that she now had no knowledge of the man in whose house I had seen her lying—apparently dead. And if she were not dead whose body was it that had been cremated? That was one of the main points of the problem which, try how I would, I failed to grasp.

Would the enigma ever be solved?

As she stood in her mother's cosy little drawing-room Gabrielle Tennison presented a strangely tragic figure. In the grey London light she was very beautiful it was true, but upon her pale countenance was that terribly vacant look which was the index of her overwrought brain. Her memory had been swept away by some unknown horror—so the doctors had declared. And yet she seemed to remember distinctly what Doctor Moroni had alleged against me in Florence!

[Pg 145]

Therefore I questioned her further concerning the Italian, and found that she recollected quite a lot about him.

"He has been very kind to you—has he not?" I asked.

"Yes. He is an exceedingly kind friend. He took me to see several doctors in Florence and Rome. All of them said I had lost my memory," and she smiled sweetly.

"And haven't you lost your memory?"

"A little—perhaps—but not much."

Here Mrs. Alford interrupted.

"But you don't recollect what happened to you when you were away, until you were found wandering near Petersfield. Tell us, dear."

"No—no, not exactly," the girl answered. "All I recollect is that it was all red, green and gold—oh! such bright dazzling colours—red, green and gold! At first they were glorious—until—until sight of them blinded me—they seemed to burn into my brain—eh!" And she drew back and placed her right arm across her eyes as though to shut out from her gaze something that appalled her. "There they are!" she shrieked. "I see them again—always the same, day and night—red, green and gold!—red, green and gold!"

I exchanged glances with the woman Alford. It was apparent that the shock the girl had sustained had been somehow connected with the colours red, green and gold.

I tried to obtain from her some faint idea of the nature of what she had witnessed, but she was quite unable to explain. That she had fallen victim to some deep-laid plot was evident.

She remembered much of her visit to Florence, I found, for when I recalled the great Duomo, where I had first seen her with Moroni, she became quite talkative and told me how much she admired the magnificent monuments—the Battistero, the Bigallo, Giotto's campanile and the magnificent pictures in the Pitti and Uffizi.

Moroni had apparently also taken her to Rome, presumably to consult another Italian professor, for she spoke vaguely of the Corso and St. Peter's and described the Forum in such a manner that she must have visited it.

While I sat chatting with her it struck me that in the blank state of her mind certain things stood out very prominently—a mental state well known to alienists—while others were entirely blotted out.

I referred to the millionaire who lived in Stretton Street, but again she declared, and with truth, that she had no recollection of him.

"Perhaps, Miss Tennison, you knew him under some other name," I said, and then proceeded to describe minutely the handsome, rather foreign-looking man who had bribed me to give that certificate of death.

"Have you an uncle?" I asked presently, recollecting that the man at Stretton Street had declared the victim to be his niece.

"I have an uncle—my mother's brother—he lives in Liverpool."

Again I fell to wondering whether the beautiful girl before me was actually the same person whose death I had certified to be due to heart disease, and who, according to the official records, had been cremated. She was very like—and yet? Well, the whole affair was a problem which each hour became more inscrutable.

Still the fact remained that Gabrielle Tennison had disappeared suddenly on November the seventh, the night I had met with my amazing adventure. [Pg 147]

In reply to my further questions, as she sat staring blankly into my face with those great dark eyes of hers, I at last gathered that Doctor Moroni, hearing of her case from a specialist in Harley Street, to whom she had been taken by the police-surgeon, had called upon her mother, and had had a long interview with her. Afterwards he had called daily, and later Mrs. Tennison had allowed him to take her daughter to Florence to consult another specialist at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova.

"I think you know a Mrs. Cullerton," I remarked at last.

The effect of my words upon her was almost electrical.

"Dolly Cullerton!" she shrieked. "Ah! Don't mention that woman's name! Please do not mention her!"

"I believed that she was a friend of yours," I said, much surprised.

"Friend? No, enemy—a bitter enemy!"

"Then you have quarrelled? She was once your friend—eh? Over what have you quarrelled?"

"That is my own affair!" she snapped in apparent annoyance. "If you know her, don't trust her. I warn you!" Then she added: "She is a wicked woman."

"And her husband, Jack?"

"Ah! he's an excellent fellow—far too good for her!"

"Why do you entertain such antipathy toward her?" I asked. "Do tell me, because it will make my inquiries so very much easier."

"Inquiries? What inquiries are you making?"

I was silent for a moment, then looking straight into her eyes, I replied very seriously:

"I am making inquiries, Miss Tennison, into what happened to you during those days when you disappeared. I am seeking to bring punishment upon those who are responsible for your present condition." [Pg 148]

She shook her head mournfully, and a faint smile played about her lips. But she did not reply.

"Tell me more about Mrs. Cullerton," I went on. "She was in Florence when you were there."

"In Florence!" exclaimed the girl, as though amazed. "What could she be doing there?"

"She was living in a furnished villa with her husband. And she went on several visits to Mr. De Gex who lives up at Fiesole. Are you quite sure you do not know him?" I asked. "He lives at the Villa Clementini. Have you ever been there? Does the Villa Clementini recall anything to you?"

She was thoughtful for a few moments, and then said:

"I seem to have heard of the villa, but in what connexion I do not recollect."

"You are certain you do not know the owner of the villa?" I asked again, and described him once more very minutely.

But alas! her mind seemed a perfect blank.

For what reason had Moroni come to London and taken her with him to Florence? But for the matter of that, what could be the motive of the whole puzzling affair—and further, whose was the body that had been cremated?

The points I had established all combined to form an enigma which now seemed utterly beyond solution.

The pale tragic figure before me held me incensed against those whose victim she had been, for it seemed that for some distinct reason her mental balance had been wantonly destroyed.

Again and again, as she sat with her hands lying idly in her lap, she stared at the carpet and repeated to herself in a horrified voice those strange words: "Red, green and gold!—red, green and gold!" [Pg 149]

"Cannot you recollect about those colours?" I asked her kindly. "Try and think about them. Where did you see them?"

She drew a long breath, and turning her tired eyes upon mine, she replied wearily:

"I—I can't remember. I really can't remember anything!"

Sometimes her eyes were fixed straight before her just as I had seen her in the Via Calzajoli in Florence—when I had believed her to be blind. At such times her gaze was vacant, and she seemed to be entirely oblivious to all about her. At others she seemed quite normal, save that she could not recall what had occurred in those days when she was lost to her friends—days when I, too, had been missing and had returned to my senses with my own memory either distorted or blotted out.

Could it be that the same drug, or other diabolical method, had been used upon us both, and that I, the stronger of the two, had recovered, while she still remained in that half demented state?

It certainly seemed so. Hence the more I reflected the more intense became my resolve to fathom the mystery and bring those responsible to justice.

Further, she had been terrified by being told that I intended to come there to kill her! Moroni had purposely told her that, evidently in anticipation that we might meet! He had pointed me out in Florence and warned her that I was her bitterest enemy. Was it therefore any wonder that she would not tell me more than absolutely obliged?

"Do you recollect ever meeting a French gentleman named Monsieur Suzor?" I asked her presently. [Pg 150]

Instantly she exchanged glances with the woman Alford.

"No," was her slow reply, her eyes again downcast. "I have no knowledge of any such man."

It was upon the tip of my tongue to point out that they had met that mysterious Frenchman in Kensington Gardens, but I hesitated. They certainly were unaware that I had watched them.

Again, my French friend was a mystery. I did not lose sight of the fact that our first meeting had taken place on the day before my startling adventure in Stretton Street, and I began to wonder whether the man from Paris had not followed me up to York and purposely joined the train in which I had travelled back to London.

Why did both the woman Alford and Gabrielle Tennison deny all knowledge of the man whom they had met with such precautions of secrecy, and who, when afterwards he discovered that I was following him, had so cleverly evaded me? The man Suzor was evidently implicated in the plot, though I had never previously suspected it! Twice he had travelled with me, meeting me as though by accident, yet I now saw that he had been my companion with some set purpose in view.

What could it be?

It became quite plain that I could not hope to obtain anything further from either Gabrielle or the servant, therefore I assumed a polite and sympathetic attitude and told them that I hoped to call again on Mrs. Tennison's return. Afterwards I left, feeling that at least I had gained some knowledge, even though it served to bewilder me the more.

Later I called upon Sir Charles Wendover in Cavendish Square, whom I found to be a quiet elderly man of severe professional aspect and demeanour, a man whose photograph I had often seen in the newspapers, for he was one of the best-known of mental specialists. [Pg 151]

When I explained that the object of my visit was to learn something of the case of my friend Miss Tennison, he asked me to sit down and then switched on a green-shaded reading-lamp and referred to a big book upon his writing table. His consulting room was dull and dark, with heavy Victorian furniture and a great bookcase filled with medical works. In the chair in which I sat persons of all classes had sat while he had examined and observed them, and afterwards given his opinion to their friends.

"Ah! yes," he exclaimed, when at last he found the notes he had made upon the case. "I saw the young lady on the twenty-eighth of November. A most peculiar case—most peculiar! Leicester and Franklyn both saw her, but they were just as much puzzled as myself."

And through his big round horn spectacles he continued reading to himself the several pages of notes.

"Yes," he remarked at last. "I now recall all the facts. A very curious case. The young lady disappeared from her friends, and was found some days later wandering near Petersfield, in Hampshire, in an exhausted condition. She could not account for her disappearance, or the state in which she was. Her memory had completely gone, and she has not, I believe, yet recovered it."

"No, she has not," I said. "But the reason I have ventured to call, Sir Charles, is to hear your opinion on the case."

"My opinion!" he echoed. "What opinion can I hold when the effect is so plain—loss of memory?"

"Ah! But how could such a state of mind be produced?" I asked.

"You ask me for the cause. That, my dear sir, I cannot say," was his answer. "There are several causes which would produce a similar effect. Probably it was some great shock. But of what nature we cannot possibly discover unless she herself recovers her normal memory so far as to be able to assist us. I see that I have noted how she constantly repeats the words 'red, green and gold.' That combination of colours has apparently impressed itself upon her mind to such an extent that it has become an obsession. Often she will utter no other words than those. She was seen by a number of eminent men, but nobody could suggest any cause other than shock."

"Is it possible that some drug could have been administered to her?"

"Everything is possible," Sir Charles answered. "But I know of no drug which would produce such effect. In brief, I confess that I have no idea what can have caused the sudden mental breakdown."

I felt impelled to relate to him the whole story of my own adventures, but I hesitated. As a matter of fact I feared that he might regard it, as he most probably would have done, as a mere chimera of my own imagination.

A girl I had seen dead—or believed I had seen dead—was now living! And she was Gabrielle Tennison.

Of that I had no doubt, for the dates of our adventures corresponded.

And yet a girl also named Gabrielle had died and her body had been cremated!

The whole affair seemed to be beyond human credence. And yet you, my reader, have in this record the exact, hard and undeniable facts.

[Pg 152]

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## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

[Pg 153]

### SOME INTERESTING REVELATIONS

Next day I went to the office of Francis and Goldsmith, and after a consultation with both principals, during which I briefly outlined the curious circumstances such as I have here related, I was granted further leave of absence.

Yet I entertained a distinct feeling that old Mr. Francis somewhat doubted the truth of my statements. But was it surprising, so extraordinary had been my adventures?

"Perhaps you do not credit my statements, gentlemen," I said before leaving their room. "But one day I hope to solve the enigma, and you will then learn one of the most extraordinary stories that any man has lived to tell."

Afterwards I went round to the Carlton and inquired for Monsieur Suzor. To my surprise he was in.

Therefore I was ushered up to his private sitting-room, where he greeted me very warmly—so frankly welcome did he make me, indeed, that I wondered whether, after all, he had detected me following him, or whether he had entered and escaped from that house in the Euston Road with some entirely different motive.

"Ah, my dear friend!" he cried in his excellent English. "I wondered what had become of you. I called at Rivermead Mansions three days ago, but I could get no reply when I rang at your flat. The porter said that both you and your friend were out, and he had no idea when you would return. I go back to Paris to-morrow."

"Shall you fly across this time?" I asked.

"No. I go by train. I have a lot of luggage—some purchases I have made for my friend the Baroness de Henonville."

[Pg 154]

It was then about five o'clock, so he ordered some tea, and over cigarettes we chatted for nearly an hour.

The longer I conversed with him the more mysterious he appeared. Why had he crossed from Paris to London with me in order to meet clandestinely the poor girl who was the rich man's victim? That was one point which arose in my mind.

But the main question was the reason of his supposed chance meeting with me in the express between York and London.

During our chat I feared to refer to Gabrielle lest he should suspect that I knew of his subtle intrigue. I could see that he was congratulating himself upon his cleverness in misleading me, therefore I chuckled inwardly.

What I desired most at that moment was to establish the connexion between the elegant cosmopolitan Frenchman and Oswald De Gex with his wily accomplice Moroni. That the latter was a man of criminal instinct I had long ago established. He was a toady to a man of immense wealth—a clever medical man who, by reason of his callous unscrupulousness, was a dealer in Death in its most insidious and least-looked-for form. The hand of death is ever at the command of every medical man, hence mankind has to thank the medical profession—one of the hardest-worked and least recognized in the world—for its honesty, frankness and strict uprightness. In every profession we have black sheep—even, alas! in the Church. But happily unscrupulousness in those who practise medicine in Great Britain is practically an unknown quantity.

[Pg 155]

But in Europe it is different, for in the dossiers held by the police of Paris, Rome, Madrid and Berlin criminals who practise medicine are written largely, as witnessed by the evidence in more than one famous trial where the accused has been sentenced to death.

I longed to go to Scotland Yard and tell my story. Yet how could I do so when, in a drawer in my room, there reposed that bundle of Bank of England notes, the price paid to me for being the accomplice of a mysterious crime? I could only seek a solution of the enigma alone and unaided by the authorities. I seemed to be making a little headway, yet each fact I established added complications to the amazing affair.

Further, I must here confess to you that during the past day or two I had found myself actually in love with the beautiful girl whose mentality had been wilfully destroyed by some means which medical science failed to establish. From the first I had been filled with great admiration for her. She was indeed very beautiful, with wonderful eyes and a perfect complexion. There was grace in every movement, save when at times she held herself rigid, with fixed blank eyes as though fascinated, or gripped by some invisible power. More than once I had wondered whether she were under hypnotic influence, but that theory had been completely negated by Sir Charles Wendover.

Be that as it may, I had now fallen desperately in love with the girl whom I was seeking to rescue from her enemies.

Why had the body of Gabrielle Engledue been cremated if not to destroy all evidence of a crime? Gabrielle Tennison still lived; therefore another woman must have lost her life by foul means—most probably by poison—in face of the pains that were taken by Moroni to efface all trace of the cause of death.

[Pg 156]

Over our tea the affable French banker told me of a rapid journey to Liverpool which he had taken a few days before, he having some pressing business with a man who was on the point of sailing for New York. The person in question had absconded from Paris owing the bank a large sum of money, and he had that day cabled to the New York police asking for his arrest on landing.

"I shall probably be compelled to go across to America and apply for him to be sent back to Paris," my friend said, "so I am going back for instructions."

As he spoke I pondered. Was it possible that he was unaware of the surveillance I had kept upon him during and after his secret interview with Gabrielle? If so, why had he entered that dingy house in the Euston Road and made his exit by the back way? I had established the fact that the house was well-known to thieves of a certain class who used it in order to escape being followed. Several such houses exist in London. One is near the Elephant and Castle, another in the Clapham Road, while there is one in Hammersmith Road, and still another just off Clarence Terrace at Regent's Park. Such houses serve as sanctuaries for those escaping from justice. The latter know them, and as they slip through they pay a toll, well-knowing that the keeper of the house will deny that they have ever been there.

The "in-and-out" houses of London and their keepers, always sly crooks, form a particular study in themselves. One pretends to be a garage, another a private hotel, a third a small greengrocer's, and a fourth a boot repairer's. All those trades are carried on as "blinds." The public believe them to be honest businesses, but there is far more business done in concealing those wanted by the police than in anything else.

[Pg 157]

From Suzor's demeanour I felt that he did not suspect me of having been witness of his entry into that frowsy house near Euston Station. But why had he gone there? He must have feared that he might be watched. And why? The only answer to that question was that he had met Gabrielle clandestinely and feared lest afterwards he might be followed.

But why should he fear if not implicated in the plot?

To me it now seemed plain that I had been marked down as a pawn in the game prior to that day when we travelled together from York to London. I had not altogether recovered from the effect of what had been administered to me. Often I felt a curious sensation of dizziness and of overwhelming depression, which I knew was the after effects of that loss of all sense of my surroundings when I had been taken to the hospital in St. Malo. I had been found at the roadside in France, just as Gabrielle had been found on the highway near Petersfield.

When I reflected my blood boiled.

The affable and highly cultured Frenchman presented a further enigma. He was crossing back to Paris next day. What if I, too, went back to Paris and watched his further movements? As I sat chatting and laughing with him, I decided upon this course.

When, shortly afterwards, I left, I went straight across Hammersmith Bridge and found that Harry Hambleton had just returned from his office.

We sat together at table, whereupon I told him one or two facts I had discovered, and urged him to cross to Paris with me next day.

"You see, you can watch—for you will be a perfect stranger to Suzor. I will bear the expense. I've still got a little money in the bank. We can see Suzor off from Charing Cross, then take a taxi to Croydon, fly over, and be in Paris hours before he arrives at the Gare du Nord. There you will wait for his arrival, follow him and see his destination." [Pg 158]

Hambleton, who was already much interested in my strange adventures, quickly saw the point.

"I've got one or two rather urgent things on to-morrow," he replied. "But if you really wish me to go with you I can telephone to my friend Hardy and ask him to look after them for me. We shan't be away very long, I suppose?"

"A week at the most," I said. "I want to establish the true identity of this banker friend of mine. I have a distinct suspicion of him."

"And so have I," Hambleton said. "Depend upon it, some big conspiracy has been afoot, and they are now endeavouring to cover up all traces of their villainy. I was discussing it with Norah when we were walking in Richmond Park last night."

"I quite agree," I replied. "Then we'll fly across to Paris at lunch-time to-morrow, and keep watch upon this man who meets Miss Tennison in secret and then uses a thieves' sanctuary in order to escape."

"That story of the absconding customer of the bank is a fiction, I believe," Harry exclaimed.

"I'm certain it is," I said.

"Then why should he have told it to you if he did not suspect that you had been watching?" my friend queried.

I had not considered that point. It was certainly strange, to say the least, that he should thus have endeavoured to mislead me. [Pg 159]

Next morning Hambleton was up early and went to Charing Cross, where he watched the banker's departure. Afterwards he returned, and with our suit-cases we travelled down to the London Terminal Aerodrome at Croydon, where, just before noon, we entered one of the large passenger aeroplanes which fly between London and Paris. Within half an hour of our arrival at the aerodrome we were already in the air sailing gaily southward towards Lympne, near Folkestone, where we had to report previous to crossing the Channel.

The morning was bright, and although cold the visibility was excellent. Below us spread a wide panorama of tiny square fields and small clusters of houses that were villages, and larger ones with straight roads running like ribbons through them, which were towns.

The dark patches dotting the ground beneath us were woods and coppices, while running straight beneath was a tiny train upon the railway between Folkestone and London. There were three other passengers beside ourselves, apparently French business men, who were all excitement, it evidently being their first flight.

Very soon we could see the sea, and presently we could also discern the French coast.

As we approached Lympne the observer telephoned by wireless back to Croydon telling them of our position, and in a few moments we were high over the Channel. At Marquise, on the other side, we again reported, and then following the railway line we sped towards Paris long before the express, by which the banker was travelling, had left Calais.

Indeed, shortly before three o'clock we had installed ourselves at the Hôtel Terminus at the Gare St. Lazare, in Paris, and afterwards took a stroll along the boulevards, awaiting the time when the express from Calais was due at the Gare du Nord. [Pg 160]

Shortly before half-past five Hambleton left me and took a taxi to the station for the purpose of watching Suzor's arrival and ascertaining his destination, which, of course, I feared to do, lest he should recognize me.

It was not until past nine o'clock that evening that my friend returned to the hotel. He described how Suzor on arrival at the Gare du Nord had been met by a young English lady, and the pair had driven straight to the Rotonde Restaurant at the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann, where they had dined together.

"I dined near them, and one could see plainly that their conversation was a very earnest one," declared my companion. "She seemed to be relating something, and apparently was most apprehensive, while he, on his part, seemed gravely perplexed. Though he ordered an expensive meal they scarcely touched it. They sat in a corner and spoke in English, but I could not catch a single word."

In response to my request he described Suzor's lady friend.

Then he added: "She wore only one ornament, a beautiful piece of apple-green jade suspended round her neck by a narrow black ribbon. When they rose and the waiter brought their coats, I heard him call her Dorothy."

"Dorothy Cullerton!" I gasped. "I recollect that piece of Chinese jade she wore in Florence! What is she doing here, meeting that man clandestinely?"

"The man slipped something into her hand beneath the table and she put it into her handbag," Hambledon said. "I have a suspicion that it was a small roll of French bank notes."

[Pg 161]

"Payment for some information, perhaps," I said. "I don't trust that young stockbroker's wife. Well?" I asked. "And what then?"

"On leaving the Rotonde they drove to the Rue de Rivoli, where the lady alighted and entered the Hôtel Wagram, while he went along to the Hôtel du Louvre," was his reply.

I was much puzzled at the secret meeting between the affable Frenchman and young Mrs. Cullerton, and next day by watching the entrance to the Hôtel Wagram, which was an easy matter in the bustle of the Rue de Rivoli, I satisfied myself that my surmise was correct, for at eleven o'clock she came forth, entered a taxi, and drove away.

My next inquiry was at the head office of the Crédit Lyonnais, in the Boulevard des Italiens, but, as I suspected, the name of my French fellow-traveller was unknown.

"We have no official of the name of Suzor," replied the polite assistant director whom I had asked to see. "The gentleman must be pretending to be associated with us, monsieur. It is not the first time we have heard of such a thing."

So it was apparent that Suzor was not a bank official after all!

In the meantime Hambledon was keeping watch at the Hôtel du Louvre, and it was not until afternoon that he rejoined me to report what had occurred.

It seemed that Suzor had, just before noon, strolled to the Grand Café, where he had met a well-dressed man who was awaiting him. They took coffee together, and then entering a taxi drove out to the Bois, where at the Pré Catelan they were joined by a smartly dressed young woman who was, no doubt, an actress. The three sat talking for a quarter of an hour, after which the two men left her and returned to a small restaurant in the boulevard St. Martin, where they took their *déjeuner*. Afterwards Suzor had returned to his hotel.

[Pg 162]

At my suggestion my companion had become on friendly terms with the under concierge, who had promised to inform him if Monsieur Suzor should chance to be leaving.

It was well that he had arranged this, for when at six o'clock Hambledon again went to the hotel the man in uniform told him that Monsieur Suzor was leaving the Quai d'Orsay at eleven o'clock that night by the through express for Madrid.

I saw that for me to travel to Spain by the same train as the man who had posed as a banker would be to court exposure. Hence Hambledon volunteered to travel to the Spanish capital in all secrecy, while I promised to join him as soon as he sent me his address.

That journey was destined to be an adventurous one indeed, as I will duly explain to you, but its results proved more startling and astounding than we ever anticipated.

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## CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

[Pg 163]

### THE GATE OF THE SUN

The spring morning was grey and rather threatening as I left the Hôtel de la Paix in Madrid and walked from the Puerta del Sol past the smart shops in the Carrera de San Jeronimo and across the broad handsome Plaza de Canovas, in order to meet Hambledon at a point which he had indicated in the Retiro Park.

Late on the previous night I had arrived in the Spanish capital, and while Hambledon was at the Palace Hotel in the Plaza de Canovas I had gone to the Paix in the Puerta del Sol. I had been in

Madrid only once before in my life, and as I walked through the gay thoroughfares I recalled that proud saying of the Madrileños: "De Madrid al cielo y en el cielo un ventanillo para ver á Madrid" (From Madrid to Heaven, and in Heaven a loophole to look at Madrid). The Spanish capital to-day is indeed a very fine city, full of life, of movement, and of post-war prosperity.

Crossing the Prado, where the trees were already in full leaf, I took that straight broad way which led past the Royal Academy, and again crossing the Calle de Alfonso XII came to the Alcahofa fountain, the Fountain of the Artichoke, near which I waited for the coming of my friend.

I stood there upon ground that was historic, and as I gazed around upon that sylvan scene, I wondered what would be the result of our long journey from Rivermead Mansions. That beautiful park which, in the seventeenth century, had been laid out with such taste by the Conde-Duque de Olivares, the favourite of Philip IV, had been the scene of innumerable festivals which swallowed millions of money, and gave rise to many biting "pasquinas" and "coplas." To-day it is the Hyde Park of Spanish Society. There all the latest Paris fashions are seen at the hour of the promenade, and everybody who is anybody in Spain must be seen walking or riding along its picturesque paths.

[Pg 164]

I had not long to wait for Hambledon, for after a few moments his familiar sturdy figure came into sight.

"Well, Hughie!" he exclaimed, as we sank upon a seat together. "There's some deep game being played here, I'm certain!"

"What game?" I asked quickly.

"Ah! I can't yet make it out," he replied. "But I'll tell you what's occurred. Suzor, on arrival, went to the Ritz, where he has a private suite, and after I had watched him safely there I took up my quarters at the Palace on the other side of the Square, and started to keep a watch upon our friend. I got the concierge at the Ritz to do something for me for which I paid him generously, so as to pave the way for information concerning Suzor, in case we may want it."

"Good," I said. "There's nothing like making friends with a concierge. He knows everything about the visitors to his hotel, and about their friends also."

"Well, on the first day Suzor did not go out at all. But on the second morning at about eleven o'clock, he came forth very smartly dressed, and strolling along the Calle de Alcalá turned into the Gran Café where an elderly lady dressed in black was awaiting him. She was Spanish, without a doubt. He greeted her with studied courtesy and then sat down opposite her at the little table and ordered *apéritifs*. They conversed together in low, earnest tones. She seemed to be questioning him, while he gave rather hesitating replies. It seemed to me that he had come to Madrid in order to meet her. Therefore when after about half an hour they parted, I followed the lady. She took a cab and drove to the North Station, where she took a ticket for Segovia which I found was about sixty miles from here. I, of course, entered another compartment of the train and in about three hours we reached our destination. At the station she was met by a handsome young girl, who began to ply her with questions to which the elder woman replied in monosyllables as the pair ascended the pretty tree-lined boulevard that led into the picturesque town perched as it is upon a rock between two streams. Half-way up the Paseo, just prior to entering the ancient city so full of antiquities, the two ladies went in the gates of a large white house, evidently the residence of someone of importance. Unseen, I watched the door as it was opened by a man-servant who bowed to them as he admitted them. Afterwards I passed into that most venerable city of Castile where I found a hotel called the Europeo, where I ordered a meal. The waiter spoke broken English, and when I described the big white house in the Paseo Ezequiel González and inquired who lived there he replied that it was the Condesa de Chamartin with her niece Señorita Carmen Florez. The Countess was the widow of an immensely wealthy Spaniard who had died leaving most of his money away from his wife. There were rumours afloat both in Segovia and in Madrid—where he had had a fine house—that the widow was now in quite poor circumstances. Yet the Conde de Chamartin had been one of the richest men in Spain. Then I came back and telegraphed to you in Paris."

[Pg 166]

"What has Suzor done since?"

"Practically nothing. He hardly ever goes out in the daytime, which shows me that he is no stranger in Madrid. Yet almost every evening after dinner he goes alone to one or other of the theatres, or to the variety show at the Trianon. Last night he was at *Il Trovatore*, at the Teatro Real."

"Alone?"

"Always alone."

"Then why has he come here, to Madrid?" I queried.

"In order to meet the Condesa de Chamartin."

"But he has already met her. She came from Segovia to keep that appointment, hence one would think he would have returned to Paris by this time."

"We can only watch," Hambledon replied. "I will continue my surveillance, but you had better be seen about as little as possible. He might meet and recognize you. Should I discover anything, or



should I want to see you, I will either telephone to you at your hotel, or we will meet again—at this spot.”

Thus it was arranged, and half an hour later we parted.

I walked back to my hotel, my thoughts occupied by the beautiful girl who had suddenly so possessed me. Before me, by day and by night, rose visions of the lovely countenance of that strange, half-bewildered expression which was so pathetic and so mysterious. I recollected her sweet smiles when we had talked in her mother’s drawing-room in Longridge Road, and I knew that my admiration had already ripened into love.

But it was all so mysterious, so incredible indeed, that I hardly dared reflect upon those amazing events of the immediate past.

The name of the great financier, De Gex, was one to conjure with all over Europe. Since my night’s adventure in Stretton Street I had learnt much concerning him. His nationality was obscure. He posed as an Englishman, but at the same time he was a Frenchman, an Italian, and a Greek. His financial tentacles were spread throughout Europe. Fabulously wealthy, he held a controlling interest in a number of banks and great industrial concerns, and it was said that he knew the capitals of the world as a milkman knows the streets of his particular suburb.

[Pg 167]

Behind the smoke-clouds of great events his intriguing figure followed unseen, unheralded, influencing dynasties through his secretaries and agents—one of whom was Prime Minister of a foreign kingdom—and financing bankrupt states.

Now and then he emerged from the retirement of the Villa Clementini and would go to Paris, Brussels, or Rome, and there entertain most lavishly Ministers and aristocrats of various nations, and frequently give them presents at the dinner-table.

One man declared to me that Oswald De Gex was the friend of mighty persons and the moulder of mighty events. He was a man of mystery who quietly and in secret juggled the destinies of nations in his gilded fingers. Wherever money has the power to speak there Oswald De Gex would be found smiling an inscrutable mysterious smile, but always the centre of intrigue and adventure.

To outwit and expose such a man I was determined.

Back in the hotel I stood at the window of my room, gazing out across the busy plaza upon the fine Ministerio de la Gobernacion, with its great clock upon the façade. The Gateway of the Rising Sun is ever a scene of animation, and the more so on a “fiesta,” which it happened to be that day.

I stood there looking blankly out upon the centre of Madrid life. It was irksome to be compelled to remain in the hotel during the daytime for fear of recognition by the man Suzor. Why had he held that secret meeting with the widow of the wealthy Count Chamartin? Hambleton had certainly acted with discretion and promptitude in following the lady in black to her home in Segovia. Could the Frenchman’s visit to Madrid be in any way connected with the affair at Stretton Street?

[Pg 168]

A new and highly interesting feature had arisen in the fact which I had only recently discovered, that Suzor had apparently travelled with me from York to London on that well-remembered afternoon with some set and distinct purpose. He had been most affable, and he had told me all about himself—a story which I now knew to be fictitious. In return, I suppose I had told him something about myself, but the exact conversation had long ago escaped my memory.

I had had no suspicion that the man who had posed as an important official of one of the best known of French banking corporations was in any way associated with the mysterious Oswald De Gex, until I had seen him meet in secret the girl with whom I had fallen so violently in love.

I tried to analyse my feelings towards Gabrielle Tennison, but failed utterly. I loved her, and loving her so well, I now set my whole soul upon elucidating the mystery.

Truly, the problem was most puzzling, presenting further complications at every turn.

Through the day I idled about the big hotel, occupying my time in writing letters and reading the papers. The café below in the late afternoon was crowded, for on the day of a fiesta Madrid is always agog with life and movement.

[Pg 169]

When night fell and I ate my solitary dinner in the big restaurant, where I specially ordered an *olla* with *garbanoz*, a dish so dear to the Spanish palate and which cannot be procured beyond the confines of King Alfonso’s kingdom. The waiter aided me, of course, and he smiled contentedly when I gave him his *propina*.

Around me there dined as smart a set of people as those who frequented the Carlton in London, and perhaps the toilettes were even more elaborate. In certain feminine details the West End can be eclipsed both by modern Madrid and Bucharest, while Paris remains where she has ever been, the inventor of feminine fashion and the alluring City of Light.

In Madrid to-day one has all the pre-war prosperity combined with post-war extravagance. The latest *mode* of the Rue de la Paix is seen at the Ritz in Madrid almost before it is seen at Armenonville, and it becomes only second-hand when it has filtered through Dover Street—or

"Petticoat Lane," as that thoroughfare is termed by truculent London bachelors.

After dinner I spent an hour at the gay Café Iberia, in the Carrera de San Jeronimo, and returned early to the hotel.

As I entered the concierge met me with a note. It was from Harry Hambledon, written an hour before, urging me to meet him at the Gato Negro Café (The Black Cat), in the Calle del Principe.

I lost no time in keeping the appointment, and on meeting my friend, he whispered excitedly:

"Suzor has a visitor. He arrived at the Ritz at six o'clock, and they have dined together. He is a well-dressed man of between forty and fifty, rather sallow-faced, and has given his name at the hotel as Henri Thibon, rentier, of Bordeaux." [Pg 170]

"Aged nearly fifty—sallow?" I echoed. "Are his features of a rather Oriental cast—a dark, handsome man with deep-set eyes and a dimple in the centre of his chin?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes. That just describes him."

"De Gex!" I gasped. "Then he is here!"

"After dinner they went out to the Trianon. They are there now."

"Then we will watch them return to the Ritz," I said.

We spent an hour together in the café, after which we rose and walked through the well-lit streets and along beneath the trees of the Prado until we came to the great plaza where, opposite the Neptune fountain, the fine hotel stands back behind its gardens.

We both halted against the colossal fountain, the waters of which were plashing into the great basin, and found that from where we were standing we had a good view of the entrance to the hotel. That the theatres were over was proved by the number of cars and taxis that were depositing people in evening-dress who had come to the Ritz to supper. Hence we had not long to wait before we distinguished Suzor and his companion, both in dinner-jackets, strolling on foot across the Plaza from the Calle de Cervantes in the direction of the hotel.

In an instant I recognized the form of the mysterious owner of the house in Stretton Street.

"Yes!" I cried. "I'm not mistaken! But why is he here under the name of Thibon? Without a doubt he is known in Madrid. Why should he seek to conceal his identity?"

"We are here to discover the motive of his journey from Italy. According to his passport he arrived from Irun. But if he had come direct from Italy he would have come from the south—from Barcelona, most probably." [Pg 171]

"He has a house in Paris. No doubt he has followed his friend Suzor from there. It will be interesting to watch."

As I spoke the pair passed up the steps of the hotel and were lost to sight, therefore we turned and retraced our steps along the wide Carrera de San Jeronimo to my hotel where, for an hour, Hambledon sat in my room discussing the situation.

He suggested that he should move from the Palace Hotel to the Ritz, which was only just opposite. At first it seemed a good idea, but on reflection I did not agree, because I feared lest he might be recognized by Suzor. De Gex, of course, would not know him, but with Suzor the danger of recognition was always great. If either realized that they were being watched, all chances of solving the problem would instantly disappear. Only by secret and patient watchfulness could we discover the motive of that amazing affair near Park Lane, and again the truth of what actually occurred on that fateful November night.

"There is no doubt some further devil's game is in progress here," I declared, as Harry sat upon my bed smoking a cigarette, while I was stretched in an easy-chair. "And it is up to us to discover what it is, and whether it has any bearing upon the plot against poor Gabrielle Tennison."

"Yes," agreed Hambledon. "We must watch all their actions, for it is now evident that this fellow Suzor is deeply implicated in the conspiracy, whatever its nature."

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## CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

[Pg 172]

### THE INTRUDER

During the next few days I remained idle in the hotel, not daring to go out while it was light, and leaving the surveillance upon De Gex and his friend to my old friend Hambledon.

Each night we met at one café or another as we appointed, when he would report to me what he had witnessed during the day. It seemed that De Gex—or Monsieur Thibon, as he preferred to call himself—shared Suzor's private sitting-room and, curiously enough, he also did not go out in the daytime!

After all, that was not surprising, for such a great figure in international finance was probably well-known in the Spanish capital. I had learnt that he had had a hand in the finances of Spain, and had made some huge profits thereby. This man of mystery and intrigue was, I felt, there in Madrid with some malice aforethought. The very fact that he feared to be recognized was in itself sufficient proof! On the other hand, Suzor now went out in the daytime, going hither and thither as though transacting business for his friend. Hambledon had reported to me how he had sent three cipher telegrams by wireless from the Correo Central in the Calle Carretas, the first was to London, the second on the following noon to an address in Paris, and the third at one o'clock in the morning to Moroni in Florence. The message to the latter was in figures, groups of five numerals as used by the British Admiralty. Besides, he had also posted several letters in that big box at the chief post-office marked "Extranjero."

[Pg 173]

The message to Moroni was highly suspicious. Harry Hambledon, as a solicitor, was, of course, a very acute person, and in addition he had very fortunately entered into the true spirit of the adventure. Though he longed to be back again at Richmond with his pretty *fiancée*, Norah Peyton, yet the mystery of the whole affair had bewildered him, and he was as keen as I was myself in elucidating the strange enigma.

Moroni was no doubt a tool in the hands of that quiet, sallow-faced man who, by reason of his colossal wealth and huge financial resources, could even make and unmake dynasties. Oswald De Gex, the man who without nationality or patriotism pulled a hundred financial strings both in Europe and in America, held the sinister Doctor Moroni in his pay. I could discern that fact, just as I could see that the man Suzor, who had so cleverly posed as an official of the *Crédit Lyonnais*, was one of the many confidential agents of the mysterious De Gex.

One evening I went, by appointment, to the Nuevo Club, to which I had been admitted as a foreign member, and in the smoking-room I awaited Hambledon.

At last he came through the big swing doors, and approaching me, excitedly exclaimed:

"They've both gone out to Segovia to see the Countess de Chamartin. De Gex sent a wire early this morning and then, on receipt of a reply, they hired a car and drove out to keep the appointment."

"Chamartin was a Spanish financier. De Gex is one of international fame—a millionaire," I remarked. "The wits of De Gex are perhaps pitted against the widow and the executors of the dead man. Don't you agree?"

"Entirely," was Hambledon's reply. "I follow the trend of your thoughts, Hugh. De Gex is the controlling influence of great events, but why should he seek to send you into an asylum for the insane?"

[Pg 174]

"With the same motive that he endeavoured to send into such an asylum poor Gabrielle Tennison," I said bitterly.

"In law we have an old adage which says 'discover the motive and you also discover the miscreant,'" Harry remarked.

I agreed, and, as much bewildered as he, exclaimed:

"Well, as far as we can discern there is something very underhand in this meeting. But the count's widow is a cheery, easy-going person, despite her mournful black, and perhaps, after all, we may be upon a wrong scent."

"Exactly. De Gex may be attracted by her handsome niece, the *Señorita Carmen Florez*—eh?"

"He may. But as the dead count was a great financier, Oswald De Gex may be working in the interests of the widow—or to the contrary."

"To the contrary," said my friend without hesitation.

Next morning Hambledon told me that De Gex and Suzor did not return to the Ritz until nearly one o'clock. Apparently they had dined and spent the evening in Segovia. On that same day at noon, my curiosity aroused, I took train to the old-world town with its wonderful cathedral, the Alcazar, and the aqueduct built by Augustus, the largest piece of Roman work extant in Spain, rivalling as it does the walls of Tarragona.

Without difficulty I discovered the fine country house of the Countess de Chamartin situated high up on the broad tree-lined Paseo. She had never seen me, therefore I had no hesitation in idling in the vicinity, in order to catch sight of her or her niece, their descriptions having been given to me by my friend Hambledon. Till it was growing dark I waited in vain, when suddenly I had a very narrow escape. A big dusty grey limousine came rapidly up the hill and halted close to where I was standing. From it there alighted Gaston Suzor, who without hesitation entered the big iron gates and disappeared into the garden.

[Pg 175]

Fortunately he was in such haste, and so preoccupied that he did not notice me, hence I crossed the road and hid behind a half-ruined wall, where I had a good view of the car.

About twenty minutes later he emerged again, and with him was a young girl wearing a small toque and a rich sable coat. No second glance was needed to realize that it was the *Señorita Carmen Florez*, niece of the countess. The elegant Frenchman held the door open politely for her,

and after she had entered he got in beside her, whereupon the car turned and went down the hill and out of sight.

It occurred to me that Suzor had come from Madrid to fetch her, and that surmise later proved to be correct, for on returning to the capital at ten o'clock Hambledon called at the Hôtel de la Paix, and as we sat upstairs in my bedroom he informed me that the young girl had arrived by car at the Ritz and had dined with De Gex and his companion. The countess, who had apparently been in Madrid since the morning, and who had attended a charity *matinée* at the Comedia, had arrived at the Ritz a quarter of an hour before her niece. It was evident, therefore, that they were well known to De Gex, who, as I afterwards ascertained, had been a friend of the late count.

The four had dined privately together in Suzor's sitting-room, and according to the information given to Hambledon by the concierge, a number of papers had been produced and examined immediately after the coffee had been served. [Pg 176]

"I understand that the production of the papers had a most disturbing effect upon the countess," Hambledon told me. "She gave vent to a cry of amazement, and afterwards burst into a fit of tears. At least that is what the waiter told the concierge. The countess is very well known at the Ritz, for she moves in the Court circle, and is often at the smart functions so constantly held there."

"And the niece?" I asked. "She is certainly both smart and good-looking."

"I can discover but little concerning her," Harry replied. "She is not known at all. She has apparently only gone to live with her aunt at Segovia since the count's death."

"I wonder what was in the papers which so affected the lady?" I remarked. "De Gex evidently invited them to dinner in order to make some disclosure, and to prove it by the production of documents."

"Evidently," replied my companion. "In any case, the countess and her niece have just started to return for home, the widow being very upset at what has been revealed to her to-night."

"What can it have been, I wonder? Could not the waiter ascertain the nature of the disclosure?" [Pg 177]

"No. I saw him myself afterwards, and he explained that the documents in question were produced just after he had left the room. He heard the countess utter a cry of dismay, and when he again entered the room in pretence of clearing away the coffee-cups, he found the lady in tears, while her niece declared hotly in French: 'I do not believe it! I will never believe it!' A number of legal documents were spread out upon the table, and De Gex was holding one of them in his hand."

"Then the object of the visit of the precious pair seems to have been to disclose some hitherto well-guarded secret to the widow of the Spanish financier—eh?"

"Yes," my friend agreed. "It certainly seems so," and then he rose and left. Downstairs in the palm court the gay crowd was pouring through to the restaurant for supper after the theatre, for smart Madrid is gay at night, and there is as much dancing and fun there, on a smaller scale of course, as there is in the West End. The pretty dresses, the laughter, the sibilant whispers, and the claw-hammer coat are the same in Madrid and Bucharest as in London or Paris, or any other capital. The hour of midnight is the same hour of relaxation when even judges smile after their day upon the bench, and the blue-stockings will laugh at a risky story.

So after Harry had gone, refusing to have supper with me lest somebody should notice us together, I strolled about, and selecting a table in the corner, ate my solitary meal, having had no dinner that day.

It was past midnight before I ascended in the lift to my room. I undressed and when in bed I read the *Heraldo* until I suppose I dropped off to sleep.

I knew nothing until later I was awakened by some slight movement. In an instant I was seized by a strange intuition of danger, and my wits became acute. Next second I was on the alert. There had been three lights burning when I retired, now there was but one. I had bolted my door, yet it was now slightly ajar!

I lay and listened. Outside I heard the hum of a car receding across the great square. Afterwards a church bell began to clang discordantly, as they all do in Spain.

The light was over the dressing-table in the corner, and so shaded that the room was quite dim. [Pg 178]

Someone had been in my room! I grasped my automatic pistol which I kept under the pillow, and jumping out of bed crossed to the dressing-table where I had put my watch and bank-note-case on taking them from my pocket. As I did so I heard the click of an electric light switch, and next instant the room was in darkness.

For a second I was nonplussed. I knew, however, that I was not alone in the room, so I dashed across to the door, my pistol in my hand, and gaining it before the intruder could escape, turned on the lights.

Before me stood revealed a tall, thin-faced, dark-haired man in his shirt and trousers who, seeing my pistol, at once put up his hands, crying in Spanish:

"Ah! no—no! It is a mistake. Holy Madonna! I have mistaken the room! I thought my friend Pedro was here! A thousand apologies, señor! A thousand apologies."

"But my door was bolted! How did you get in?" I demanded fiercely.

"No, señor. It was not bolted. I have been taken very unwell. I was seeking my friend Pedro," he stammered, pale and frightened. "Come to my room, and I will show you my papers to prove that I am no thief, but a well-known advocate of Burgos."

I told him roughly to turn his face to the wall while I went through my belongings to satisfy myself that nothing had been stolen.

All seemed in order, and the fellow's explanation seemed to be quite feasible—save for the fact that I distinctly remembered bolting the door. Nevertheless I began to wonder whether I had not misjudged him.

"Come along to my room, señor," he urged. "I will show you my identity papers. I have to offer you a thousand apologies." [Pg 179]

I followed him to a room near the end of the corridor, where he quickly produced documents and papers showing that his name was Juan Salavera, an advocate, who lived in the Calle de Vittoria, in Burgos. He showed me the portrait of his wife and child which he carried in his wallet and a small painted miniature of his mother, and other proofs of his integrity, including a case well filled with notes.

"I trust, señor, that you will no longer accuse me of being a thief!" he said. "Our encounter would have been distinctly amusing had we not so frightened each other as we have done."

I laughed, for I felt convinced that he was a respectable person, and I really began to feel uncomfortable.

Indeed, I muttered an apology for my rather rough behaviour, and at the same time I noticed upon the left side of his neck a deep scar probably left by an abscess.

"My dear señor, it was quite forgiveable in the circumstances," he declared, offering me a cigarette and taking one himself. "I had supper at a restaurant after the theatre to-night and ate something which had disagreed with me. Half an hour ago I felt faint, so I rose and went to find my friend Pedro Espada, who came with me from Burgos, and I entered your room in mistake. He must be in the room next yours."

"Shall we seek him?" I asked.

"No. I feel much better now, thanks," was his reply. "The fright has chased away all faintness! Besides, we should have to go down to the office and ascertain in which room he really is. I shall be all right now," he assured me.

He went on to say that he had come to Madrid in connexion with a large estate in Granada, to which a client of his had laid claim. [Pg 180]

"I shall be here for a week at least, therefore I hope you will give me the pleasure of spending an evening with Pedro and myself. We will dine at a restaurant and go to one of the variety theatres afterwards."

I thanked him, and laughing at our encounter we parted quite good friends.

On returning to my room I examined the bolt, and found that the screws of the brass socket had been forced from the woodwork and it was lying on the floor.

That fact caused suspicion to again arise in my mind. Surely considerable force must have been used to break away the socket from the woodwork. Yet I had heard nothing!

However, I returned to bed, and leaving the lights on I reflected upon the strange episode. The fellow's excuse was quite a legitimate one, yet I could not put from myself the fact that the door had been forced. By whom, if not by him?

And yet he was so cool it seemed impossible that he was a thief whom I had caught red-handed.

After half an hour I rose again and thoroughly examined the bolt, when my suspicion was increased by a strange discovery. In my absence the socket of the bolt had been removed, the screw holes enlarged and filled up with bread kneaded into a paste; into this the screws had been placed so that although I had bolted the door I could not secure it, for the smallest pressure from outside would break the fastening from the woodwork!

The dodge was one often practised by hotel thieves. But what proof had I that the lawyer from Burgos had prepared that bolt? I had no means of knowing when the screws had been rendered unstable, or by whom. It might have been done even before I had occupied that room, for the paste was hard and crumbling. [Pg 181]

Nevertheless the fact remained that my door had been prepared for a midnight theft, and I had found a stranger in my room. So with a resolve to make further inquiry next morning, I threw myself down and slept.

I must have been tired and overwrought, for it was past nine o'clock when I awoke and drew up

the blinds.

Then as I crossed to ring the bell for my coffee and hot water I made a very curious discovery.

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## CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

[Pg 182]

### ANOTHER STRANGE DISCLOSURE

On the ground, close to my bed, were three brass-headed carpet pins which had apparently spilt accidentally out of a box.

The sharp point of each was upturned, and it was a marvel that during the night I had not stepped upon them.

How had they come there? Was it by accident or design that they were beside my bed?

At first I wondered whether the hotel upholsterer had been at work on the previous day and had left them behind. He might have used them for pinning down my carpet.

I took one up and examined it. Next second I stood aghast.

The others I also took up, handling them very gingerly, for around the points of each was some colourless transparent substance which looked like vaseline. Such a substance was not ordinarily upon the points of carpet pins.

A horrible thought flashed across my mind. Therefore I carefully placed the three pins upon the small glass tray upon the dressing-table, and dressed as quickly as I could, reflecting the while upon my adventure with the stranger whom I had taken to be a thief.

I shaved, swallowed the coffee which the young waiter brought me, and at once descended to the bureau; when in French I inquired of the clerk for Señor Salavera. He examined the register and replied politely:

"We have no one of that name staying here, señor."

[Pg 183]

"What?" I cried. "He was in Room 175 last night!"

"Number 175 was Señor Solier," replied the smart young clerk. "He paid his bill and left just after seven o'clock this morning."

"But I saw his identification papers—his passport—letters addressed to him as Señor Salavera!"

"That may be so, señor," was the suave reply. "But he registered here as Señor Solier." And then he dropped into English, which he spoke very fairly. "Of course people who stay at hotels do not always give their correct names. They do not wish them published in visitors' lists in the newspapers. Perhaps it is only natural," and he smiled.

"Have you any one named Pedro Espada in the hotel?" I inquired.

Again he consulted his register, but shook his head.

"Nobody of that name," he replied.

I hesitated. Then I asked:

"Did the gentleman who spent the night in Room 175 depart alone?"

The reception-clerk called the uniformed concierge, and asked:

"Did Number 175 leave alone?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He caught the early express for Zaragoza. He was going on to Barcelona, he told me. He went in the omnibus."

"No one with him?"

"Nobody."

"When did he arrive?" I asked.

"The night before last. He was alone—with only a handbag. I charged him with a deposit for his room."

"Have you ever seen him before?" I asked.

"Never to my recollection."

"Neither have I," remarked the concierge. "He seemed very afraid of being seen. I noticed him in the lounge last night. He left this morning quite suddenly, and without taking anything—even a cup of coffee."

[Pg 184]

"He left in a violent hurry—eh?" I exclaimed, well knowing the reason. "Well," I added, "I wish to

see the manager.”

“I will inform him,” the clerk replied, and he went to the telephone. A minute later, after exchanging a few words in Spanish, he turned to me, saying:

“You will find the manager’s office on the first floor. If you take the lift the man will direct you, señor.”

A few minutes later I was seated in the office of an elderly bald-headed man, a typical *hôtelier*, courteous, smiling, and eager to hear any complaint that I might have to make.

At once I told him of my curious adventure of the previous night, and of the sudden flight of the mysterious stranger whom I had discovered in my room.

“That is certainly strange, sir,” he replied in English. “His excuse was a very ingenious one, to say the least. I think we ought to inform the police. Do you not agree?”

I told him of my discovery of the carpet pins, and asked his advice as to whom I might send them for chemical analysis.

At once he suggested Professor Vega, of the Princesa Hospital in the Calle Alberto Aguilera, adding:

“The Professor often dines here. If you wish, I will take you to him.”

So still leaving the three carpet pins upon the little glass tray I wrapped it in paper and together we went round to the hospital, where I was introduced to a tall, narrow-faced, grey-haired man in a long linen coat. To him I explained how I had found the pins on the carpet beside my bed, and asking whether he would submit them to examination.

[Pg 185]

He looked at them critically, first with the naked eye and afterwards by means of a large reading-glass. Then he grunted in dissatisfaction and promised that next day, or the day after, he would tell me the result of his analysis.

As we drove back to the hotel the manager remarked:

“It is a very curious affair, sir, to say the least. One does not scatter carpet pins about a bedroom, and particularly when the points are smeared with some mysterious substance. If they had been there before you retired to bed the chambermaid must certainly have seen them. She makes a round of the rooms each night at ten o’clock. Besides, the facts that the bolt had been tampered with, and also that the man who occupied 175 left so early and so hurriedly, are additionally suspicious. Yes,” he added, “I think we ought to see the police.”

With that object he took me at once to Señor Andrade, the Chief of Police, a short, stout, alert little man, who heard me with keen interest and seemed very puzzled.

“The intruder’s explanation was certainly a very clever one,” he remarked in French. “It is a pity you did not demand to see his friend, Pedro Espada. If you had, you would have discovered him to be nonexistent.”

“But he was so clever,” I answered. “He told me that at that hour he could not discover in which room his friend was really sleeping.”

“But the night-porter was on duty,” exclaimed the hotel manager. “He had the register and would have been able at once to tell you the number of the room.”

The fellow seemed so frank in revealing to me his money, the portraits of his family, and his private letters, that I had taken his statement as the truth.

[Pg 186]

Yet, even now, I could not believe that he had any sinister design—not until the Professor had examined those three carpet pins.

In response to close questions put to me by Señor Andrade, with whom was Señor Rivero, the head of the Detective Branch, I gave a description of my midnight visitor as accurately as I could. I told them how I had covered him with my automatic pistol, and how afterwards we had laughed together at our mental fear of each other.

Señor Rivero, the bald-headed, black-bearded chief of the branch of criminal investigation, suddenly stopped me when I mentioned the scar upon the neck of the advocate from Burgos.

“Did you notice that there was any deformity of his hands?” he asked quickly.

In an instant I recollected that the little finger of his right hand had been amputated at the first joint, and I told him so.

“Ah!” exclaimed the shrewd, dark-bearded official. “Perhaps we may here find something of interest. Just a few moments,” and he rose and left us.

We chatted with Señor Andrade for about a quarter of an hour when the detective returned with a bundle of papers and four photographs of a man taken in police style upon one negative, full face, three-quarter, half and profile.

The instant he placed it before me, I exclaimed:

"Why, that is Salavera!"

"I thought as much," remarked the famous detective with a grim smile. "He is not Salavera, but Rodriquez Despujol, one of the most dangerous criminals in Spain!"

"Despujol!" cried Señor Andrade. "And he was in Madrid last night!" Then he added: "Ah! if we had but known." [Pg 187]

"True. But why was he in the English gentleman's room?" queried the detective. "He is a dangerous character, and one would have thought that instead of being covered he would, on being cornered, have drawn his knife and attacked his adversary."

"Despujol is no amateur," the Chief of Police agreed. "We've wanted him for the last five years for the assassination of the banker, Monteros, in the train between Cordova and Malaga, and yet he always evades us, even though he is one of the most audacious thieves in Europe."

"But his friend Pedro?" I remarked, startled at what I had now learned.

"He does not exist," replied the detective. "You no doubt had a lucky escape. Had you demanded to see his friend he would no doubt have killed you. He is a man of colossal strength—a veritable tiger, they say."

"But what was the motive?" I asked. "I have no valuables, save my watch and tie pin, and fifty pounds in English money. Surely it was not worth while to kill me for that!"

"No. That's just it," replied the dark-eyed detective, whose chagrin was so apparent that Despujol had slipped through his fingers. "The game was not worth the candle. So he returned after proving to you his bona fides. And these bona fides he always carries in order to extricate himself from any ugly situation."

"But the carpet pins?" asked the hotel manager.

The director of the Spanish secret police shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Until Professor Vega can make a report we can do nothing. It is no use basing theories upon mere surmises. So we can only wait for Señor Vega to tell us what he discovers. Meanwhile, we will try and secure Despujol—though I fear he has too long a start of us." [Pg 188]

He crossed the room to the telephone, and a few minutes later spoke in Spanish into the instrument in sharp, authoritative tones.

I understood him to be speaking to the police commissary at Zaragoza, explaining that the much-wanted criminal Despujol had left Madrid for that city, and giving the train by which he was supposed to be travelling. Then, in turn, he spoke to the commissaries of Alcazar, Salamanca, Valladolid and Arroyo, thus informing the police along all the lines of railway leading from the capital.

It was evident that what I had told them caused considerable excitement. Indeed, after the head of the detective department had concluded giving his instructions over the telephone, he turned to me and translated into French the black record of the stranger whom I had discovered in my room.

That he was a bold and audacious criminal was quickly apparent. In the Sud express travelling between Madrid and Paris he had drugged and robbed an Italian jeweller of a wallet containing a quantity of diamonds, which he took to London at once and disposed of to a receiver of stolen property at Kilburn.

Another of his daring exploits was the theft of the famous Murillo from the Castle of Setefillas, near Seville. This he sold to a dealer in Brussels, who afterwards smuggled it to New York, where it was bought by a private collector for a very large sum.

Yet again, a few months later he enticed a bank messenger in Barcelona into a house he had taken for the purpose, and having knocked him down robbed him of his wallet containing a quantity of English bank notes and negotiable securities. [Pg 189]

Up to five years before he had been convicted many times, but he now seemed to be able to commit robberies with impunity, and always get off free. It was believed that he lived in secret somewhere abroad and only came to Spain to commit thefts. Probably he passed to and fro to France by one of the obscure mountain tracks through the Pyrenees known only to those who dealt in contraband—and there are many in that chain of mountains.

In any case the police were now hot again upon his track.

Suddenly the head of the Detective Department had another inspiration and rang up both Jaca and Pamplona, which are at the end of each railway line towards the barrier of mountains which form the French frontier.

"If he is on his way to France he will go to either one place or the other," he said.

"But have they his photograph?" I asked.

"A copy of this photograph taken at the prison of Barcelona, is in every detective office in Spain," was his reply. "Rodriquez Despujol is the most dangerous and elusive criminal at large," he went



on. "He never leaves anything to chance. No doubt he believed that you were in possession of something valuable, and his intention was to drug you and get it. But you were too quick for him. My chief surprise is why, when he found himself cornered as he was, that he did not draw his knife and attack you."

"But I had a pistol!" I said.

"Despujol does not fear pistols. Before you could pull the trigger he could have pounced upon you like a cat!" replied the police official.

"Well, he certainly entirely misled me," I exclaimed. "I even offered him an apology for my attitude towards him." [Pg 190]

The three men laughed heartily.

"An apology to Despujol!" cried the Chief of Police. "How very amusing!"

"I consider that I was very lucky," I said. "He seems to be a most desperate character."

"He is," answered Señor Andrade. "We have had inquiries for him from all over Europe. During the war it seems that he served as a spy of Germany in France, hence the military authorities there are very anxious to get him."

"But you think he lives in France and crosses the frontier every now and then."

"Yes. We received information to that effect about a year ago. He probably lives as a poor, but perfectly honest man in one of the remote villages in the Pyrenees, and is perhaps held in high esteem by all around him. It was the case of the notorious Maurice Tricoche who escaped us for years and lived near Luchon until he was betrayed by a woman whose husband he had maltreated. Perhaps Despujol will also be betrayed. We hope so!"

"I cannot understand why the fellow dared to put foot into Madrid when he knows how active we are in search of him," remarked Señor Rivero, turning to me. "He must have followed you with evil intent. The explanation of mistaking your room was, of course, a good one, but entirely false."

I longed to tell the police all about the mystery of Stretton Street, and the grave suspicions concerning the great international financier who was at that moment at the Ritz. Yet I hesitated for two reasons, the first being that I feared lest my story should be disbelieved, and secondly, because I had, on behalf of the beautiful girl with whom I had fallen in love, set out to solve the enigma by myself, and bring the culprit to justice. [Pg 191]

"If Despujol is arrested I will willingly come forward and give evidence—that is, if I am still in Spain," I promised.

But both police officials shrugged their shoulders, and the detective remarked:

"Despujol is a will o' the wisp. There seems little hope of our ever securing him. Nevertheless we shall continue to do our best to allow you to face him again one day. And then, señor, you will realize what a miraculous escape you have had!"

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## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

[Pg 192]

### WHAT THE PROFESSOR FOUND

When I met my friend Hambledon in secret at two o'clock that day under the trees at a spot in the Retiro, not far from the great Plaza de la Independencia, we sat down and I described to him my strange midnight adventure.

He listened in amazement, which was increased when I told him how the police had recognized in the inoffensive lawyer of Burgos the notorious bandit Despujol, who was wanted not only by Scotland Yard, but by the police of Europe.

"But those carpet pins are a curious feature of the affair, Hughie," he remarked.

"Yes. The police seem to attach no importance to them—but I do."

"So do I. The opinion of Professor Vega may throw some light upon the affair."

"I shall call at the Princesa Hospital to-morrow," I said, and then I inquired the latest information concerning De Gex and his French friend.

There was little to report. De Gex had not been out of the hotel, though Suzor had gone to purchase some cigars at eleven o'clock that morning. While Suzor was absent De Gex had, according to the friendly concierge, received a visitor, a middle-aged Spanish woman of the middle-class. She had asked to see him, and on her name being sent up the great one at once gave orders for her to be admitted.

Again the floor waiter became inquisitive, and heard the financier speaking in English with his [Pg 193]

visitor.

"Unfortunate! Most unfortunate!" he heard De Gex say. "I am very glad, however, that you have come to me so quickly. You had a telegram from Siguenza—eh?"

"I received it only a quarter of an hour ago, sir," the woman had replied in broken English.

Then De Gex had apparently given her something for her services, and dismissed her.

"A telegram from Siguenza!" I exclaimed, when my friend Harry had told me this. "Now Siguenza is on the direct line from here to the Pyrenees and the French frontier! That telegram may be from Despujol while in flight. If so, the police have set a trap for him at his journey's end, either at Jaca beneath Mont Perdu, or at Pamplona. I wonder if he'll be caught?"

"He might go on to Zaragoza and then turn to Barcelona and Marseilles," Hambledon remarked.

"All the frontiers are watched, so it seems almost impossible for him to escape. But," I added, "I wonder if this information conveyed by the Spanish woman really concerned the fugitive?"

"I wonder. A man like De Gex, with so many financial irons in the fire, and with agents in every European capital, is bound to receive visits from all sorts and conditions of people who bring him information for profit. When one deals in colossal sums as he does, one has to cultivate people of all classes," Hambledon said. "Personally, I don't think the woman's information had anything to do with your mysterious friend's hurried departure," he added.

"I do. I'm highly suspicious. There was some motive that he did not attack me, as he could so easily have done, for he's a most desperate character and has committed several murders when cornered. His explanation was really wonderful, and I admit that I was so completely deceived that I actually apologized to him! But," I went on, "we may perhaps know more when we learn the truth from Professor Vega."

[Pg 194]

Hence at noon next day I called at the great hospital in the Calle Alberto Aguilera, and was ushered into the Professor's room.

"Ah, my dear monsieur!" he exclaimed in French, knowing that I spoke Spanish only with the greatest difficulty. "I am very glad you have called. Those brass-headed pins which upholsterers often use, and which you have submitted to me, are most interesting from a toxicological point of view."

"What?" I gasped. "Were they poisoned?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the grave-faced old expert. "And by somebody who is *au courant* with the very latest and undetectable poison. I searched for alkaloids and glucosids, and used Kippenberger's process, and then the tests of Marne, Meyer, Scheiblen and Dragendorff. Since you brought the three pins to me I have been active all the time, for the problem much interests me. At last—though I did not think that the substance could possibly contain so subtle, deadly, and as yet unknown poison—I applied Sonnenschein's reagent—phosphomolybdic acid—and then I obtained a result—only an hour ago indeed!"

"And what was the result, Professor?"

He looked me straight in the face, and replied: "You have had a very narrow escape from death, monsieur—a very narrow one. Had you placed your foot upon one of those upturned points you would have fallen dead within five seconds!"

"Why?"

[Pg 195]

"Because each of the points of those three pins, left there as though by accident by some upholsterer employed by the hotel, was impregnated by one of the most deadly of all newly-discovered poisons. It is called by men of my profession orosin, after its discoverer Orosi, and is certainly a most dangerous poison in the hands of anyone with criminal intent, because no post-mortem examination known to the medical profession to-day would be able to detect whether the victim had been murdered or died of natural causes."

"It astounds me!" I gasped.

"No doubt. But to me, of course, it is a most interesting piece of research," and the professor went on: "I have never met this substance before, though I had heard whispers of it. Professor Orosi, who lived in Cologne a few years ago and is now dead, produced this poison quite accidentally, and among his intimate friends disclosed its existence, though he had no idea how to test for it with certainty. For five years all toxicologists made constant tests until apparently quite by accident Professor Sonnenschein, of Hanover, discovered the reagent which would reveal the actual glucosid, and determine its identity. It gives a yellowish-white precipitate," he added, holding up for my inspection a small test-tube containing a liquid of the colour he had indicated.

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "I had no idea that medical science could carry inquiries so far. I know that in criminal cases in London our pathologists, with their mirror-tests for arsenic, fix the guilt upon poisoners in a manner most amazing. But I have never heard of this secret and most subtle poison which was placed beside my bed, the intention being for me to tread upon the impregnated pin."

"And if you had done so you would have been taken with a sudden fatal seizure, the cause of which would never have been detected." [Pg 196]

"You mean I should have died of poison?"

"You certainly would. No medical aid would have been of any avail, for orosin is the most deadly substance which has ever been discovered. It is indeed good for humanity that it is known to only a few toxicologists, but that in itself reveals the fact, monsieur, that an exceedingly clever and secret attack has been made upon your life. A single puncture of the skin with one or other of those pins which were placed so conveniently at your bedside when you sprang out to meet the intruder, and you would by this time have been buried as one whose death had been due to natural causes!"

I held my breath. This declaration by one of the greatest professors of toxicology in Europe staggered me. A dastardly attempt had been made upon me by one of the most notorious of modern criminals!

Why? No attempt at assassination is made without some motive, and the game must ever be "worth the candle."

The whole of the dramatic incidents of the night flashed across my memory; how I had faced the fellow in my room, challenged him at the point of my pistol, and compelled him to give me meekly proofs of his respectability. Truly it was all humorous—but only from Despujol's point of view.

I recollected those innocent-looking pins which apparently had been left so carelessly in my room. Each held for me a sudden and suspicious death.

"The slightest puncture of the skin would inevitably prove fatal," the Professor continued. "Feeling yourself pricked you would naturally remove the pin and very quickly afterwards death would supervene. So prior to it you yourself would no doubt have removed all trace of the crime!" [Pg 197]

"It is as well that such poison is not generally known, or it would be used by many who wished to get rid of their friends," I remarked.

The Professor laughed, and agreed, saying:

"There are several poisons of the same type which are known only to toxicologists, and we are very careful not to allow the public sufficient knowledge of them. I must confess that I never dreamed when I commenced my investigations that I was in the presence of orosin. There is sufficient in this little tube"—and he held it to the light—"to kill a hundred persons. It certainly is one of the most dangerous of known compounds."

"So it is evident that the man Despujol entered my room and placed the pins there intending that I should step upon one or other of them!" I gasped.

"Without doubt. And it seems little short of a marvel that you escaped," said the Professor.

"It certainly does," I remarked. "But I must tell the police of the fact you have established. The affair now assumes a new phase. The man was not in my room with the intention of robbery, but in order to encompass my death by secret means."

"If you had not so fortunately avoided treading upon the pins you certainly would not be alive at the moment," remarked the Professor, again reflectively examining the yellow fluid in the tube. "What motive could the man have had in gaining access to your room and placing the pins there? I suppose he did not risk putting them there before you went to bed, as you might have picked one up on your boot, and that would have drawn your attention to them. By placing them there after you were in bed he hoped that, on getting out, your bare foot would come into contact with one of the impregnated points." [Pg 198]

"It was certainly a most fiendish plot!" I declared. "And I thank you, Professor, for taking all this trouble with your analysis and so establishing the truth. I will go to the police and inform them."

"Yes. I wish you to do that, for the fellow is undoubtedly in possession of orosin, and intends to use it. Perhaps he has already killed people by the same subtle and secret means."

"He must be arrested at all costs," I said. "Already the police all over Spain are watching for him, and special surveillance is being kept along all the railways and on the frontier."

"Any person with orosin in his possession should be detained and examined," the Professor declared. "I wonder where he obtained it?"

"Who knows?" I exclaimed, but I was reflecting whether, after all, my presence in Madrid was not known to De Gex. If so, was it possible that he had hired the notorious Despujol to attack me in secret!

"Of course we know that there is a secret traffic in poisons. Medico-legists, with the police, have established that fact over and over again," said Professor Vega. "But the vendors are very difficult to trace. One was found only six months ago—a doctor living in a suburb of Copenhagen. But orosin is not known to a dozen people beyond those who study toxicology. Hence this man Despujol must have been supplied with it by someone who knew."

The suspicion had arisen in my mind that De Gex and his agent Suzor knew that I was in Madrid

for the purpose of watching them, and they had resorted to a very clever and secret means of getting rid of me once and for all. If the notorious criminal Despujol was in their pay he would no doubt afterwards blackmail them, now that the desperate plot had failed. Again, could it be possible that Moroni had had any hand in supplying this most effective and dangerous of all secret poisons to the Spanish malefactor who snapped his defiant fingers under the very nose of the police?

[Pg 199]

As I sat in that quiet room of the Professor's, a room that smelt strongly of chemicals, though it was filled mostly with books, I could not refrain from shuddering when I reflected upon the narrow escape I had had. Yet if De Gex resorted to such measures, he must certainly hold me in great fear. Besides, if my life was threatened, so also was that of my friend Harry Hambleton, who remained so vigilant in the serene belief that his presence was undetected.

At that time I never dreamed that the great financier who controlled the destinies of certain European States never moved without a police official being in attendance, and that surveillance was kept upon him as though he were royalty travelling incognito. De Gex, it seemed, was ever afraid that one of his enemies, the hundreds whom he had ruined by dint of sharp practice, unscrupulous dealing, and flagrant bribery, might seek revenge.

Hence, though neither Hambleton nor myself knew of it, both De Gex and his toady and agent, Gaston Suzor, were well aware of our presence, and, moreover, were kept posted concerning our movements from day to day!

Though we were in ignorance of all this, yet the desperate nature of the plot against me caused me to wonder what exactly was the fear in which De Gex held me. Of course it concerned Gabrielle Tennison. But exactly how, I failed to surmise.

One thing was certain, that the mystery-man of Europe intended to rid himself of me, and in this he was being aided by certain of his friends, chief among whom were Suzor and Moroni. That the assassin Despujol was only a paid servant was quite clear. But the pay must have been a very handsome sum to cause him to dare to come to Madrid so boldly and run the risk of arrest.

[Pg 200]

I smiled at my own innocence when I remembered how completely he had imposed upon me by showing me his papers of identity, and the photographs of his pretended family. Truly only a great criminal could have remained so imperturbed and polite to the man whom he intended should die.

"This drug orosin is a very mysterious one, I suppose?" I remarked a few seconds later as the Professor, who had offered me a cigar, was in the act of lighting up.

"Yes. A very weak solution taken by the mouth produces extraordinary effects upon the human brain. The latter almost instantly becomes unbalanced and the victim lapses into an unconscious state for days, even for weeks," he said. "Very often the brain is quite normal, save that a complete loss of memory follows the return to consciousness. In other cases orosin has produced complete and hopeless dementia."

"Always hopeless?" I asked eagerly, recollecting my own case and that of Gabrielle Tennison.

"Not always hopeless. There have been cases that have been cured."

"Do you know any personally?" I demanded breathlessly.

"There are one or two—very few—on record. Professor Gourbeil, the well-known alienist of Lyons, has observed two patients who recovered. But the majority of cases where orosin has been administered were found incurable. The mind is blank, the memory completely destroyed, and the general health so undermined that only the strongest persons can withstand the strain."

[Pg 201]

At once I described Gabrielle's symptoms and general attitude, whereupon the Professor said:

"What you tell me are the exact symptoms exhibited by a person to whom a small dose of orosin has been administered. In most cases, however, such a state of mind develops into actual insanity with a homicidal tendency. Such a patient should be very carefully watched, for in ninety per cent. the chance of a cure is, alas! beyond expectation."

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## CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

[Pg 202]

### MORE ABOUT THE MYSTERY-MAN

One very important fact I had established. Orosin was the obscure and little-known drug that had been administered to Gabrielle Tennison, as well as to myself, by the mystery-man of Europe at his palatial house in Stretton Street. Gabrielle being the weaker, was still suffering from its paralysing effects, while I, the stronger, had practically recovered.

Yet it had been intended by the daring Despujol that a fatal "accident" should now befall me! And could anything be plainer than that the fellow for whom the police were searching so eagerly was a hireling of the man De Gex who went in fear of me?

That most secret and most potent of all poisons might be known to Moroni! Indeed, it apparently was known to him, and the endeavour had been to introduce it into my system by means of an infected carpet pin.

On leaving Professor Vega I at once sent a note round to Hambledon, and awaited his arrival.

When he came I related all the professor had told me.

"Well, Hugh," he said, "we now know the truth, and it remains for us to combat the fiends. If you are marked down—no doubt I am also. So it behoves us both to be very wary."

"Why can't we tell the police the whole circumstances?" I suggested.

"My dear fellow, they wouldn't believe you, and they wouldn't arrest such a powerful man as Oswald De Gex," was his serious reply. "Money can buy immunity from arrest in every country in Europe, and especially De Gex's money, for it can be distributed in secret by his agents. No. If we are to be successful we must lay our plans just as cleverly as he lays his. We must allow him to believe that we are entirely unsuspecting of his plotting. That is our only way."

[Pg 203]

I realized that there was much truth in his argument. It remained with us to pretend ignorance. Therefore we resolved to still watch and wait.

A few hours later I told Señor Andrade, the Chief of Police, of the professor's discovery that the points of the pins had been infected with orosin, the newly discovered drug which in small doses produced loss of memory and insanity, and in larger doses sudden death.

In reply, he informed me that though every effort had been made to trace the elusive fugitive, all had been in vain, and that he was still at large.

"But if he has this terrible drug in his possession he is more than ever a danger to society," the Spanish official went on, speaking in French. "I thank you, m'sieur, for all the information you have given me, and you may rely upon me to take every possible step towards securing his arrest. I was in telegraphic communication with the Paris Sûreté only this morning concerning him. I will wire them again. They have been stirred into activity by the message I sent them after your call to see me."

I longed again to be frank with the affable Señor Andrade, yet I saw that if I were I might negative all chance of solving the problem which concerned the health and life of the girl whom I had grown to love so fervently.

Upon a sudden impulse I remarked with affected carelessness:

"I hear that our English financier, Mr. De Gex, is at the Ritz."

[Pg 204]

"Yes," he replied. "He is here under an assumed name in connexion with some big railway scheme in Estremadura—a line between Toledo and Merida. It is badly wanted, and has been talked of for years. There is a huge stretch of country south of the Tagus as far as Villa Nueva without any railway communication. The King himself has been agitating for the development of that rich agricultural region for the last ten years. And now it seems as though your great financier, Monsieur De Gex, is here to consult with the Ministry of Communications."

"Yes," I said, realizing in what high esteem that mystery-man of millions was held.

"I do not think I would care to have such colossal wealth as his," remarked the Chief of Police. "As soon as he arrived from Paris I had orders from the Ministry to place him under surveillance, because, it seems, he goes in fear of some personal attack upon him."

"By whom?" I asked, instantly interested.

"The information is vague," was his reply. Then, taking up a large yellow paper from his desk, he said: "It seems that he has applied to the Ministry for personal protection, and for a daily report of anyone who may be keeping observation upon him. There is a young Englishman living at the Palace Hotel who seems unduly interested in the gentleman's movements. We are watching him."

I held my breath. This was an unexpected revelation. De Gex was in fear of us, and had resorted to that ruse in order to keep himself posted upon Hambledon's movements! Truly the situation was daily growing more complicated!

"Surely such a well-known man as Mr. De Gex—a man who is noted not only for his immense wealth, but for his generous contributions to charity—could not have enemies?" I remarked.

[Pg 205]

"Everyone has enemies, my dear m'sieur," was the police official's suave reply. "Señor De Gex was here in Madrid a year ago when he made a similar application to the Ministry for personal surveillance. He was here in connexion with the foundation of the new Madrid and Southern Spain Banking Corporation, which is guaranteed by a group of French and Dutch financiers of whom Señor De Gex is the head."

He paused, and then continued:

"He seems highly strung and nervous. All men who are in the public eye seem to be the same. Well-known foreigners visiting Madrid often apply for surveillance, yet there is certainly no need of it. And I confess to you that my staff is, after all, unduly worked."

"I can quite imagine that," I said. "But is a strict watch kept upon Mr. De Gex?"

"Yes, and upon his agent, Monsieur Suzor, also."

"Has Monsieur Suzor been in Madrid before?"

"He was here two years ago when Señor De Gex had some big financial deal with the Count Chamartin, who was head of the Miramar Shipping Company of Barcelona. They say he bought the whole fleet of steamers from Count Chamartin."

"Was Count Chamartin wealthy?"

"Yes. A millionaire, without a doubt. But it is said that shortly before his death he quarrelled with his wife. Why, nobody knows. She lives at Segovia, and their house here in the capital has just been sold."

"Was any attempt made upon Mr. De Gex?" I asked.

"Well, a mysterious young Frenchman called one night at the Ritz and demanded to see him. He was very excited, and when he was refused admission upstairs, he flourished a revolver. My agent on duty arrested the stranger, who was, after examination, deported. For that Señor De Gex sent me a letter of thanks, and the scarf-pin which you see I wear."

[Pg 206]

The pin he indicated consisted of a single black pearl with the base surrounded by diamonds, an expensive piece of jewellery. That, in itself, was sufficient to show that Oswald De Gex was a past-master in the art of bribery, and that he had established in the minds of the authorities of the Spanish capital that when he came there he came in the interests of the Government, and hence he could do no wrong.

Ah! How I longed to be able to tell my story to that charming official. But I saw that if I did so he would not only disbelieve me, but put me down as an exaggerating fool. So I held my tongue.

I further questioned him concerning De Gex and his friend Suzor.

"Monsieur Suzor has been in Madrid before," he said. "He is agent of Señor De Gex. But how wealthy the latter must be! During the war he made a big loan to our Government. The real extent of it is not known, but some say that he can pull the strings of the Cabinet in any way he wishes, though the King disapproved of the whole transaction. At least that is the rumour. Yet, after all, Señor De Gex is a true friend of Spain, even though he, like all financiers, obtains huge percentages upon his loans."

"True," I laughed. "Men of wealth are seldom philanthropists. One finds more true philanthropy among the poor, and in the artistic circles of lower Bohemia, than in the circles of the ultra-rich. Philanthropy is not written in the dictionary of the war-rich—those blatant profiteers with their motors and their places in the country, who, having fattened upon the lives of the brave fellows who fought and died to save Europe from the unholy Hun, are now enjoying their lives, while the widows and orphans of heroes starve."

[Pg 207]

"Ah, M'sieur Garfield, with that I entirely agree," sighed the astute man seated at his writing-table with the three telephones at his elbow. "In my official career as head of the police department of Madrid, I have watched recent events, and I have seen how men who were little removed from the category of the worst criminals, have suddenly jumped into wealth, with its consequent notoriety, and the power which is inseparable from the possessor of money."

"The international financier Oswald De Gex is one of those," I said. "You cannot close your eyes to that fact!"

"You appear to entertain some antipathy towards him," he remarked, a little surprised it seemed.

"No, not at all," I assured him, smiling. "I only speak broadly. All these great financiers fatten upon the ruin of honest folk."

"I hardly think that such is the case with Señor De Gex," he remarked. "But you are English, and you probably know more than myself concerning his career."

"Nobody in England knows much about him," was my reply. "We only know that he is immensely wealthy, and that his riches are daily increased by the various ventures which he finances."

"He is a great support to our Ministry of Finance," declared the Chief of Police. "It was Count Chamartin who first interested him in Spain, I believe. In any case, they combined to finance a number of industrial enterprises, including the great Guadajoz Copper Mine which must, in itself, have brought them both a fortune."

[Pg 208]

"You said that the count is dead," I remarked.

"Yes. He died quite suddenly last year. He was one of the most popular men at Court, and his tragic death caused a great sensation. He was taken ill in the Sud Express while travelling from Madrid to keep an appointment with Señor De Gex in Paris, and though he was taken from the train on its arrival at San Sebastian and conveyed to the hospital, he died a few moments after reaching there. He had a weak heart, and had consulted two doctors only a month previously. They had ordered him a complete rest and change, but, contrary to their advice, he continued attending to his affairs—with fatal result."

"And the countess?"

"Ah! Poor lady, she was beside herself with grief. She was his second wife. His first was the daughter of an Englishman who lived in Madrid. The present countess is the daughter of the Marquis Avellanosa of Algeciras, and they were a most devoted pair. She now lives in Segovia in comparative seclusion. The count's untimely end was a great loss to Spain."

It was news to me that Oswald De Gex was in Madrid with his agent Suzor in connexion with the new railway scheme. Indeed, what I had just been told was all amazing, and showed De Gex to be a man of outstanding genius. The mystery-man of Europe took good care to inform himself of any person who watched his movements, or sought to inquire into his business. It certainly was a master-stroke to pretend fear of assassination, and compel the police to act as his personal guard. By that means he had learnt that Hambledon and myself were in Madrid on purpose to discover what we could, hence he had hired the assassin Despujol to set that dastardly trap for me.

[Pg 209]

Again it was upon the tip of my tongue to reveal the suspicions I had of the great financier, but I refrained, because I could see that my companion held De Gex in high esteem as a friend and financial mainstay of his country.

A few moments later I reverted to the possibility of the arrest of Despujol, for if arrested he might betray De Gex as the person who had paid him to place those infected pins in my room. In such case my story would be heard and investigated.

But the Chief of Police shook his head dubiously.

"I fear that he has again gone into safe hiding—up in the mountains somewhere, without a doubt," he replied. "It was an act of considerable daring to come boldly to Madrid and stay at your hotel when he knows full well the hue-and-cry for him is raised everywhere, and that there is actually ten thousand pesetas offered as reward for his capture."

"Someone may betray him," I suggested with a smile.

"Yes. We hope so. One of his friends, male or female, will no doubt do so and come one day to us for the reward. Not till then shall we know the truth of that strange attempt upon your life. The motive could not have been robbery, as you had nothing worth taking save your watch. If he had been found in De Gex's room at the Ritz one could have understood it."

I smiled. The Chief of Police never suspected the true facts of the case, facts within my own knowledge, which were of such an amazing and startling character that I hesitated to relate them.

When I left my friend I again sought Hambledon and told him all I had learnt.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Very wily of De Gex to get the police to keep an eye upon me. If I'm not careful I shall suddenly find myself under arrest as a suspicious person who is in the habit of loitering in the vicinity of the great financier."

[Pg 210]

"Yes," I agreed. "This seems to put an end to our present activity—does it not?"

"Well, he apparently knows that we are watching," Hambledon said. "What a pity we cannot tell the police all we know."

"If we did we should not be believed, and, moreover, they wouldn't hear a word against the great man who is such a friend to Spain. Money buys reputation, remember. Nobody knows that better than De Gex."

Hambledon was standing at my bedroom window looking thoughtfully down upon the Puerta del Sol with its crowd of hurrying foot-passengers.

"It seems a miserable ending to all our careful surveillance upon Suzor—doesn't it?" he grumbled.

"True, it does. But now that the pair are on the alert I cannot see that anything can be gained by remaining in Madrid longer," I pointed out.

"Then you intend to give up the quest for the truth?"

"Not by any means," I replied quickly. "I intend, at all hazards, and at all costs, to still fathom the mystery. What we have learned since we came to Spain puts quite a different complexion upon matters. We are now in possession of certain facts concerning De Gex—facts of which we had no suspicion. We had never dreamed that to further his ends he did not hesitate to employ a notorious criminal to commit murder with malice aforethought. Neither did we know anything of his financial dealings with the Spanish Ministry of Finance, or his partnership with the Conde de Chamartin, or that the drug he used upon poor Gabrielle and myself was the obscure but most deadly and dangerous orosin. All these are points which may in the near future be of greatest advantage to us. Therefore we must not despair. Let us take courage and continue to probe the mystery—for the sake of poor Gabrielle Tennison," I urged. "Let us act as quietly and discreetly as our enemy is acting, and we may yet attain success!"

[Pg 211]

## THE TRACK OF DESPUJOL

Having decided to still remain in Madrid I deemed it advisable to engage the services of a private inquiry agent to watch the movements of De Gex and Suzor, who still remained at the Ritz. The mystery-man, living under an assumed name, never went out in the daytime, though Suzor often went forth, paying visits to certain banks and commercial offices in connexion with the proposed new railway.

The man we engaged was an elderly ex-detective of the Seville police, named Pardo, who very soon discovered the identity of the secret agent employed to keep surveillance upon De Gex on behalf of the police so that no harm should befall him.

In consequence, I took Pardo into my confidence, and calling him to my hotel, explained that I desired to keep secret watch upon the Frenchman Suzor, without the knowledge of the detective watching De Gex.

"I particularly desire to know the addresses of any telegram which Suzor may send. Probably he may send some message to Italy. If so, please discover the address and the text of the message."

I believed that De Gex might communicate with Moroni, now that the plot of Despujol had failed.

"I will watch, señor," was the grey-haired Spaniard's reply. "If Señor Suzor sends any telegram I shall probably obtain a copy of it. They know me well at the chief telegraph office. Señor Suzor appears to be transacting a considerable amount of business in Madrid—a scheme for a new railway, I understand." [Pg 213]

"Yes, I know. All I want you to do is to find out who visits Mr. De Gex, and whether any telegrams are sent by either him or Mr. Suzor."

"I quite understand, señor," was the detective's reply as he rose, and a few minutes later withdrew.

Late in the evening two days afterwards I returned to the hotel to find the man Pardo awaiting me. After I had taken him up to my room and closed the door, he drew a piece of paper from his pocket, saying in French:

"Señor Suzor sent a telegram at half-past eight this evening of which this is a copy."

The message he handed me was in a pencilled scribble, and was in English as follows:

"Charles Rabel, Rue de Lalande 163, Montauban.—

"Important that I should see you. Meet me at Hôtel Luxembourg, Nîmes, without fail, next Monday at noon.—O."

The initial "O" stood for Oswald—Oswald De Gex! So the mystery-man of Europe contemplated leaving Madrid!

I thanked the man Pardo, who said:

"Señor Suzor did not dispatch the telegram from the chief office in the Calle del Correo, but from the branch office in the Plaza del Progreso. He apparently wished to send it in secret."

"I wonder why?" I asked.

The Spaniard raised his shoulders.

The address conveyed nothing to me. But the message was proof that De Gex intended to leave Spain, and further, it was a source of satisfaction to know his destination in case he slipped away suddenly.

After Pardo had gone I sat and pondered. It struck me as very curious that Suzor should have gone to a distant telegraph office in order to send the message. It seemed that he feared to be recognized by the counter-clerk at the chief telegraph office. For over an hour I smoked reflectively. I confess that a curious ill-defined suspicion had arisen in my mind, a suspicion that became so strong that just about eleven o'clock I entered the Jefatura Superior de Policia in the Calle de la Princesa, and again inquired for Señor Andrade. [Pg 214]

Fortunately he had been detained in his office, and I was shown into his presence.

He seemed surprised to see me, but at once he became interested when I said:

"I have a distinct suspicion that I know the whereabouts of Despujol."

"Have you?" he exclaimed quickly. "What causes you to suspect?"

"A man whom I believe to be an acquaintance of his has to-day sent an urgent telegram to Charles Rabel, Rue de Lalande, 163, in Montauban, in France, making an appointment to meet him at the Hôtel Luxembourg at Nîmes next Monday at noon."

"Who is his friend?" he asked eagerly.



"I regret, Señor Andrade, that I am not in a position to answer that question. The whole matter is only one of suspicion—very strong suspicion."

The Chief of Police looked very straight at me.

"Ah! Then you are in possession of certain secret knowledge concerning the man who made such a dastardly attempt upon your life!" he remarked. "And you suspect this Charles Rabel at Montauban to be the fugitive—eh?"

"Exactly," I replied.

He asked me to repeat the address, which he scribbled down, and then looking up, said:

[Pg 215]

"Personally, Señor Garfield, I think your suspicions are unfounded. Despujol, if he is ever found, will be discovered in hiding somewhere in the mountains of the north."

"But why not in Montauban?" I asked. "He is apparently a well-educated man, judging from his conversation with me. He speaks French well, and perhaps passes as a French subject."

"He could pass for a Spaniard, an Italian, a Greek, or a Frenchman," Andrade remarked. "And as forged passports are so cheap nowadays, and almost impossible to detect, the means of escape of such a daring criminal are both numerous and easy. But," he added, "I am interested in this person whom you believe to be a friend of the fugitive. Cannot you tell me who he is?"

I shook my head, and smiling replied:

"I have only come here to tell you of a very distinct suspicion I entertain that Despujol is at Montauban."

"Then his friend is your enemy—eh?" he suggested, his dark, penetrating eyes fixed upon mine. "You know the motive of that trap which Despujol set for you, and yet you will not reveal it to me!"

Again I shook my head and smiled.

"It would make my task much easier," he remarked.

"I am aware of that. But at present mine is only a suspicion. I have no actual knowledge that Charles Rabel is the man you are so desirous of arresting."

"And you really refuse to tell me who sent this message?" he asked in a tone of disappointment.

"It was sent in secret," I answered. "Indeed, it was that fact which caused me to suspect. You can, of course, obtain the original of the telegram by applying for it from the authorities. But it is only signed by an initial."

[Pg 216]

"How did you obtain knowledge of it?"

"Again I have no intention of disclosing the source of my information, Señor Andrade," I replied as politely as I could, "I am, as a matter of fact, here in Madrid attempting to solve a very remarkable mystery which occurred in London a few months ago."

"This is most interesting! You never told me that before!" he exclaimed. "I confess I wondered with what motive you and your friend Señor Hambledon, living at separate hotels, had in remaining here. It was regarded as suspicious by the detective force that being such intimate friends you lived at separate hotels, and met only in secret. Reports have reached me of your movements, and of your meetings," he laughed. "More than once you have been regarded as suspected persons," he added.

"Well, I hope you do not regard me as a suspected person any longer, Señor Andrade!" I exclaimed with a smile.

"No, no," he laughed. "But I confess you are something of a mystery. Why should the notorious Despujol dare to put his foot into Madrid and lay that deadly plot to kill you? You know the motive, and yet you will not disclose it to me."

"Not at present," I said. "If it is found that Charles Rabel is really Despujol, then I will come forward and state all that I know."

"You promise that?"

"I do."

"Very well—then I will give orders to have your suspicions investigated," replied the patient, urbane official. "A detective shall leave by the next train for Montauban with a request to the Prefect of Police of the Department of Tarn-et-Garonne for the arrest of the individual in question, if he should be identified."

[Pg 217]

"Then I will accompany him," I said.

"Excellent," he exclaimed. "It would be well if Señor Rivero, the head of the Detective Department, whom you have met, went in person to France. I will ring him up at his house."

He took up the telephone and a few minutes later spoke rapidly in Spanish to the chief detective of Spain.

Presently after a rapid conversation he put down the receiver, and said:

“Señor Rivero will meet you at the Delicias Station at two o’clock to-morrow morning. The express for Barcelona leaves at two-fifteen. From Barcelona you can get direct to Nîmes, and on to Montauban. And,” he added, “I only hope you will be successful in arresting the notorious Despujol.”

I thanked him, and suggested that if we should be fortunate enough to identify him, we should watch for the keeping of the appointment at the Hôtel Luxembourg at Nîmes on the following Monday.

“With whom is he keeping the appointment?” asked Señor Andrade.

“That I will disclose later,” was my reply. “I know that the appointment has been fixed, and if we watch, we shall, I feel assured, gain some knowledge of considerable interest.”

“As you wish,” replied the Chief of Police, who now seemed convinced by my manner that I was in possession of certain actual facts. “You will meet Señor Rivero—eh?”

“Certainly,” I said.

“Then I wish the pair of you the good fortune of arresting the assassin Despujol,” he said as we shook hands and parted. [Pg 218]

I drove at once to Hambleton’s hotel, where I found that he had just retired to bed. As he stood in his pyjamas, surprised at my unexpected visit at that hour, I told him what I had arranged.

“Then I will remain here and watch De Gex’s departure,” he said.

“Yes. But be very careful of yourself,” I urged. “Keep your revolver handy, for you never know when an attack may be made upon you. These fellows, though great men in the eyes of the world, employ desperate characters to do their dirty work.”

“I’m quite alive to that fact, Hugh,” replied my friend. “But we won’t give up till we punish those responsible for poor Miss Tennison’s state—will we?”

“No, we won’t,” I declared determinedly. “Of course we may be on a wrong scent, but something seems to tell me that we are pretty hot on the trail. The assassin Despujol would never have been employed by them if they did not hold us in dread.”

“Your journey to Montauban will prove whether you are right, Hugh,” he said, and then, after arranging that he should follow Suzor should De Gex leave without him, and that he should at once wire me word to the Poste Restante at Nîmes, I left, and returning to the hotel packed my suit-case and later met the bald-headed but famous detective.

The latter proved an amusing companion who, during the long night journey to the Mediterranean, recounted to me many of his interesting experiences. His French was better than his English, so we conversed in the former tongue.

There was no sleeping carriage upon the train, therefore, after my companion had spoken to the conductor, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the first-class compartment which had been reserved for us. At half-past three in the morning, with true Spanish forethought, he produced some sandwiches, fresh fruit, and a bottle of excellent wine, upon which we made a hearty meal, after which we dozed in our corners till dawn. [Pg 219]

Throughout the day my companion, who was quite as eager as myself to arrest the notorious Despujol, chatted in French as we went slowly down the fertile valley of the Ebro and suddenly out to where on our right lay the broad blue sea. Not until late afternoon did we arrive at Barcelona, and having two hours to wait we went along the Paseo de San Juan to the Francia Station, and having deposited our bags there, strolled along to the Plaza de Cataluña, where, at the gay Maison Dorée, we had coffee and cigarettes, while my companion read the *Diario* and I watched the picturesque crowd about us. Rivero knew Barcelona well, so after we had finished our cigarettes we took a taxi to the Central Police Office, where we had a chat with the chief of the Detective Department, a short stout little man with a round boyish face and a black moustache. After that we took another taxi along to the toy-fair in the Plaza de la Constitución, it being the Feast of St. George, the patron saint of Catalonia, which accounted for the bustle and gaiety of the city.

Then, after an interesting half-hour, we returned to the station and set out upon our slow eight-hour journey through the rich wine lands of Catalonia, with their quaint mediæval villages and towns, with occasional glimpses of sapphire sea, and passing over many ravines and gullies we at last, long after nightfall, entered a long tunnel at the end of which was the station of Port-Bou, the French frontier. [Pg 220]

The usual prying douaniers were quickly at work, and after some coffee at the Restaurant Baqué, which is so well known to travellers to Southern Spain, we re-entered the train for Narbonne, where in the morning we changed and travelled to Montauban, by way of Carcassonne and Toulouse.

It was late in the afternoon when, on arrival at our destination, we took rooms at the Hôtel du Midi on the opposite side of the Tarn to the prosperous pleasant little French town, once a

headquarter of the Inquisition, and even now containing in its Museum the executioner's axe and many instruments of torture. After a wash and a meal, for we were both very hungry, we set out to find Monsieur Charles Rabel, whose address was Rue de Lalande, number 163.

We crossed the wonderful old brick bridge from Villebourbon to the town—a bridge built in the fourteenth century with an internal passage running beneath the roadway to the ancient Château. Then, making our way past the old Church of St. Jacques, with its fine Gothic octagonal tower, and passing through a number of streets we found ourselves in the narrow old-world Rue de Lalande.

Just as we entered the street, which contained a number of small shops, I halted.

"He must not see me!" I exclaimed.

"I quite agree," replied the Spanish detective. "There is a little café over there. Go in and wait for me. I will make some discreet inquiries concerning this Monsieur Rabel."

Hence we parted, and while Señor Rivero sauntered along the street in search of the house in question, I went into the café and ordered a bock. [Pg 221]

Full of anxiety lest, after all, this man Rabel should be a respectable citizen, I waited.

Time passed slowly. Half an hour went by. I ordered a mazagran and sat smoking, trying to suppress my eagerness. An hour elapsed—an hour and a half—two hours!

I waited yet another half-hour until the proprietor of the café began to look askance at me. Then I paid, and rising, went out into the street.

It was now dark. There was no sign of my friend the Spanish police agent. He had disappeared!

I stood upon the pavement full of anxiety and bewilderment.

What could have happened to him?

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

[Pg 222]

### MADemoiselle JACQUELOT

I returned to my rather barely-furnished room at the Hôtel du Midi which overlooked the Place outside the station in the suburb across the river, and sank into a chair to reflect.

The concierge—a lad who wore the concierge's cap—the concierge being off duty at his evening meal—informed me that my friend had not returned. He seemed an alert French lad of that type so frequently seen in Continental hotels.

Señor Rivero had disappeared! For an hour I waited seated alone in my room reflecting deeply. My sole desire and fixed object was to solve the enigma of Gabrielle Tennison's unfortunate mental state and to bring to justice those unscrupulous blackguards responsible for it. As I sat there her pale beautiful face arose before me—the wonderful countenance of the girl who had, in such a strange and indescribable manner, taken possession of my soul. To analyse my feelings towards her was impossible. I put to myself the query why I loved her, but I was utterly unable to answer it.

I loved her most passionately and devotedly. That was all.

The tragedy of the situation was that I loved one who, alas! could not return my affection as a girl with her mental balance unaffected could do. Her poor unbalanced brain could never allow her to understand me, or to return my love.

I was tired after the long sleepless journey from Spain, and I suppose I must have dozed in my chair. [Pg 223]

I awoke suddenly, hearing a tap upon the door, and an elderly chambermaid entered with a telegram.

I tore it open and found it had been dispatched from Castelsarrasin, and was from Rivero, saying: "Absence unavoidable. Hope to be back by midnight."

"Where is Castelsarrasin?" I inquired of the woman.

"It is about sixteen kilomètres from here, m'sieur," replied the buxom woman in the strong accent of Toulouse. "It is on the road to Agen and the railway junction for Beaumont-de-Lomagne. Just a small town. They say that the name is a corruption of Castel-sur-Azin. At least my mother used to tell me so."

What, I wondered, had taken the head of the Madrid detective force out there? He must be following some fresh clue.

So I went forth across the bridge to a big café opposite the theatre, and there idled till nearly

midnight, when I returned eagerly to meet my friend.

He entered my room just before one o'clock in the morning, tired and dusty, for he appeared to have walked a long distance. I had some cognac and a syphon of seltzer awaiting him, and sinking exhausted into a chair, he took a long and refreshing drink before he spoke.

"Well?" he said with a sigh. "You have been wondering why I disappeared so mysteriously—eh? The fact is I was compelled. On making inquiry of a shoemaker who has a little shop near Charles Rabel's house I learned that the man for whom we are searching lived in a flat on the first floor of the house kept by a widow named Cailliot. But he was frequently absent in England or in Italy. Only for short spells was he there, for he was a commercial traveller representing a Lyons firm of silkweavers. As we were speaking, the shoemaker pointed to a rather smart young woman who was at that moment leaving the house, and said: 'Look! That is Mademoiselle Jacquelot, the fiancée of Monsieur Charles! She might tell you where he is. I do not think he is at home to-day. I saw him four days ago and spoke to him as he passed. But I believe he has left again!' I thanked him, and at once followed Mademoiselle, hence I had no time to tell you, for I had no idea where she was going. I saw that by following Rabel's fiancée I might gain some useful knowledge. She walked to the station, and took a ticket for Castelsarrasin. I did the same. We had half an hour to wait, but I spent it patiently, and when we left I travelled alone with her in the same compartment. Soon I managed to get into conversation with her, whereupon I mentioned that I had a friend, Monsieur Charles Rabel, in Montauban, and that we had met in Paris. He had once shown me her photograph and I believed I was not mistaken that she was Mademoiselle Jacquelot. At first she was surprised, but I told her a very plausible story, whereupon she explained that Charles had gone to Toulouse on business three days before, but that he was returning at noon to-morrow. She herself lived in Castelsarrasin."

[Pg 224]

"But do you anticipate that we shall discover in Charles Rabel the notorious Despujol?" I inquired eagerly.

Rivero raised his shoulders and elevated his black eyebrows, saying:

"From facts I gathered from Mademoiselle concerning him I certainly think that we are really upon his track. It hardly seems possible, but we must remain in patience till to-morrow. Then, if we find our surmise correct, we must act with the greatest caution if we are to watch him to Nîmes where he is to meet your mysterious friend—the man whose name you refuse to reveal."

[Pg 225]

"When they meet you will at once recognize him," I said. "I may be mistaken," I added. "But I do not anticipate that I am. If all goes well, then you will arrest the notorious Despujol."

"I only wish that the fellow would fall into my hands," replied my companion. "If so, then revelations will be made that will startle Europe."

"And incidentally gain you promotion in the service—eh?" I laughed.

He nodded and admitted:

"I hope so, Señor Garfield. I sincerely hope so," he replied, and we parted for the night.

Next day I woke early and sought my friend. We idled about till nearly noon, when we went together to the railway station to watch the arrival of the train from Toulouse.

A number of people were about, for the dusty lumbering express from Bordeaux to Marseilles had, at that moment, arrived, and considerable bustle ensued in consequence.

While we stood watching the crowd Señor Rivero suddenly touched my arm, and whispered:

"Look yonder! The girl in dark blue! That is Mademoiselle Jacquelot! She must not see me. I wonder why she is here—if not to warn him of the inquiries made concerning him by a stranger!"

I glanced in the direction he had indicated and saw a tall, slim, rather good-looking girl sauntering idly in our direction. Her attention had, for the moment, been diverted by an advertisement upon the wall.

"Quick!" cried my friend. "Let us slip back here."

And next moment we had repassed the barrier, back into the booking-office.

[Pg 226]

"If she sees me her suspicions will be aroused—if they are not already aroused," said my companion. "The fact that she is here gives rise to the question whether she is really so innocent as she pretends. She may know of her lover's escapades, and suspects me of having followed her out to her home."

"If she does suspect, then she is cleverer than you anticipated," I remarked.

"Yes. But in any case we had better act independently. You return to the platform, for she has never seen you. You will remain well concealed and watch them meet, while I shall be at the exit to identify him if you find that you cannot get near enough to him without courting observation."

As he spoke the bell was clanging, and there came the roar of the engine entering the big echoing station.

I slipped back instantly upon the platform and standing at a point against the corner of the bookstand where I hoped to escape unobserved, I turned my head away as the train came along.

Then, when it drew up, I held my breath anxiously as I turned around.

The girl in navy blue was not far from me searching along the train until, of a sudden, she espied a man in a dark overcoat and dark-green velour hat, who had just alighted, carrying in his hand a small leather case. His countenance was ruddy, and he had a small black moustache.

My heart fell. The man was a stranger to me! The countenance was not that of the man whom I had surprised in my bedroom at Madrid. He bent and greeted her affectionately, but next moment it was apparent that she was explaining something which caused his countenance to grow serious.

[Pg 227]

He put one or two swift questions to her. Then halting suddenly, he glanced at his watch.

I strove to get sufficiently near to look well into his face, but I feared recognition.

Would he pass out of the exit where the famous Spanish detective was awaiting him? Rivero knew Despujol by photographs, and indeed had been present when he had been convicted on the last occasion a few years before.

Mademoiselle's friend hesitated for some moments, and then accosting a porter asked a question. The man pointed to a train on the opposite platform.

Was it possible that what Mademoiselle had told him had scared him? It seemed so, for with a sudden resolve, instead of walking to the exit he entered the booking-office and bought another ticket.

In an instant I dashed to the exit where the Spaniard was waiting, and in a few breathless words told him of the man's intention.

To my amazement Señor Rivero heard me unmoved.

"I was awaiting you," he said. "The man you have been watching is not Despujol at all. Despujol, whom I recognized, passed out a few moments ago and took a cab to his house in the Rue de Lalande."

"Then you have seen him!" I gasped.

"Yes. It is Rodriguez Despujol, without a doubt, Monsieur Garfield. You have not been mistaken, and we must certainly thank you for putting us upon the track of this dangerous assassin."

"Then, after all, my surmise is correct! And he will go on Monday to meet his paymaster in Nîmes," I said. "The plot against me failed. Probably a second attempt is to be made."

[Pg 228]

"We shall be careful not to be seen until he travels to Nîmes," laughed Rivero, well satisfied at the progress he had made.

"But I wonder who is the red-faced man whom Mademoiselle has met," I remarked. "She has evidently warned him of some danger."

"If that's so we ought to see him," my friend exclaimed. "Let us go together on to the platform and watch. So long as Mademoiselle does not recognize me, we are safe."

With the reassuring knowledge that the man who was being sought for by the whole police of Europe had gone to his unsuspecting abode in the Rue de Lalande, we returned to the far platform where a train stood waiting to leave. It was the *rapide* for Paris by way of Bourges. The man was already in a third-class compartment and as he stood with his head out of the window, Mademoiselle was chatting with him. Truly his stay in Montauban had not been long.

The instant Rivero caught sight of the fellow's face, he exclaimed:

"Holy Madonna! Why, it is Mateo Sanz, the motor-bandit. We've been searching everywhere for him! He shot and killed a carabineer near Malaga a month ago!"

Next second he had left me and a few moments later hurried back. He had bought a ticket.

"Sanz does not know me. As soon as we've left the station and are away from Mademoiselle I shall be all right. Remain here. I will wire you, and in any case we shall be together in Nîmes on Monday. But be careful not to be seen by Despujol. He is a wary bird, remember!"

Then, unseen by Mademoiselle, he entered a first-class compartment of the train, just as the signal was given to start.

[Pg 229]

The train moved off, and I was left alone. Surely much had happened in those few exciting moments!

But why had Mademoiselle Jacquelot warned her friend the motor-bandit? If she had warned him because of Rivero's inquiries concerning Despujol then she could also warn the latter. Again it was curious that she met Sanz, and did not meet Despujol. Further, it was a strange fact that the pair of Spanish criminals had not travelled together—unless there was some reason for it.

Perhaps there was.

I watched Mademoiselle as she passed out of the station to a little restaurant where she had a frugal meal. Then she returned and took a ticket back to her home in Castelsarrasin.

Rivero now had his hands full. Not only had he identified in the respectable commercial traveller, Charles Rabel, the notorious assassin Despujol, but he had also quite accidentally come across Sanz the motor-bandit, who of late had terrorized the south of Spain, and whose daring depredations were upon everyone's lips. Mademoiselle seemed to be a friend of both men!

I returned to my hotel close by, and ate my *déjeuner* alone. My position was a very unenviable one, for I feared to go over into the town lest I should come face to face with the man who had so cunningly made an attempt upon me as the hireling of Oswald De Gex.

But my thoughts were ever of my beloved, the girl who was the victim of some foul plot into which I, too, had been drawn—a mystery which I was devoting my whole life to solve.

At five o'clock that evening I received a telegram from Harry in Madrid, telling me that all was quiet, and "our friend"—meaning De Gex—never went out. [Pg 230]

To this I replied in a cryptic way that our suspicions had been verified, and that the person of whom we were in search we had discovered. We were only now waiting for the appointment to be kept at the Hôtel de Luxembourg at Nîmes.

Next day passed uneventfully. In order to kill time I took train to the quaint little town of Moissac, an ancient little place on the Tarn about twenty-five kilometres distant, and there spent the hours wandering about the countryside which is so famed for its grapes in autumn. I did not return to Montauban till after seven, and while I sat at dinner the waiter handed me another telegram. It was from Rivero, and having been sent from Lyons, read: "All well. Just returning to Montauban."

Later, I busied myself with time-tables and found that he would be due to arrive about six o'clock on the following morning. Therefore I possessed myself in patience, and I was still in bed when in the morning he entered my room.

"Well?" he exclaimed in French, as he sank wearily into a chair. "I've had a swift and weary journey. Sanz has been alarmed by the girl. Why, I cannot tell. Did she go to see Despujol?"

"No," I replied. "She didn't see him, but went straight home."

"You have not ventured near Despujol, I hope?"

"No. I have hardly ventured into the town."

"Good. Well, we shall make a double arrest," he went on. "When the train arrived at the junction at Montlucon at midnight Sanz, evidently fearing lest he was followed, slipped out of the train and into another on the opposite side of the platform. It is a favourite dodge of elusive persons of his type. So, unseen by him, I also joined the train, and we travelled across to Lyons. There he went to a house in the Rue Chevreuil, close to the river, and when I had him safely there I went to the Bureau of Police and asked that observation should be kept upon him until such time that we in Spain should demand his arrest and extradition. The Lyons police know me very well, so two agents were at once detailed for that duty, and I immediately made my way back here. It seems that Sanz is also wanted in France for a motor-car exploit outside Orleans. Therefore our discovery is indeed a lucky one!" [Pg 231]

"Will Sanz be arrested?" I asked.

"Yes. I have already reported by telegram to Señor Andrade in Madrid. He will at once ask them in Paris to order the arrest."

"And Despujol?"

"We have now to await his journey to Nîmes to keep this mysterious appointment with your friend."

"Not my friend," I remarked, "rather with my bitterest enemy!"

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

[Pg 232]

### AT THE HÔTEL LUXEMBOURG

As a detective Rivero was of outstanding shrewdness. He knew that more could be gained by patience than by sharp activity. Hence he did not go near the Rue de Lalande. Indeed, on the Saturday night we both left Montauban together, and travelled by that slow, cross-country route through the Aveyron, by way of Sévérac, down to the ancient city of Nîmes—that quaint, quiet old place which contains more monuments of antiquity than any other town in France.

Early in the morning we alighted at the station, high upon a viaduct, after a sleepless night, and drove to a small commercial hotel, the Cheval Blanc, in the Place des Arènes, nearly opposite the Luxembourg where the mystery-man of Europe had appointed to meet the infamous Despujol. When I inquired for a telegram one was handed to me. It was from Hambledon, saying that De Gex had left for Nîmes and Suzor was returning to Paris, therefore he would follow the latter.

Having installed ourselves in the hotel, Rivero went to the concierge, and taking him into his confidence over a twenty-franc note, told him that he was very anxious to know whether a gentleman named Rabel had arrived at the Luxembourg. Would he ask the concierge there privately on the telephone?

The man in uniform at once rang up the Luxembourg, and addressing the concierge as his "dear Henri," made the inquiry.

The reply was that Monsieur Rabel was expected at noon.

[Pg 233]

"Ask if a gentleman is expected who has engaged a private sitting-room," Rivero said.

The reply came back that a gentleman, believed to be English, had arrived in the night and now occupied the best suite. His name was Monsieur Johnson, of London.

I then described De Gex to the concierge, who repeated the description to the other hotel.

"Yes, m'sieur," he said, turning again to me. "Henri believes it is the same gentleman whom you describe."

"Who is he?" asked Rivero, much puzzled.

"Wait—and you will see," I replied, laughing, for we now seemed to be within an ace of success.

Just before midday we watched the arrival of the train from Montauban, and from it there descended the man we expected—the notorious Despujol. Though his features were unmistakable he was made up to look much older, his hair being made grey above the ears.

At his side there walked a man whom I instantly recognized, and sight of him, I must confess, caused me to hold my breath.

It was the sinister-faced Italian, Doctor Moroni.

We drew back, and hastening to a taxi, returned at once to our hotel, from the door of which we could see the entrance to the Luxembourg, where a few moments later we saw both the travellers enter.

What further devil's work was now in progress?

We watched the hotel in patience, until just before three o'clock the trio came forth laughing airily.

"Why, look!" gasped Rivero. "Despujol is with your great English financier, Señor De Gex!"

I smiled triumphantly.

"I told you that I had a surprise in store for you," I exclaimed.

[Pg 234]

"But if Despujol is with him it must be with some evil intent!"

"That is certain!"

"While Señor De Gex was in Madrid we had orders to afford him police protection," Rivero said. "Possibly he suspected that some attempt might be made upon him. Certainly he has no idea of that man's true identity."

"Yes, he has, for he has come here specially to meet him in secret. But why that Italian should be here I can only surmise. He is a doctor from Florence, named Moroni—a man of very evil repute."

"But why should Señor De Gex meet such people in secret?" asked Rivero, much astonished.

"I suppose there is some strong motive why they should meet—the more so, now that I have proved to you that the notorious Despujol is a hireling of this wealthy man De Gex."

"A hireling!" he gasped. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that De Gex hired Despujol to make that attempt upon my life, and I have a suspicion—one not yet entirely verified—that Moroni prepared that deadly orosin by the agency of which it was hoped that I should meet with my death."

"Do you really suggest that De Gex, one of the best-known and most philanthropic men in Europe, actually hired Despujol to go to your room that night?" my companion asked, his eyes following the trio as they walked together and chatted beneath the trees of the Avenue Feuchères.

"I do. And further, De Gex has every motive in closing my lips."

"Ah! Then you hold some secret of his, perhaps?" asked Rivero, a new interest being instantly aroused.

[Pg 235]

"I do—one that I intend to expose when I obtain sufficient corroborative evidence," I answered with determination. "But is not the fact of the three men meeting here in secret under assumed names sufficient proof to you that some fresh plot is afoot?"

"Certainly it is," Rivero agreed. "But I wish you would reveal to me the whole facts."

"It is unnecessary," was my reply. "You are here only to deal with Despujol. I promised I would bring you to him—and I have done so. Instead of living in obscurity in a high-up frontier village in the Pyrenees, as you in Madrid believed, I have shown you that he lives in Montauban, where he passes as an industrious commercial traveller. If you search that house in the Rue de Lalande you might find a quantity of stolen property."

"As a matter of fact, it has already been searched by the police of Montauban at my request," he replied. "The raid was made last night after Charles Rabel had left. I received a telegram from the Commissary of Police only an hour ago to the effect that six heavy cases of 'travellers' samples' had been opened, and in them was found a great quantity of stolen jewellery, negotiable securities, and other objects of value, including two valuable paintings which were missing from the Prado Museum three years ago."

"Then my information has been of some little use to you—eh?"

"Of enormous use, Señor Garfield! You will no doubt receive an official letter of thanks from the Ministry of the Interior," he replied. "But we must act very warily. Despujol will not risk remaining here for long. Besides, some friend may telegraph to him that the police have been to the Rue de Lalande!"

[Pg 236]

Once more it was upon the tip of my tongue to explain the manner in which I had become implicated in the evil deeds of Oswald De Gex and his sycophants, when of a sudden he added:

"You must really forgive me, Señor Garfield, but you are an entire mystery to me. You have never been frank with me—never once!"

"I have been as frank as I dared," I replied. "I tell you that I am here to watch and to strive to elucidate a great plot—one which concerns myself and the woman I love. We have both been victims of a vile and desperate conspiracy."

"And whom do you suspect?"

"Oswald De Gex."

"With what motive?" he asked, for he held the enormously wealthy financial friend of Spain in awe and admiration.

"That, alas! is an enigma to me. I only know that he has made an attempt upon my life, and that at least one woman has been sent to the grave by foul means."

"Do you really infer that Señor De Gex is an assassin?" he asked incredulously.

"I only tell you what I know, Señor Rivero," I replied quietly. "I said that I would lead you to the secret abode of Despujol, and I think I have now fulfilled my promise, and shown you that he is on friendly terms with the great financier whom you in Spain all hold in such high esteem."

"There is certainly no man more welcome in Madrid than Señor De Gex," replied the police official. "At the Ritz, whether in his own name or incognito, he constantly receives our greatest politicians and most prominent personages. Even the King has more than once commanded him to the palace, in order to confer with him upon acute financial problems in the interests of our country. And yet you infer that Señor De Gex is an assassin!"

[Pg 237]

"I not only infer it," I said, "but I openly allege it!" I added hotly, as I thought of Gabrielle.

Rivero glancing at me quickly raised his shoulders with a gesture of disbelief.

"Very well," I said. "At least I have proved to you that he is a secret friend of the notorious Despujol. Why is he here in Nîmes to consult with De Gex and his friend the Italian, Moroni, if not for purposes of evil? Despujol has made desperate war upon society, and it is De Gex who secretly finances him! Hence he is the servant of the man with money."

The dark-faced Spaniard reflected.

"Well," he exclaimed at last. "What you have revealed is certainly most interesting."

"And if you wish to capture Despujol you must lose no time," I assured him. "Remember, he and his gang have agents everywhere with eyes and ears open. He will soon know of the raid upon his retreat in Montauban."

"No doubt he will," agreed my companion. "They will return presently, and then we will arrest him. In the meantime I will call upon the Commissary of Police. Come with me."

We at once took a cab to the Prefecture where we were ushered into the presence of Monsieur Coulagne, a rather tall, grey-haired elegant man, with the rosette of the Legion of Honour in his coat.

When Rivero introduced himself the Commissary bowed to us both and bade us be seated.

In a few quick sentences the Spanish detective explained the object of his mission, and producing his authority from the Spanish Ministry, requested the arrest of the infamous bandit Despujol.

[Pg 238]

"But is Despujol actually in Nîmes?" cried the Commissary astounded.

"He certainly is. I identified him on his arrival here at midday."



"We have been searching for him for over two years. He is wanted, among other things, for the murder of Madame Lescot, a wealthy widow of Aix-en-Provence."

"Ah! Then it is not a matter for extradition, eh?" remarked Rivero. "We want him for a dozen crimes of violence in Spain. He attempted the death of my English companion here, Monsieur Garfield—who will give evidence against him."

The Commissary pressed an electric button, whereupon his secretary appeared.

In a few rapid sentences the tall, elegant French official gave orders, and the secretary retired at once to execute them.

"Despujol is a desperate character. He is always armed, and possesses abnormal strength. He could strangle his strongest opponent," Rivero remarked.

"I have taken precautions," replied Monsieur Coulagne, smiling. "I have ordered ten men in plain clothes to go at once unobtrusively to the Hôtel du Luxembourg, and arrest him when he returns."

"That will frighten De Gex and Moroni," I said quickly. "And if they are frightened they will escape!"

Rivero laughed. I knew that he entirely disbelieved my statement. In his eyes the wealthy friend of Spain could do no wrong. Did not his King invite him to conference, in ignorance, of course, of his true character?

I was not surprised at Rivero's attitude, yet I had hoped that Despujol's arrest would be effected without the knowledge of De Gex and his sinister medical friend. [Pg 239]

I pointed this out, whereupon Rivero remarked with sarcasm:

"If what you allege against Señor De Gex and his friend be true, they ought also to be arrested."

"Yes. They ought, and they will be when I am able to bring forward sufficient evidence to convict them," I replied warmly. "Why, I ask you, should Oswald De Gex be in secret association with that dangerous bandit?"

The Spaniard merely shrugged his shoulders, while at the Commissary's request a dossier was brought in, and then they both went through a long catalogue of crimes alleged to have been instigated or actually committed by the man whom I had found in my bedroom, and who had so cleverly deceived me.

The list was a formidable one, and showed how elusive was the man whom the police of Europe had been hunting for so long.

Among the big batch of papers was a report in English from the Metropolitan Police at Scotland Yard stating that the individual in question had arrived in London on a certain date, and stayed with a respectable family at Ham, near Richmond, representing himself to be a lawyer from Barcelona. Thence he had gone to Glasgow, where he stayed at a certain hotel, and then moved to Oban. Afterwards he had come south again to Luton, in Bedfordshire, where all trace of him had been lost.

"Well," laughed Rivero triumphantly, "we shall take good care not to lose him now!"

"No," said the Commissary of Police. "My men will be armed, and will take him, alive or dead!"

"And De Gex and Moroni will then instantly flee!" I said, full of regret that I had taken that step which might so easily result in destroying all my chances of solving that puzzling enigma of Gabrielle Tennison. [Pg 240]

Nevertheless, it was a source of satisfaction that at last Despujol had, by my watchfulness, been run to earth.

Suddenly the telephone at Monsieur Coulagne's elbow rang, and after listening, he exclaimed:

"The men are already posted round the hotel. So all we have to do is to await his return."

Hence I went forth with Rivero and the Commissary. Led by the latter, we approached the Place de l'Esplanade through a labyrinth of narrow back streets until, on gaining the hotel, we saw idling in the vicinity a number of men who were apparently quite disinterested.

We entered the hotel boldly, and drawing back to the end of the lounge, after a whispered word with the concierge, we waited.

For a full hour we remained there in eager impatience, until suddenly a figure whom I recognized as Doctor Moroni showed in the doorway.

He was alone!

He ascended to his room, where he remained for about ten minutes. Then, descending, he went to the bureau and inquired for the bill of his friend and himself, announcing his intention of departing for Paris by the train which left in half an hour!

Rivero, who had been standing near him unrecognized, crossed quickly to where with the

Commissary I sat well back from observation, and gasped:

"They've gone! He is also leaving! Evidently they suspected they were under observation!"

"Ah! Despujol is a very wary bird," replied Monsieur Coulagne, rising and walking out into the Place, where he whispered some hurried words to a stout, well-dressed man who was sauntering by, and who was his chief inspector. [Pg 241]

In a few moments more than half the lurking police agents had disappeared to make inquiries at the railway station and in various quarters, and when he rejoined us—Moroni having returned upstairs—he said:

"Despujol cannot yet have gone very far. I have given orders for all railway stations within two hundred kilometres to be warned. Let us return to my bureau and await reports."

"And what about Moroni?" I asked.

"He will be followed. I have already seen to that," was the reply.

Back at the Prefecture Monsieur Coulagne was soon speaking rapidly over the telephone. Then we waited for news of the fugitive. None came until about two hours afterwards the result of inquiries was told to us by an inspector.

It seemed that on the previous day a large open car, driven by a chauffeur, put into Carli's Garage, a big establishment in the Boulevard des Arènes. The chauffeur asked for a receipt for the car, saying that he had to go by train to Marseilles, and that his master would probably call for the car on the following day, and produce the receipt. He asked that it should be filled up with petrol in readiness for his master. About two hours before the police made inquiry three gentlemen entered the garage, the descriptions of whom tallied with those of De Gex, Despujol and Moroni. De Gex produced the receipt for the car. He paid for the petrol, and he and Despujol drove away bidding farewell to Moroni! Despujol drove the car.

"Ah!" exclaimed Rivero. "Despujol would not risk the train. He always arranges a secret means of escape. In this case he prepared it on the day before. Without a doubt he knew that watch was being kept." [Pg 242]

"Or was it that De Gex knew that I was here?" I suggested.

"Well, in any case," remarked the Commissary of Police, "the pair have got clear away, and though we will do our best, it will no doubt be extremely difficult to rediscover them. They will change the number-plates on the car, and perhaps repaint it! Who knows? Despujol is one of the most desperate characters in all Europe!"

"And Oswald De Gex is equally dangerous!" I declared, for I was still no nearer the truth.

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

[Pg 243]

### GABRIELLE AT HOME

I had been back in London a little over a week when I read in the paper one morning a paragraph which possessed for me a peculiar interest. It ran as follows:

"The notorious Spanish bandit Rodriguez Despujol, who has for several years terrorized Murcia and Andalusia and has committed several murders, is dead. The police have been searching for him everywhere, but so elusive was he that he always evaded them. The celebrated Spanish detective Señor Rivero learnt a short time ago that the wanted man had been seen at Nîmes, where he cleverly contrived to escape by car.

"Certain clues came into the hands of the police, and by these Señor Rivero was able to trace the fugitive to Denia, not far from Valencia. He was hiding in a small cottage in an orange-grove just outside the town. The place was surrounded by police, but Despujol, discovering this, opened fire upon them from one of the windows and also threw a hand grenade among them, with result that two carabinieri were killed and four others injured, among the latter being Señor Rivero himself. A desperate fight ensued, but in the end the bandit received a bullet in the head which proved fatal.

"A large quantity of stolen property of all sorts has been discovered in rooms which the criminal occupied in Montauban, in France. Despujol's latest exploit was an attempt to administer in secret a very deadly poison to an Englishman who was visiting Madrid. It was that attempted crime which aroused Señor Rivero's activities which have had the effect of ridding Spain of one of its most notorious assassins." [Pg 244]

I read the report twice. So the defiant Despujol was dead, and poor Rivero had sustained injuries! Nothing was said of the powerful financier's friendship with the bandit.

When I showed it to Hambledon, he remarked:

"At least you've been the means not only of putting an end to Despujol's ignoble career, but also of restoring a quantity of very valuable property to its owners."

"True, but it brings us no nearer a solution of the affair at Stretton Street," was my reply.

Gabrielle's mother had returned to London, and that evening I called upon her by appointment. I found her a grey-haired refined woman with a pale anxious face and deep-set eyes.

When I mentioned Gabrielle, who was in the adjoining room, she sighed and exclaimed:

"Ah! Mr. Garfield. It is a great trial to me. Poor child! I cannot think what happened to her. Nobody can tell, she least of all. Doctor Moroni has been very good, for he is greatly interested in her case. They have told me that you called some time ago and evinced an interest in her."

"Yes, Mrs. Tennison," I said. "I feel a very deep interest in your daughter because—well, to tell you the truth, I, too, after a strange adventure here in London one night completely lost my sense of identity, and when I came to a knowledge of things about me I was in a hospital in France, having been found unconscious at the roadside many days after my adventure in London."

[Pg 245]

"How very curious!" Mrs. Tennison remarked, instantly interested. "Gabrielle was found at the roadside. Do you think, then, that there is any connexion between your case and hers?"

"Yes, Mrs. Tennison," I replied promptly. "It is for that reason I am in active search of the truth—in the interests of your daughter, as well as of those of my own."

"What do you suspect, Mr. Garfield?" asked Gabrielle's mother, as we sat in that cosily-furnished little room where on the table in the centre stood an old punch-bowl filled with sweet-smelling La France roses.

"I suspect many things. In some, my suspicions have proved correct. In others, I am still entirely in the dark. One important point, however, I have established, namely, the means by which this curious, mysterious effect has been produced upon the minds of both your daughter and myself. When one knows the disease then it is not difficult to search for the cure. I know how the effect was produced, and further, I know the name of the medical man who has effected cures in similar cases."

"You do?" she exclaimed eagerly. "Well, Gabrielle has seen a dozen specialists, all of whom have been puzzled."

"Professor Gourbeil, of Lyons, has been able to gain complete cures in two cases. Orosin, a newly discovered poison, is the drug that was used, and the Professor has a wider knowledge of the effect of that highly dangerous substance than any person living. You should arrange to take your daughter to him."

The pale-faced widow shook her head, and in a mournful tone, replied:

[Pg 246]

"Ah! I am afraid it would be useless. Doctor Moroni took her to several specialists, but they all failed to restore her brain to its normal activity."

"Professor Gourbeil is the only man who has ever been able to completely cure a person to whom orosin has been administered—and that has been in two cases only."

"So the chance is very remote, even if she saw him," exclaimed the widow despairingly.

"I think, Mrs. Tennison, that Gabrielle should see him in any case," I said.

"I agree. The poor girl's condition is most pitiable. At times she seems absolutely normal, and talks of things about her in quite a reasonable manner. But she never seems able to concentrate her thoughts. They always wander swiftly from one subject to another. I have noticed, too, that her vision is affected. Sometimes she will declare that a vivid red is blue. When we look into shop windows together she will refer to a yellow dress as mauve, a pink as white. At times she cannot distinguish colours. Yet now and then her vision becomes quite normal."

"I have had some difficulty, Mrs. Tennison, in that way myself," I said. "When I first left St. Malo, after recovering consciousness of the present, I one day saw a grass field and it appeared to be bright blue. Again, an omnibus in London which I knew to be blue was a peculiar dull red. So my symptoms were the same as your daughter's."

"It seems proved that both of you are fellow-victims of some desperate plot, Mr. Garfield," said the widow. "But what could have been its motive?"

"That I am striving with all my might to establish," I answered. "If I can only obtain from your daughter the true facts concerning her adventures on that fatal night last November, then it will materially assist me towards fixing the guilt upon the person I suspect. In this I beg your aid, Mrs. Tennison," I said. "I have only just returned from several weeks abroad, during which I have gained considerable knowledge which in the end will, I hope, lead me to the solution of the problem."

[Pg 247]

I then told her of my journey to Spain and afterwards to Nîmes. But I mentioned nothing concerning either Oswald De Gex or Despujol.

At that moment Gabrielle, unaware of my presence, entered. She was dressed in a simple grey frock with short sleeves and cut discreetly low, and looked very sweet. On seeing me she drew back, but next second she put out her slim white hand in greeting, and with a delightful smile, exclaimed:

"Why—why, Mr. Garfield! I—I remember you! You called upon me some weeks ago—did you not?"

"Yes, Miss Tennison, I did," I replied as I sprang from my chair and bent over her hand. "So you recollect me—eh?"

"I do. They said that you would call upon me," she replied, her beautiful face suddenly clouding.

"Who told you that?" I asked.

"Doctor Moroni. He warned me that you were my enemy."

I drew a long breath, for I discerned the depth of the plot.

"Not your enemy, Miss Tennison," I assured her. "But your friend—your friend who is trying his best to solve the problem of your—your illness."

"Yes, Gabrielle, dear, Mr. Garfield is certainly your friend. I know that," declared her mother kindly. "Doctor Moroni must have been mistaken. Why should he have warned you against meeting Mr. Garfield?"

[Pg 248]

I was silent for a moment, then I said:

"Of course, Mrs. Tennison, you have no previous knowledge of me. You are taking me entirely at my own estimation."

"When I meet a young man who is open and frank as you are, I trust him," she said quietly. "You know that woman's intuition seldom errs."

I laughed.

"Well," I answered. "I am striving to solve the mystery of what occurred on the night of November the seventh—of what occurred to your daughter, as well as to myself."

Mrs. Tennison endeavoured to obtain from me a description of my adventure, but I managed to evade her questions.

"I wonder why Doctor Moroni warned Gabrielle against you?" she remarked presently. "It is a mystery."

"Yes, Mrs. Tennison, it is all a mystery—a complete mystery to me why Doctor Moroni, of all men, should take an interest in your daughter. He is certainly not a man to be trusted, and I, in turn, warn you against him."

"Why? He has been so good to Gabrielle."

"The reason of my warning is that he is her enemy as well as mine," I said, glancing at the beautiful girl, whose countenance had, alas! now grown inanimate again.

"But I do not understand," Mrs. Tennison exclaimed. "Why should the doctor be Gabrielle's enemy?"

"Ah! That I cannot tell—except that he fears lest she should recover and reveal the truth—a serious truth which would implicate him."

[Pg 249]

"Do you think he had any hand in the mysterious affair?"

"I certainly do," was my reply, and then I told her of my journey to Italy, and of my discovery of her daughter with Moroni in Florence.

"But how did you know my daughter?" she asked.

"Because on that fatal night I saw her in a house in London."

"You saw her! Where?"

"In the house of a mutual enemy."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Tennison," I exclaimed quietly. "At present I cannot reveal to you more than I have done. Please excuse me. When I have fully verified my suspicions I will explain all that occurred to me—all that is within my knowledge. Until then, please remain in patience."

"I never dreamed that Gabrielle had a single enemy in the world. I cannot understand it," she exclaimed.

"Neither can I, but the fact remains. The greatest care should be exercised regarding your daughter. Why did she meet that Frenchman in Kensington Gardens?"

"I have only just heard about it," was her mother's reply. "It appears that Doctor Moroni

introduced them. She had only seen him once before.”

Then, turning to the girl, her mother asked:

“What did he say to you?”

“He brought me an urgent and secret message from Doctor Moroni, telling me that there was a plot against my life,” she replied in a slow, mechanical voice. “The doctor sent word to me that Mr. Garfield would probably call and endeavour to be friendly with me, but that he was my enemy, and I should have no dealings with him.”

“Ah!” I exclaimed. “So that was the second warning given you, Miss Tennison! It is more than ever plain that they fear lest, by meeting, we shall discover the plot and its instigators. What else did he say?”

[Pg 250]

“He told me that Doctor Moroni was still in Florence, but that he would be coming to London again very soon, and that he would call. He urged me at the same time to tell nobody that he had seen me, or that he had warned me against you—not even my mother.”

“All that is in no way surprising,” I remarked, “for I happen to know that Monsieur Suzor and the doctor are on terms of closest friendship—a partnership for evil.”

“How?”

“As I have already explained, Miss Tennison, I have not yet fully solved the enigma, though I have learned a number of facts which, though they increase the mystery, yet they give some clue to the solution of the enigma.”

“But their evil design?” asked her mother.

“Their evil design is against us both, hence your daughter’s interests have become my own,” I replied. “My sole object is to bring to justice those who have, for their own ends—no doubt for financial gain—been guilty of the astounding plot against your daughter. You may believe Doctor Moroni and his friend Suzor as you will, Mrs. Tennison, but I shall not withdraw from my present attitude. That they fear me is conclusively proved.”

“I quite see your point,” said the quiet-voiced, refined lady.

“Then I do urge you to have a care of Miss Gabrielle,” I exclaimed. “If it is known, as it may be, that I have been here, an effort will surely be made to close the mouth of one or other of us. These men are desperate. I have already proved them so. Therefore we must take every precaution against surprise.”

[Pg 251]

“Why not go to the police?” suggested Mrs. Tennison.

“Because the whole circumstances are so strange that, if I related them at Scotland Yard, I should not be believed,” was my reply. “No. I, with my friend Mr. Hambledon, must carry on our inquiries alone. If we are sufficiently wary and active we may, I hope, gather sufficient evidence to elucidate the mystery of your daughter’s present mental condition, and also the reason why a similar attempt was made upon myself.”

“Well, Mr. Garfield,” exclaimed the charming, elderly lady with a sigh, “I only hope you will be successful in your quest after the truth. This blow upon me is, I confess, a most terrible one. It is so distressing to see my poor child in such an uncertain state of mentality. Sometimes, as I have told you, she is quite normal, though she has no knowledge of what occurred to her. And at other times she is painfully vague and often erratic in her actions.”

“She must consult Professor Gourbeil, the great alienist, at Lyons. He has a wide knowledge of the symptoms and effects of orosin.”

The poor lady sighed, and with tired, sad eyes looked upon her daughter, who had sunk into a chair with her pointed chin resting upon her palms.

“Unfortunately, Mr. Garfield, I am not rich,” she said in a low earnest tone. “I will give most willingly all I possess in order that my poor child be restored to her normal senses. But I have very little in these post-war days, when everything is so dear, and taxation strangles one, in face of what they told us during the war that they were making England a place fit for heroes to live in! It seems to me that they are now making it fit for Germans and aliens to live in.”

[Pg 252]

“My dear Mrs. Tennison, our discussion does not concern politics,” I said, anxious for the future of the graceful girl whom I had grown to love so dearly, even though her brain was unbalanced. At first I regarded it as strange that being fellow-victims of Oswald De Gex and his desperate, unscrupulous accomplices—who included the assassin Despujol—I had been drawn towards her by some unknown and invisible attraction. But when I analysed my feelings and surveyed the situation calmly I saw that it was not more extraordinary than in any other circumstances when a man, seeing a woman who fulfills all his high ideals, falls desperately in love with her and worships at her shrine.

## THE DEATH-DRUG

It was July.

The London season, later in these modern days, was already on the wane. The Derby and Ascot had been won, in glorious weather. There had been splendid cricket at Lord's, fine polo at Hurlingham, and Henley Week had just passed. London Society was preparing for the country, the Continental Spas, and the sea, leaving the metropolis to the American cousins who were each week invading London's big hotels.

I was back at Francis and Goldsmith's hard at work as I had been before my strange adventure, while Harry was busy at his legal work in the police courts.

From our windows looking across the Thames between the trees on the towing path we had a wide view of the river with the chimneys of the factories on the opposite bank. On the right was Putney, the starting place of the University Boat Race, and on the left the great reservoirs and the bend of the river behind which lay Mortlake, the finish of the boat-race course. Each morning, when I rose and dressed, I looked out upon the wide and somewhat uninteresting vista, racking my brains how to further proceed with my campaign against the great intriguer who could, by his immense wealth, juggle with dynasties.

With Mrs. Tennison I had become on very friendly terms. Fearing to reveal myself as having taken that bundle of Bank of England notes as a bribe, I held back from her what had actually happened to me on that fateful night. But I had become a frequent guest at Longridge Road, and often spent many delightful hours with Gabrielle, who at times seemed quite in her normal senses.

[Pg 254]

Yet, at others, she became vague and spoke in awed tones about what she had seen—"all red, green and gold." And often I sat at home smoking and wondering what she had seen that had so impressed her. Often, too, I discussed it with Mrs. Tennison and with Harry Hambleton, but neither of us could suggest any solution of the mystery.

Mrs. Tennison, on account of the slump in securities owing to the war, was, I knew, in rather straitened circumstances. When I again suggested a visit to the great specialist in Lyons she shook her head, and told me frankly that she could not afford it. De Gex had, it seemed, sought his victims among those who had been ruined by the war.

She had, however, told me that her brother, a shipping agent living in Liverpool, who was Gabrielle's godfather, was deeply interested in her.

I suggested that she should write to him and urge that, as a last resort, Gabrielle should consult Professor Gourbeil. The latter had been successful in restoring to their normal mental condition patients who had been infected with orosin, that most dangerous and puzzling of the discoveries of modern toxicologists.

Mrs. Tennison had acted upon my advice. Had I been in a financial position to pay Gabrielle's expenses to Lyons I would have done so most willingly. But my journey to Spain had depleted my resources, and though I had those Bank of England notes still reposing in a drawer at home, I dared not change one of them lest by such action I should have accepted and profited upon the bribe which De Gex had so cleverly pressed upon me.

[Pg 255]

In the first week of July Mrs. Tennison wrote to me, and that evening I went over to see her after leaving the office in Westminster.

It was a hot dry night when London lay beneath its haze of sun-reddened dust after a heat spell, parched and choked.

Gabrielle was out at the house of one of her school friends, hence, we sat alone together in the cool drawing-room—a room which was essentially that of a woman of taste and refinement.

A few seconds after I had entered, a tall, grey-haired man came in, whereupon Mrs. Tennison introduced him as her brother Charles from Liverpool.

The man glanced at me sharply, and then, smiling pleasantly, took my hand.

"I have come up to see my sister regarding poor Gabrielle," he said, when we were seated. "I understand that you have experienced similar symptoms to hers, and have recovered."

"I have not completely recovered," I replied. "Often I have little recurrences of lapse of memory for periods from a few moments to a quarter of an hour."

"My sister has told me that you believe that poor Gabrielle and yourself are fellow-victims of some plot."

"I am certain of it, Mr. Maxwell," I replied. "And I have already devoted considerable time and more money than I could really afford in an attempt to solve the mystery of it all."

"Can you explain the whole circumstances?" he asked. "I am deeply interested in my unfortunate niece."

"I can relate to you a few of the facts if you wish to hear them," was my reply. I certainly had no intention of telling him all that I knew, or of the death and cremation of the mysterious Gabrielle

[Pg 256]

Engledue—whoever she might have been.

So I explained practically what I had told his sister. I also described how Professor Vega at Madrid had told me of the two cures effected by Professor Gourbeil, of Lyons.

“My sister tells me that you suggest Gabrielle should consult him,” Mr. Maxwell said. “But she has consulted so many specialists. Doctor Moroni has been most kind to her. He took her to doctors in Paris and in Italy, but they could do nothing.”

“Well, I think that as Professor Gourbeil has cured two persons of the deadly effects of the drug Miss Tennison should see him,” I remarked.

“I quite agree. It is for that reason I have come to London,” he said. “I understand that you, Mr. Garfield, take a personal interest in my niece, therefore I want to ask you a favour—namely, that if I pay the expenses would you accompany my sister and her daughter to Lyons?”

“Willingly. But I will pay my own expenses, please,” was my prompt reply.

At first he would not hear of it, until I declined to go unless I went independently, and then we arranged for our departure.

Four days later we descended at the big busy Perrache station at Lyons from the lumbering *rapide* which had brought us from Paris, and entered the Terminus Hôtel which adjoins the platform. Later, from the concierge, we found that Professor Gourbeil of the Facultés des Sciences et de Médecine, lived in the Avenue Felix Faure, and I succeeded over the telephone in making an appointment with him for the following day at noon.

This I kept, going to him alone in order to explain matters.

[Pg 257]

I found him to be a short, florid-faced man with a shock of white hair and a short white beard. His house was a rather large one standing back in a well-kept garden full of flowers, and the room in which he received me was shaded and cool.

I told him of Professor Vega’s recommendation, whereupon he exclaimed in French:

“Ah! I know Professor Vega. We met last year at our conference in Paris—a very brilliant man!”

Then, as briefly as I could, I explained how the deadly drug orosin had been surreptitiously administered to Gabrielle and myself, and its effects upon us both.

“Orosin!” exclaimed the old savant, raising his thin hands. “Ah! There is not much hope of the lady’s recovery. I have known of only two cases within my experience. The effect of orosin upon the human brain is mysterious and lasting. It produces a state of the brain-cells with which we cannot cope. A larger dose produces strong homicidal tendencies and inevitable death, and a still larger dose almost instantaneous death.”

I told him how we both had lost all sense of our surroundings for weeks, and how we were both found at the roadside, she in Hampshire and I in France.

“You were both victims of some plot; that is evident. Of course you have invoked the aid of the police?”

I did not reply. I certainly feared to seek the assistance of Scotland Yard.

He explained to me practically what Professor Vega had done regarding orosin and its terrible effect.

“There have been other cases of its administration,” said the great alienist. “Somebody must be preparing the drug and selling it for sinister purposes. Though it is so little known as yet that its manufacturer must be an expert toxicologist with special knowledge.”

[Pg 258]

“Have you seen many cases of its administration?” I asked eagerly.

“Yes. Quite a number,” was the old Professor’s reply. “I am in communication with Doctor Duroc, of the Salpêtrière in Paris, and together we are keeping a record of the cases where orosin is administered by some mysterious hand. Whose, we have no idea. We leave that to the Sûreté. But you say that your adventure and that of mademoiselle occurred in London?”

I repeated my story. Then I ventured to ask:

“Do you, Professor, know anything of a Doctor Moroni, of Florence?”

The white-bearded, shock-haired man reflected for a moment, and then moving in his chair, replied:

“I fancy I have heard his name. Moroni—Moroni? Yes, I am sure someone has mentioned him.”

“As a toxicologist?”

“Probably. I do not really remember. I believe I met him at one of the conferences in Paris or Geneva. He was with one of your English professors—one of your medico-legists whose name at the moment escapes my memory. He gave evidence in that curious case of alleged poison at the Old Bailey, in London, a year ago.”

“But is Doctor Moroni known as an expert in poison?”

"Not to my personal knowledge. Possibly he is, and I have heard his name in that connexion. Why do you ask?"

"Because he has had my friend Miss Tennison under his care. He has taken her to see several specialists in Italy." Then in a sudden burst of confidence I told him of my great love for the girl who, like myself, had been attacked in secret. Further, I told him that the reason of my steady inquiry was in her interests, as well as in my own.

[Pg 259]

"My dear Monsieur Garfield, now that you are so frank with me I will do my utmost in the interests of both of you," declared the dear old Professor, as he rose and crossed to the window. "What you have told me interests me intensely. I see by your travels to Spain and the South that you are leaving no stone unturned to arrive at a true solution of the problem—and I will help you. Orosin is the least known and most dangerous drug that has ever been discovered in our modern civilization. Used with evil intent it is unsuspected and wellnigh undiscoverable, for the symptoms often resemble those of certain diseases of the brain. The person to whom the drug is administered either exhibits an exhilaration akin to undue excess of alcohol, or else the functions of the brain are entirely distorted, with a complete loss of memory or a chronic aberration of the brain."

"That is the case of my friend Miss Tennison," I said.

"Very well. I will see her and endeavour to do what I can to restore her," said the elegant old French savant. "But, remember, I hold out no hope. In all cases orosin destroys the brain. It seems to create a slow degeneracy of the cells which nobody yet can understand. We know the effect, but we cannot, up to the present, combat it. There are yet many things in human life of which the medical men are in as complete ignorance as those who study electricity and radio-frequencies. We try to do our best to the extent of our knowledge, my dear monsieur. And if you will bring Mademoiselle to me to-morrow at three o'clock I will try to make my diagnosis."

I thanked him for his perfectly open declaration, and then I left. That he was the greatest living authority on the symptoms and effect of the mysterious drug orosin I felt confident. I only longed that he would take Gabrielle beneath his charge and endeavour to restore her brain to its normal function.

[Pg 260]

Punctually at three o'clock next day I called with my beloved and her mother at the house embowered in roses and geraniums up on the hill above the broad Rhône river.

We were ushered in by an old man-servant, silent and stately.

The Professor quickly appeared, his sharp eyes upon the patient.

"I wonder if you will allow me, Madame, to take your daughter into my consulting-room alone?" he asked in good English. "It will be best for me to question her without any other person being present."

"Most certainly," Mrs. Tennison replied. Then, turning to Gabrielle, she said: "The Professor wants to put a few questions to you, dear. Will you go with him into the next room?"

Gabrielle, pale-faced and tragic, looked at me strangely, and then meekly followed the old Professor into his consulting-room.

The door was closed, and Mrs. Tennison waited with me in silence. The window of the room was open and through it came the sweet scent of the roses and climbing jasmine, with the buzz of the summer insects and the chatter of the birds, for the house was high up on that hill above the great silk-weaving capital of the Rhône.

I rose and looked out upon the garden, so well ordered, for the Professor was, it seemed, a lover of roses, the blossoms running riot everywhere.

Suddenly, as we remained in silence, we heard Gabrielle's voice raised until she shouted fierce defiant words in English:

"No!" she shrieked. "It was not that—not that! You try and fix upon me a deed that I did not do! Why should you do this—why should you do this!"

[Pg 261]

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," we heard the Professor say in a quiet, calm tone. "Pardon. Please! I do not allege it. I have only asked a simple question."

"Your question is insulting, doctor!" declared my beloved loudly. "Why should you insinuate such a thing?"

"Mademoiselle, I insinuate nothing," replied the Professor. "I am endeavouring to ascertain the exact state of your mental balance. Your anger is, in itself, a most gratifying feature. A thousand pardons if you feel that I have insulted you," he added with the extreme politeness of his race.

Then, through the folding doors which divided the apartments, we heard him say:

"Will you please give me both your hands, and look directly into my eyes?"

There was a silence.

We could hear the Professor sigh, but he made no comment.



His examination occupied nearly an hour. He put to her many searching questions in an endeavour to restore her memory as to what happened, but without avail. Those questions seemed to perturb her, for of a sudden she cried loudly, indeed she almost shrieked in terror:

“Ah! no! no! Save me!” she implored. “I—I can’t stand it! I can’t—I really can’t! See! Look! Look! There it is again—all red, green and gold!—all red, green and gold!”

And we could hear her expressions of fear as she gazed upon some imaginary object which held her terrified.

We heard the kindly old Professor putting many questions to her in an endeavour to discover what gave rise to that nameless horror which she so often experienced, but her replies were most vague. She seemed unable to describe the chimera of her imagination. Yet it was only too plain that on that fatal night she had seen something bearing those colours which had so impressed itself upon her mind as distinctly horrible that it constantly recurred to her. [Pg 262]

Yet she was unable to describe it, owing to her mental aberration.

Time after time, she implored the Professor’s protection from some imaginary peril, and time after time, after she had begged him to remain near her, she repeated those mysterious and meaningless words:

“Red, green and gold!—red, green and gold!”

In breathless anxiety we listened, but all we could hear were the Professor’s sighs of despair, which meant far more to Mrs. Tennison and myself than any of his words could convey.

We knew that upon poor Gabrielle, the girl I loved with all my heart and soul, the deadly drug had done its work—and that she was, alas! incurable!

Her case was hopeless, even in the hands of the one man in all Europe who knew the effects of orosin and had only in two cases effected cures.

I looked at her mother in silence. She knew my thoughts, for tears were now coursing down her pale cheeks.

Both of us knew the worst. Our journey had been in vain.

That thought caused me to grit my teeth against De Gex and his unholy hirelings. I would follow and unmask them. I would avenge the innocent girl whom I loved so dearly, even though it should cost me my life!

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

[Pg 263]

### YET ANOTHER MYSTERY

The first week in August was unusually hot and dry in London.

Gabrielle and Mrs. Tennison had remained in Lyons, for Professor Gourbeil had suggested that his patient should, as a desperate resource, remain under his treatment for a few weeks. He gave practically no hope of her recovery. The dose of orosin that had been administered was, he declared, a larger one than that which De Gex had introduced into my drink on that night of horrors.

The effect upon me had been to muddle my brain so that I had accepted those Bank of England notes as bribe to assist the mystery-man of Europe in his foul and mysterious plot.

My companion Harry Hambleton was still earning his guineas at Hammersmith Police Court, gradually establishing a reputation. He had bought a small two-seater car, and each Sunday he took Norah out for runs to the Hut at Wisley, to the Burford Bridge Hotel, where the genial Mr. Hunt—one of the last remaining Bohemians of the days of the Junior Garrick Club—welcomed them; to the Wooton Hatch, or up to those more pretentious and less comfortable hostelries on Hindhead.

Motoring had roused a new interest in my friend. I loved the open road, but with the heavy expenses I had recently sustained I could not afford it. Besides, my firm had just secured a big electric lighting contract with the corporation of Chichester, and I was constantly travelling between that city and London, sometimes by rail and sometimes in Mr. Francis’s car. [Pg 264]

I suppose I must have carried on my work satisfactorily after the generous leave the firm—one of those stately old-fashioned ones which have still survived the war—had accorded me. But my thoughts were ever of my beloved Gabrielle, the beautiful girl whom, though her mind was so strongly unbalanced, I yet loved with all the strength of my being.

Every few days we exchanged letters. Sometimes Mrs. Tennison wrote to me from the quiet little pension in the Rue Paul Bert, in Lyons, but her letters were always despairing. Poor Gabrielle was just the same. She still had no other vista in life than her immediate one, and she still in her reflective moments gave vent to that strange ejaculation of those mysterious words: “Red, green

and gold! Red, green and gold!"

I confess that I went about my business in a low-spirited, despairing mood. More than once I passed by that dark forbidding house in Stretton Street, the blinds of which were drawn, for ever since the winter it had been closed with the caretaker in charge. Pass along Park Lane and the Mayfair neighbourhood in August and you will see the Holland blinds drawn everywhere. The window-boxes filled with geraniums and marguerites are drooping, for they have served their turn and "the families" are out of town, enjoying themselves in Scotland, in Norway, or at the French Spas. Honest Londoners may sweat and toil with their begrudged fourteen days at the sea or in the country, but Society, caring nothing for unhealthy trades or ill-paid labour, unless a strike perchance affects their pockets or their comforts, drifts to where it can flirt, dance or gamble amid gay surroundings denied in London by our sanctimonious kill-joys.

[Pg 265]

Whenever I passed along Stretton Street there spread over my mind the strange and inexplicable events of that night when De Gex's man-servant Horton had dashed out after me, and suddenly implored me to see his master. Ah! I saw the amazing cleverness of the whole plot—a plot such as could only be conceived by a master brain.

De Gex's dark, sinister, half-Oriental countenance haunted me in my dreams. True, he was a man who swayed the finances of Europe, suave, smiling, and with an extremely polished and refined exterior. But why Suzor had purposely become acquainted with me, and why I had afterwards been enticed into that house of tragedy were, in themselves, two points, the motive of which I failed to grasp.

Late one evening I passed the house, going out of my way purposely to do so, when, to my amazement, I saw standing upon the doorstep, and about to enter his car, no other person than Oswald De Gex himself. Behind him stood a strange man-servant, who at the moment seemed to be taking some instructions.

In the darkness De Gex could not distinguish me. Therefore I drew back and watched the world-famous financier enter the car and drive away.

So Oswald De Gex was back in London—and in August! I had passed the house on the previous afternoon and seen that as usual the faded Holland blinds were drawn, just as they had been for months, an indication to callers that the owner was away. I looked again. The blinds were still down!

Next day being Sunday I watched, and though at four o'clock in the afternoon De Gex came forth and strolled round to his club in St. James's Street, the blinds were still drawn, it being evident that the unscrupulous man who juggled with European dynasties was living there in obscurity—and in pretence of absence.

[Pg 266]

Why?

My watchfulness was increased; my thoughts being ever upon the avenging of the injury done to the sweet girl I so dearly loved—that poor unfortunate creature whose brain had been destroyed by the dastardly administration of that poison only known to students of toxicology. In my waking hours I conjured up scenes of how mother and daughter, living in that obscure pension in busy Lyons, went each day to the Professor's house, and how the kindly old savant did his best to restore her brain to its normal activity.

One hot day I had been to Reading on business for the firm, and on arrival at Paddington I bought an evening paper and took it home to Rivermead Mansions. As usual Harry and I had dinner together, and after he had gone out to Richmond, I sat by the open window which looked upon the towing-path beside the Thames, and with my pipe in my mouth, scanned the day's news.

Of a sudden I came across a heading which attracted me, and read as follows:

"The sudden death is announced, at his house outside Amsterdam, of Baron Harte van Veltrup, the well-known Dutch financier, who for some years was in active association with the Spanish banker, the late Count de Chamartin. The Count died recently in San Sebastian just after he, with van Veltrup, had promoted a great railway scheme in Central Spain. The circumstances of the Baron's death appear to be somewhat mysterious, says our Amsterdam correspondent. Three days ago the banker, who is a widower, went to The Hague, where in a private room in an obscure hotel, he met a man on business. The meeting was apparently in secret, for he told his valet that he did not wish anyone to know of the mysterious visitor for a certain financial reason. The man remained with the Baron for nearly an hour, after which the financier went home in his car to Amsterdam, his valet driving. On the way the servant noticed that his master seemed very perturbed, once or twice muttering threats beneath his breath.

[Pg 267]

"On arrival at his house facing Vondel Park, he dressed, ate his dinner alone, and was about to re-enter his car to drive to the Park Schouwburg, where opera was being given that night, when he staggered and fell just outside the gate, and expired in a few moments.

"Though a medical examination proved that death was due to heart failure, some comment has been caused by the valet's story of his master's mysterious visitor at The Hague. The latter he describes as middle-aged, with a small dark moustache,

a ruddy complexion, wearing round horn-rimmed spectacles. He thinks the latter were worn for purposes of disguise.

“Three doctors have, however, declared that death ensued from natural causes, hence the police discredit the valet’s story. Baron van Veltrup, who was well known in international finance, was a frequent visitor to London, where he had permanent chambers in Jermyn Street. He was in the habit of receiving strange callers—persons who probably gave him secret information regarding Government concessions and other such matters. Therefore it is not believed that the man whom he met in secret has any connexion with his sudden and lamented death. The Baron contributed most generously to Dutch charities, especially to the Blinden Institution, of which he was one of the governors.

[Pg 268]

“Some of his financial deals were of outstanding magnitude. The last loan to Peru was made through his house, in combination with that of Chamartin, in Madrid, while he negotiated a big loan to Serbia immediately before the war, as well as obtaining the concessions for two new railways in Northern Italy and in Portugal. The reputation of the house of Veltrup was one of the highest standing, and the Baron’s untimely death has cast a gloom over financial circles in all the European capitals.”

I raised my eyes from the paper and gazed across the Thames now growing grey in the evening light. Outside, the soft wind whispered in the trees and across the long suspension bridge ran an endless stream of motor traffic into and out of London.

The affair in Amsterdam was certainly curious, but what attracted me most was the fact that the dead Baron had been a partner with the late Count Chamartin, whose widow I knew by sight. The Count had also died very suddenly. So within a short time of each other two men whose names were ones to conjure with in international finance had both died!

The valet’s story I did not doubt. I knew that such men as the late Baron were often compelled, in their own interests, to receive visits from mysterious and often undesirable persons, most of whom were paid for their information. Every giant of finance employs his secret agents, whose duty it is to keep his principal informed of the various political and other secrets in Europe. Indeed, the great financiers know more of the underground currents of foreign politics than they do at any Embassy or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is their duty to know the secrets of nations—and they profit upon their knowledge.

[Pg 269]

I sat ruminating. The sudden deaths of the two pillars of finance was, to say the least, a curious coincidence. I recollected that Chamartin had been associated with De Gex, and the object of the latter’s journey to Madrid had apparently been to interview his dead friend’s widow. I also remembered Professor Vega’s description of the deadly effect of that secret poison orosin—that it might cause almost instant death, and that all doctors would attribute the cause to heart failure.

This caused me to ponder for a long time. I read and re-read the report of the Baron’s death, and when I retired to bed—Harry not having yet returned—I could not sleep, so haunted was I by vague suspicions.

Next day I found that I could not apply myself to work at the office, so gave it up and once more wandered towards Hyde Park Corner and up Park Lane where again I passed through Stretton Street. The blinds of the big dark mansion were all lowered, indicating that its owner was still out of town. Yet I knew that he was living in the half darkness of that closed house.

Why?

Several days passed when, unable to rest, I at last asked leave of absence from old Mr. Francis, and crossed by the night-boat from Harwich to the Hook of Holland. On the following day I found myself in quaint old Amsterdam, that city built upon the sand in defiance of a certain text in St. Matthew, the city with its great network of canals, and its many gaudily-painted barges. As I left my hotel and walked to the Dam, the central square of the city, my nostrils were saluted upon one side by the perfume of the flowers adorning the windows and the odour of cook-shops, while on the other was the smell of tar and the fumes of the humble kitchens of sailing vessels.

[Pg 270]

I happened to know an Englishman employed as clerk to a firm of Dutch forwarding agents whose offices were in the Dam, and this man, whose name was Graham, I at once sought.

We went out to a café together, and I explained the object of my visit, namely, the investigation of the death of Baron van Veltrup. Graham at once regarded me with considerable astonishment, for very naturally he could not make out why I should take such a keen interest in the death of one of the richest men in Holland.

“The Baron died of heart failure,” my friend said. “The doctors are agreed upon that. His valet told some extraordinary story, but no credence has been placed in it. There has been a good deal in the papers concerning the unfortunate affair, but the excitement has now all died down. The Baron was, I believe, buried yesterday.”

“I know that there is no suspicion that death was due to foul play, Graham,” I said. “But I confess that in face of certain knowledge I possess I am not altogether satisfied with the doctor’s conclusion.”

My friend smiled incredulously.

"At first, the police were, I heard, inclined to suspect foul play. But after full investigation they are now quite satisfied as to the cause of death."

"Be that as it may, I intend to make a few discreet inquiries," I replied resolutely. "I want you, if you will, to assist me."

He smiled again in undisguised disbelief.

"Of course you are at liberty to express your own opinion," he said with some reluctance. "And if you wish, I will assist you. But I really think, Garfield, that you will be only wasting your time—and mine." [Pg 271]

"I hope not," I assured him. "Were I not in possession of certain exclusive information I should not venture to come here from London and trouble you, as I am doing."

Graham, whom I had known for a number of years, looked very straight at me.

"What is the nature of this exclusive information?" he inquired. "You are concealing something, Hugh."

"Yes. I know I am," was my reply as I smiled at him. "I am here to discover the truth regarding the death of Baron van Veltrup."

"Then you suspect foul play—eh?" asked my friend.

"Yes, I do," I replied in a low voice, "and I want you, Graham, to put me in touch with the Baron's valet."

"He is a man named Folcker, a Swede, according to the newspapers. I dare say I could find him."

"If you can, you will assist me very much. I must have a chat with him," I said. "I feel somehow that in face of the strange facts within my knowledge that he can give me the clue to the cause of his master's death."

Graham smiled. He seemed to regard me as a person whose mind was not quite sound. But I will give him his due. He propitiated me, and promised to get into touch with Oscar Folcker. By virtue of the wide ramifications of the firm by which Graham was employed, I knew that it would be an easy matter, hence I was not surprised when next day he rang me up on the telephone to my hotel and told me that he had been able to find the valet Folcker who would call upon me at six o'clock that evening.

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

[Pg 272]

### WHAT THE VALET KNEW

At the time appointed, as I stood in the hall, a tall, clean-shaven, rather spruce young man entered and spoke to the concierge, who at once brought him over to me.

I took him into a corner of the lounge, and when we were seated I told him of my suspicions and my quest.

Like many Swedes he spoke English, and in reply said:

"Well, sir, I was in the Baron's service for five years, and I knew his habits very well. He was an excellent master—most kind and generous, and with him I have travelled Europe up and down. We were very often in London, where the Baron had bachelor chambers in Jermyn Street."

"I know that," I said. "But tell me what you know, and what you suspect concerning his untimely end."

"There was foul play, sir!" he said unhesitatingly. "The Baron was a strong healthy man who lived frugally, and though he dealt in millions of francs, yet he was most quiet in his habits, and his boast was that he was never out of bed after half-past ten. Though very rich he devoted nearly half his income yearly to charitable institutions. I know the extent of his contributions to the needy, for I have often seen him draw the cheques."

"Well—tell me exactly what happened," I asked.

"The affair presents some very puzzling features, sir," he replied. "One morning, while dressing, my master told me that he had to motor to The Hague as he wished to meet in strict secrecy a man who would call to see him at a little hotel called the Rhijn, in the Oranje Straat. He asked me to drive him there so that Mullard, the chauffeur, should have no knowledge of the visit. This I promised to do, for I can drive a car. We arrived early in the afternoon, and the Baron, who was unknown at the obscure little place, ordered lunch for us both. He ate his in the private room he had engaged, and at about three o'clock the visitor arrived. He inquired of the proprietor and was shown into the Baron's private room. I judged him to be about forty, of middle height, well-dressed, and wearing big round tortoiseshell glasses, like those Americans so often wear. He was [Pg 273]

red-faced and walked with a slight limp.”

“And what happened while your master was with the stranger?”

“The Baron came out and told me to go to the garage with the car, and I was telephoned for an hour later. When I met him again he seemed to be in an ill and petulant mood, for he told me to drive back to Amsterdam with all speed. He also again made me promise to tell nobody of the secret meeting.”

“And then?” I asked anxiously.

“On arrival home he washed, dressed, and dined alone. Afterwards he put on his gloves, grey suède ones, ready to go, but exchanged them for a pair of white ones, as he recollected that he was going to the opera. Then he walked out to the car, but suddenly cried, ‘Oh! My head! My head!’ and fell on to the pavement. I was just behind him when he did so, and hurried to get him up. But he was already unconscious, and scarcely before we could get him into the house he expired.”

“And why do you suspect foul play?” I asked.

“I feel certain that my master did not die from natural causes,” declared the thin-faced man-servant. [Pg 274]

“You suspect that the individual in round spectacles had a hand in it—eh?”

“I do. But how, I have no idea. The police pooh-pooh my suspicions. But if my suspicions are unfounded, why has not the stranger come forward? There has been a lot about the affair in the papers.”

“Yes,” I said. “It certainly appears strange, for there can be no cause for secrecy now that the Baron is dead, even if some great financial transaction had been involved.”

“My master often received very queer visitors,” said Folcker. “Once he entertained two very strange-looking shabby individuals when he was at Aix-les-Bains with Mr. De Gex.”

“With Mr. De Gex!” I echoed. “Was the Baron a friend of his?”

“Yes, an intimate friend. They often had big deals together in which Count Chamartin, who lived in Madrid, participated.”

“Ah! That is distinctly interesting,” I said. “Did the Baron, when in London, visit Mr. De Gex at Stretton Street?”

“Frequently. They were mutually interested in the great Netherlands Shipping Combine about a year ago,” replied the valet.

“And you usually travelled with your master, I suppose?”

“Nearly always. We were frequently in Paris, Berlin, Rome, or Madrid, and naturally I learnt a good deal about his business. His most intimate friend was Mr. De Gex. Do you happen to know him?”

I gritted my teeth, and replied in the affirmative.

“A very charming man,” the valet declared. “He was always very good to the servants. I used to look after him when he visited us here in Amsterdam.” [Pg 275]

“Did you ever meet a friend of his—a Frenchman named Suzor?” I asked.

“Yes, once. When we stayed with Mr. De Gex at Florence. He was a fellow guest with my master.”

“And an Italian doctor named Moroni?”

Folcker shook his head, as he replied:

“I have no recollection of an Italian doctor. We were in Florence only two weeks.”

“Of course you know Mr. De Gex’s butler, a man named Horton?” I asked.

“No, the man I know is named Farmer. I haven’t been to Stretton Street for over a year.”

It would therefore appear that Horton was a new servant.

“But have you any idea how your master died?” was my next query.

“None—only something tells me that he fell victim to a plot for his assassination.”

“Why?”

“Because he more than once told me that if he died certain persons would derive great benefits.”

“Who? His friends?”

“I suppose so.”

“Including De Gex?”

The thin-faced man shook his head, saying:

"Ah! That I cannot tell, sir. But I know that Mr. De Gex owed the Baron a very considerable sum over a financial deal regarding some oil wells in Roumania. Only a few months ago he mentioned to Mr. Grant, one of his friends, in my presence, that he hoped De Gex would very soon settle with him. In fact he seemed annoyed at the delay in the payment."

[Pg 276]

This statement caused me to reflect deeply.

Was it really possible that the Dutch Baron's death had been due to the machinations of this mystery-man of Europe? The fact that he owed the dead man money would serve as sufficient motive! I did not overlook the deeply-laid plot against myself, one that must have sent me swiftly into my grave had it not been for my providential escape.

The whole amazing facts, my meeting with Suzor in the express between York and King's Cross, the trap set for me at Stretton Street, and my astounding adventures afterwards, all flashed through my mind. Oswald De Gex was a most unscrupulous person who had climbed to fame and fortune over the ruined homes and bodies of his victims. I was now out to obtain direct and undeniable evidence of his crimes.

Yet up to the present I could not go much further than mere surmise. Two of his business friends, Count Chamartin and Baron van Veltrup, had died quite suddenly. In the case of the latter, the valet expressed a positive belief that his master had not died of natural causes. This was supported by the fact that the Baron received a mysterious visitor at an obscure hotel at The Hague, a man who was apparently disguised by big horn spectacles, and was certainly not a Dutchman.

And above all that, I held most conclusive evidence that both De Gex himself and the dead bandit, Despujol, had used that deadly drug orosin to secure their nefarious ends.

But the most irritating feature of the affair was that I was as far off as ever from solving the mystery of what happened on that memorable night in Stretton Street, or with what motive I had been induced to give a death certificate that had enabled the body of an unknown girl to be cremated.

[Pg 277]

I questioned the valet, Folcker, still further, telling him that I had come especially from London to endeavour to elucidate the truth concerning his master's death. He was devoted to the Baron, and was highly incensed at the attitude taken by the Dutch police.

"I will give you every assistance, sir," he replied.

"Excellent," I said. "I would very much like to go to the Baron's house. Could you take me there?"

"Most certainly, sir," was his response, and with willingness he accompanied me in a horse cab up the cobbled Leidwche Straat with its many canals to the pleasant Vondel Park, just outside the city. We stopped before a great white house, square and rather inartistic, standing back behind very high iron railings, to which we were admitted by an elderly man-servant who was in charge of the place now that its owner was dead.

Folcker showed me his master's handsome dressing-room which had been left practically as it was on the night of his tragic end. He showed me how the Baron had put on his evening clothes and descended to dine.

He took me into the fine, handsomely-furnished dining-room, with big long carved table in the centre, and showed me the small round table set in the big bow window looking out upon the garden, at which the Baron always ate his meals when alone.

"After finishing his dinner the Baron smoked one of his Petroff cigarettes which were especially made for him in Odessa, and then calling me, he asked for his coat and told me to ring up for the car," Folcker said. "He finished his cigarette and a glass of kümmel, at the same time scanning the evening newspaper. All the time he had been eating, however, he seemed in a very angry mood. The interview with the stranger at The Hague had somehow upset him, for once or twice he muttered angrily to himself."

[Pg 278]

"Now tell me, Folcker," I asked seriously, "when he entered that little hotel at The Hague he waited for his mysterious visitor—did he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"The visitor arrived and you saw him. I understand that your master came out and saw you during the interview?"

"Yes. About ten minutes after the stranger's arrival the Baron came into the little hall of the hotel and told me that he would not require me for an hour, or perhaps more. Apparently he did not wish the car to stand outside the place for so long, lest it should be recognized. So he sent me to a garage."

I hesitated.

"Then the stranger was left inside the hotel alone?"

"Yes, sir, for two or three minutes. Why?"

We were standing out in the well-furnished hall and I glanced around.

"Your master was in quite good health as he ate his dinner and smoked his cigarette?" I remarked.

"Quite. He came out of the room and standing here I gave him his hat, coat, gloves and stick. After he had put on his coat he drew on his left-hand glove. Suddenly he tore it off again, and rubbing his fingers together impatiently, said: 'I forgot, Folcker! I'm going to the opera, give me some white gloves.' They were in the drawer yonder," the valet said, pointing to a great old carved Flemish cupboard. "So I got them out and handed them to him. He drew one of them on and walked down to the gate to enter the car, when he suddenly fell upon the pavement outside. You see, just yonder," and he pointed through the open door.

[Pg 279]

"Why did he rub his fingers together, I wonder?" I remarked. "Was it a habit of his?"

"Not at all, sir. He seemed to have a sudden pain in his fingers."

"A pain. Why?"

"I don't know, sir. It has only this moment occurred to me. He flung off the glove and tossed it upon the table. It's still there—as you see. Then he put on the white gloves and went down the steps and collapsed."

"His head was affected?"

"Yes, he cried out twice that his head hurt him. The doctors attribute his death to heart failure. But, personally, I doubt it, sir! I'm certain that there was foul play somewhere."

I crossed to the great carved table which stood on the opposite side of the wide hall, tiled as it was with ancient blue and white Dutch tiles, and from the table took up a pair of well-worn grey suède gloves. They interested me, because after putting one on the Baron had torn it off and rubbed his fingers.

"Is this the glove your master wore when he went to The Hague?" I asked, selecting the left-hand one.

"Yes, sir."

I examined it closely and very gingerly. The exterior presented nothing out of the ordinary, but on turning it inside out, I found in the index finger a tiny piece of steel which tumbled out upon the table.

It was apparently a piece clipped from the blade of a safety razor, and keenly sharp. Anyone inserting a finger into the glove would certainly be cut by the razor edge of that sharp scrap of steel. As it lay upon the polished oak I bent to look at it, the valet also standing near and bending down in curiosity.

[Pg 280]

Upon it something had apparently been smeared—some colourless jelly, it seemed.

Had Baron van Veltrup fallen victim to orosin, wilfully administered?

That was my instant suspicion, one that was afterwards verified by the great Dutch pathologist Doctor Obelt, who lived in the Amstel Straat, and to whom I carried the mysterious but incriminating scrap of steel.

"Without a doubt this piece of razor-blade has been impregnated with a new and most deadly poison, orosin," he declared to me on the following evening as I sat in his consulting room. "The police have seen no mysterious circumstances in the unfortunate death of the Baron, who, by the way, was a very dear friend of mine. But now you have brought me this piece of steel which you took from his glove, and which no doubt must have caused a slight cut to his finger and, in consequence, almost instant death, I feel it my duty to take up the matter with the authorities."

"I shall be much gratified, doctor, if you will," I urged, speaking in French. "The valet's suspicions of foul play are entirely proved."

"Yes, foul play, committed by somebody who possesses expert toxicological knowledge. I confess that this is the first time I have discovered orosin. The hint you gave me caused me to search for it, and that I have found it is undoubted."

Later that day I accompanied the doctor to the Bureau of Police, where we were met by a very stolid official who smoked a long thin cigar all the time he talked to us.

At first he treated the affair as of no importance. The medical evidence had pronounced the Baron's death as having been due to natural causes. The police could not interfere further, he declared.

[Pg 281]

"Ah! but thanks to the Baron's valet we now have evidence of a most subtle and deadly poison," declared the Dutch pathologist. "I certify that I have found upon a small piece of sharp steel, which has been discovered in the dead man's glove, traces of orosin, one of the least known but most dangerous poisons."

The heavy-jowled Dutch police official straightened himself in his chair.

"Is that really so, doctor?" he asked in surprise, holding his cigar between his fingers.

"Yes, it is," Doctor Obelt replied. "The body must be exhumed, and an examination made to ascertain if there is a small cut in the first finger of the left hand. If there is—then the Baron has been secretly murdered!"

"The valet has alleged this all along, but there being no evidence we disbelieved him," said the official at once.

"There is now evidence—direct evidence," said the Dutch doctor. "This Englishman here is interested in some way in the Baron's death, and after discovering the scrap of razor-blade he brought it to me."

The Dutch police official knit his brows, and turning to me, asked:

"Did you yourself discover this piece of steel?"

"I did. From certain facts within my knowledge I suspected that the Baron had been deliberately killed. The allegations of the valet, Folcker, strengthened my suspicions, hence I travelled from London and pursued my own independent inquiries, which have resulted in the discovery of the little piece of blade inside the glove which the Baron wore when he went to interview his mysterious visitor at The Hague."

[Pg 282]

"But what evidence have we that the mysterious visitor—the individual who has been referred to in the report as the man with the round horn glasses—had anything to do with the affair?"

"According to the Baron's servant the visitor was left alone for a few moments in the room where van Veltrup had put down his gloves in order to go out and speak to his valet, who on that day was acting as his chauffeur. It was in those moments of his absence that the unknown visitor put the infected scrap of steel into the Baron's glove."

"Did he not wear the gloves on his way back to Amsterdam?" asked the police official, as he laid down his thin cigar.

"No," I replied. "The valet is certain that instead of putting on his gloves he thrust them into the pocket of his linen dust-coat. Folcker says that when his master returned he took the gloves from the pocket of the linen coat and placed them on the table in the hall—as was his habit. It was only when the Baron was going out again that he put on the left-hand one, and then suddenly drew it off and rubbed his fingers. The first finger of his left hand had undoubtedly been cut, and hence infected with that substance which causes almost instant death and the exact symptoms of heart disease."

"Orosin—did you say?" asked the head of the Amsterdam police.

"Yes," I replied. "Orosin—the most dangerous, subtle and easily administered poison known to our modern toxicologists. And your great financier Baron van Veltrup has died by the hand of one who has wilfully administered it!"

"Well," said the stolid man with the scraggy beard, rather reluctantly, "I confess that this has come to me as a perfect revelation."

"You have only to order the exhumation of the Baron's body, and an examination of the left hand, to be convinced that what this Englishman, Mr. Garfield, has discovered is the actual truth!" declared Doctor Obelt, whose reputation as a pathologist was the highest in the Netherlands, and against whose opinion even the Chief of Police of Amsterdam could raise no word.

[Pg 283]

"It shall be done, gentlemen," the stolid official assured us. "It shall be done in secret—and at once."

He was true to his word, for at noon next day I received an invitation to call again at the Police Bureau, and was there informed that a small superficial cut upon the first finger of the left hand had been discovered.

Therefore there was no doubt that death had resulted from foul play.

If such were the case, it seemed more than probable that to Count de Chamartin, the intimate associate of Oswald De Gex, a similar dose of orosin had been administered!

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

[Pg 284]

### MORE ABOUT MATEO SANZ

The means by which the unfortunate Baron van Veltrup had met with his death was as ingenious as that practised upon me by the expert thief, Despujol. As I reflected upon all the details as related to me by the valet, Folcker, I suddenly recollected that the Baron's strange visitor, the man who must have placed that sharp scrap of razor-blade within his glove at the moment when the unsuspecting victim had gone outside to speak with his servant, was described as a man with a red face and a dark moustache.



A man who answered such description was the elusive friend of Mademoiselle Jacquelot, of Montauban, the motor bandit Mateo Sanz—the man who had so cleverly evaded the police, and who had no doubt been an intimate friend of Despujol! In order to confirm my suspicions, I at once telegraphed to Señor Rivero in Madrid, urging him to send me a copy of the police photograph of Sanz for identification purposes. That same day I received a reply which informed me that the photograph was in the post, hence I remained in Amsterdam awaiting its arrival.

Four days later it was handed to me, a photograph taken in several positions of the rather round-faced, florid man whom I had seen talking to Mademoiselle at the station at Montauban—the man whom Rivero had followed, but who, on the French police going to arrest him, was found to have fled.

I carried the photograph to Folcker's lodgings and there showed it to him.

[Pg 285]

"That is the man who met my master, sir!" he cried unhesitatingly. "Only he wore round horn spectacles. His face and moustache are the same. He was not Dutch."

"No. This man is a Spaniard named Sanz, who is well known to the police," I replied.

"Then they should arrest him, for he is no doubt responsible for my poor master's death."

We went together to the Bureau of Police where the valet formally identified the photograph, and made certain declarations concerning the malefactor in question. These he signed.

"I happen to have seen this individual," I explained to the police commissary. "I was with Señor Rivero, head of the Spanish detective department, and we saw him at Montauban. But though Señor Rivero followed him, he escaped."

"Then he is wanted—eh?"

"Yes—for murder."

The Dutch police official gave vent to a low grunt.

"Very well," he said. "I will have inquiry made. I thank you very much for the information."

It seemed to me that he was annoyed because I had dared to dispute his theory that the late Baron had died from natural causes. He was a stolid man, who, having once made up his mind, would not hear any evidence to the contrary.

With failing heart I saw that to move him was hopeless, so next day I returned to London, piqued and angry, yet satisfied that I had discovered the true cause of the Baron's lamentable death.

Weeks passed. To pursue the inquiry further seemed quite hopeless. The summer went by, but Mrs. Tennison and her daughter still remained in Lyons. The reports were never hopeful. My poor darling was just the same. There recurred to her ever and anon a remembrance of those three colours which haunted her—red, green and gold.

[Pg 286]

The Professor was most kind, Gabrielle's mother wrote me. He did everything in his power, and still persevered after failure upon failure.

"I fear poor Gabrielle will never recover," she wrote in one of her letters. "The Professor is always optimistic, but I can read that in his heart he has no hope. The next step will, I dread to think, be hopeless imbecility!"

With that letter in my pocket I went to the office in Westminster each day with leaden heart. The joys of life had become blotted out. I cared for nothing, for no one, and my interest in living further had been suddenly swept away.

Harry Hambleton, as we sat together at breakfast each day, tried in vain to interest me in various ways. He urged me one evening to go with him and Norah to the Palais de Danse, across Hammersmith Bridge, and I was forced to accept. But instead of dancing I sat at a side table and sipped ice drinks. Dancing had no attraction for me.

Very fortunately we were extremely busy at the office. Four big contracts had been entered into by the firm for the lighting and telephones for four new hotels-de-luxe, one at Bude, in Cornwall, one in Knightsbridge, another at Llandudno, in North Wales, and the fourth at Cromer. Hence I was compelled to be ever on the move between Wales, Norfolk, and Cornwall, and perhaps this sudden activity prevented me from brooding too closely over the hopeless condition of the girl with whom I was so deeply in love. In these days electrical engineers have to be pretty active in order to pay their way, and though Francis and Goldsmith was an old-established firm, they were nothing if not up-to-date in their methods.

[Pg 287]

One morning as I sat in a corner of the London-Exeter express on my way down to Bude, I read in my paper the following:

"Mr. Oswald De Gex, the well-known international financier, is to be entertained on Thursday next to luncheon by the Lord Mayor and Corporation at the Mansion House. The Prime Ministers of Spain and the Netherlands, who are in London on official business, will be included among the guests. Mr. De Gex, though he has a house in London, is seldom here. He has recently been engaged in a great financial scheme to secure for England the whole of the output of the rich oil field

recently discovered in Ecuador.”

So Oswald De Gex was still in London! I held my breath. With his wall of wealth before him he seemed invulnerable. I recollected those crisp Bank of England notes which still reposed in a drawer at Rivermead Mansions—the bribe I had so foolishly accepted to become his accomplice in that mysterious crime.

Gabrielle Engledue! Who was the girl whose body, because of my false certificate, had been reduced to ashes in order to destroy all evidence of foul play? Who was she—and what was the motive?

If I could only ascertain the latter, then I might be able to reconstruct the crime slowly, piece by piece. But as far as I could see there was an utter absence of motive.

Long ago I had arrived at the conclusion that by the death of the unknown girl named Engledue, the unscrupulous financier had added some considerable sum to his bank balance. But how? His crafty unscrupulousness was shown by the manner in which his partner, to whom he owed a big sum, had been cleverly secretly killed by a hireling—a friend of the dead Despujol. Oswald De Gex posed to the world as an honest and upright man of business whose financial aid was welcomed cordially by all the hard-up States in Europe. He posed as a philanthropist, and as such earned a big reputation in those countries in which the operations of the all-powerful group he controlled were carried on.

[Pg 288]

But I knew his methods, and I sat staggered at the fact that the Corporation of the City of London were about to entertain him. Yet money counts always. Did not the Lord Mayor and Corporation once entertain the man who gave a service of gold communion-plate to St. Paul’s Cathedral, and who afterwards spent many years in one of His Majesty’s gaols?

My blood boiled within me when I read that announcement. Yet on calmer consideration, I resolved to still wait and watch.

I returned to London on the following Friday, and in the train I read of the splendid luncheon given on the previous day to the arch-criminal and the eulogistic speeches made by two English politicians and the two foreign Premiers.

Oswald De Gex was declared to be one of the greatest financiers of the age, and there was a hint that a certain Allied Government was about to enlist his efforts with a view to extricate it from national bankruptcy.

De Gex was a man who thought and spoke in millions. Accompanying the article was a photograph of him standing smiling beside the Lord Mayor as guest of the City of London. Oswald De Gex seldom allowed himself to be photographed, but some enterprising Press photographer had no doubt snapped him unawares.

[Pg 289]

His hesitation to be photographed—public man that he was—was but natural. Wherever you hear of people in the public eye, male or female, who will not allow their pictures to appear in the papers, you may always suspect in that hesitation a dread of the raking up of some hidden scandal. Many a face which has looked out upon us from a pictorial newspaper or a “back-page” of one’s daily journal, has caused its owner much terror, and in more than one instance a rush into obscurity to avoid the police.

Scotland Yard and the Paris Sûreté have many albums of photographs, and it is not generally known that each day their counterparts are searched for in the daily journals.

Oswald De Gex had on that memorable day become, against his will no doubt, a lion of London. One heard nothing of Mrs. De Gex. She was still at the Villa Clementini no doubt. Her name was never mentioned in the very eulogistic articles which innocent men of Fleet Street penned concerning the man of colossal finance. One can never blame Fleet Street for “booming” any man or woman. A couple of thousand pounds to a Press agent will secure for a burglar an invitation to dine at a peer’s table. Plainly speaking, in Europe since the war, real merit has become almost a back number. Money buys anything and anybody.

I fear that, young man as I still am, I am a fierce critic of the manners of our times. I learned my, perhaps, old-fashioned ideas from my father, an honest, upright, country parson, who loved to ride with the hounds, who called a spade a spade, and openly denounced a liar as such. He never minced matters, and stuck to his opinion, yet he was a pious, generous, open-hearted Englishman, who had no use for the “international financier,” who has lately become the pseudonym for a foreign adventurer.

[Pg 290]

The autumn days shortened and winter was approaching, for the east winds blew chill across the Thames into my room as I shaved before my window each morning. Mrs. Tennison was still in Lyons, and Harry Hambledon went each morning to his sordid work at the Hammersmith Police Court, either prosecuting or defending in small cases. His eloquence and shrewdness as an advocate had more than once been commented upon by the stipendiary, hence he was gradually working up quite a lucrative practice.

Things drifted along till the end of October. De Gex was living at Stretton Street, very occupied, I ascertained, in arranging a great development scheme for Liberia, that independent State in West Africa.

In the City he was constantly expressing his regret at the unfortunate deaths of his partners, Count de Chamartin, of Madrid, and the Baron van Veltrup, of Amsterdam, but he had expressed himself ready to carry the great deal through himself, though it involved the speculation of nearly two millions sterling.

I could hardly take up any newspaper—neither could you, my reader, for that matter—unless I saw De Gex referred to, under another name, of course. He went here and there, the guest of a Cabinet Minister, playing golf with a Leader of the House, or spending a week-end with a Duke, until it seemed that the world of Society had at last prevailed upon the mystery-man of millions to emerge from his shell and take up his position in Mayfair.

When I saw that he was the guest of certain hard-up members of the aristocracy, or of war profiteers, who, dropping their aitches, had bought ancestral homes, I merely smiled at the ignorance of those who were entertaining one of the greatest criminals in Europe. [Pg 291]

In the watch I kept each evening upon the house in Stretton Street my friend Harry Hambledon assisted me. As we lurked in doorways in the vicinity, we saw the great ones of London Society, of both sexes, going and coming, for Oswald De Gex had now commenced to entertain upon a lavish scale. He gave smart dinner-parties and musical evenings, which the most exclusive set enjoyed.

One night, after it had grown dark, I sauntered along Park Lane, as was my habit, and having turned into Stretton Street noticed a rather shabbily dressed man, evidently a foreigner, descending the steps from De Gex's door. He turned in my direction, and we came face to face.

In an instant I recognized him as the Spaniard, Mateo Sanz! He had never seen me before, therefore, when at a respectable distance, I turned and followed him along to a street off the Edgware Road, where he entered a third-class private hotel.

What, I wondered, was his object in visiting De Gex unless some other plot was in progress? I, however, did not intend, now that I knew the truth concerning the death of the Baron in Amsterdam, that the assassin should escape. Hence I took a taxi to Scotland Yard where I was interviewed by a detective-inspector to whom I revealed the hiding-place of the much-wanted criminal.

He thanked me, and then began to inquire what I knew concerning him. In return, I told him of my friendship with the great Spanish detective Rivero, and how, with the latter, I had seen Sanz at the station at Montauban. [Pg 292]

Presently he rose, and telling me he would search for any request from the Spanish Government for the man's arrest, he left me.

He returned a quarter of an hour later with some papers in his hands, and said:

"I find that the Madrid police have applied to us for this individual's arrest, and here is his photograph," and he showed me one similar to that which Rivero had sent me to Amsterdam.

I, of course, made no mention of Oswald De Gex, but it suddenly occurred to me that if Sanz were arrested De Gex might take fright, so I suggested that the Spaniard be kept under surveillance until the Spanish police were communicated with.

"I believe Señor Rivero suspects that Sanz is one of a very dangerous gang," I said. "If so, it would be well to arrest them all."

"Are the others in London, do you think?" asked the tall, dark-haired official of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"Ah! That I do not know," was my reply. "I only know that Mateo Sanz is a very dangerous person, who has been wanted for several years."

"Well, we thank you very much for your information, sir, and we shall act upon it at once," he replied. And then I went along the stone corridor and out again into Parliament Street, well satisfied that I had, at last, placed one of the criminals in the hands of the police, who would, in due course, learn the true facts concerning Baron van Veltrup's mysterious end.

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

[Pg 293]

### A CURIOUS STORY

At Scotland Yard they acted upon my suggestion, and at once sent a wireless message to Señor Rivero in Madrid, telling him of the discovery of the notorious Mateo Sanz.

In the meantime my curiosity was further aroused by a note sent to me by Mrs. Tennison's servant, Mrs. Alford, next day, saying that Doctor Moroni had called at Longridge Road and that, finding Miss Gabrielle absent, he had put to her a number of questions concerning myself.

"As I promised you, sir," the woman wrote, "I pleaded ignorance of everything. He was apparently astonished to find my mistress and Miss Gabrielle away. He asked me for their

address, but I replied that they were moving from place to place on the Continent. He seemed most annoyed, and went away."

I wondered what was his object in going to Longridge Road, if not for the purpose of some further evil work. Though he pretended friendliness towards Gabrielle, yet I knew that he was her enemy, just as he was mine.

Moroni was in London, hence he would no doubt visit De Gex. Hambledon was unknown to Moroni, therefore he watched in Stretton Street on the following night, and in his work of observation he was assisted by Norah, who had been told something of the strange circumstances, though of course not the whole amazing story.

Just before eleven o'clock Harry and his fiancée arrived at Rivermead Mansions in a taxi and told me that they had seen Moroni arrive at Stretton Street about half-past nine. He was admitted by a new and rather supercilious man-servant—for Horton did not now seem to be in the great man's employ.

[Pg 294]

"Ten minutes afterwards Suzor arrived," Harry said. "Then about half an hour later Moroni came out."

"I was passing the house slowly when he came down the steps muttering fiercely to himself in Italian," Norah said. "He took no notice of me, for he seemed extremely angry and excited. Indeed, as he left, he glanced back at the house, his hands clenched, and he seemed to invoke a curse upon it."

"By Jove!" I gasped. "That's interesting! The precious trio have perhaps quarrelled!"

"Perhaps," said Hambledon. "And as a lawyer I venture to predict that if they really have we shall, ere long, obtain some very interesting disclosures."

Norah stayed and had some supper, for we were all desperately hungry, and later on Harry saw her back to Richmond.

Three days later, in consequence of a message sent to me from the Hotel Cecil, I went home early from the office to Rivermead Mansions, and had only been in five minutes when the door-bell rang.

On opening it I found my expected visitor, Señor Rivero.

"Ah! my dear friend!" cried the good-humoured police official, as he wrung my hand warmly. "So I have found you at last! The taxi-man made a mistake in the address and took me further down the road. Well, so you have been doing good business for us—eh? You have found Mateo Sanz!"

"Yes. I recognized him," I said.

"I have just been with Superintendent Ridsen, of Scotland Yard, and we have seen our friend whom we have wanted for so long. He is quite unsuspecting. But I am told that two days ago he visited the house of Mr. De Gex."

[Pg 295]

"Yes, he is his friend, just as Despujol was," I remarked.

"But I cannot understand that!" Rivero declared. "It seems incredible that a person of such high standing as Mr. De Gex should number bandits among his friends!"

"I revealed to you the truth concerning De Gex when we were in Nîmes," I said. "Even then you were half inclined to disbelieve it. Now you know the truth. The two business partners of Oswald De Gex, the Conde de Chamartin, of Madrid, and the Baron van Veltrup, of Amsterdam, have both died suddenly—and at the instigation of their unsuspected friend! It has been proved that Sanz introduced the tiny scrap of infected razor-blade into the Baron's glove."

"At De Gex's instigation?—impossible!"

"De Gex was the only person to profit by the Baron's death," I pointed out. "He owed a large sum to the Baron over a financial deal, and by the latter's death, and the destruction of certain papers, he now escapes payment."

"But you surely do not allege that Mr. De Gex resorts to the use of this little known and unsuspected poison in order to secure his own ends!" cried the famous detective, as he sat opposite me in an easy-chair.

"When we know the truth—as I hope we may very soon—then you will be staggered," I assured him. "At present you do not know the whole of the amazing story. For certain private reasons I have been unable to reveal it to you. But slowly, piece by piece, I have been steadily working upon the mystery of certain amazing occurrences at De Gex's house in Stretton Street. By slow degrees, and after travelling up and down Europe, I have at last succeeded in finding just a streak of daylight through the impenetrable barrier so cleverly contrived in order to mystify and mislead me. If you desire to ascertain the great ramifications of the desperate plots conceived by De Gex and his friends, and take steps to combat them, it will be best to allow his accomplice Sanz further liberty. Keep vigilant watch, but do not allow him to suspect," I urged. "He will no doubt go to Stretton Street again. Sanz, though a hired assassin as was his friend Despujol, should not be arrested yet, for the longer he remains at liberty the more extensive will be our information against the arch-schemer of Europe, Oswald De Gex."

[Pg 296]

Rivero spent the evening with me. We dined at the Clarendon, across Hammersmith Bridge, and afterwards we idled in one of the foreign cafés near Piccadilly Circus.

He was in London with a warrant for the arrest of Mateo Sanz in his pocket. But at my suggestion he stayed his hand. Meanwhile Sanz, all unsuspecting, was being carefully watched, not only by two detective-sergeants from Scotland Yard, but also by two Spanish detectives whom Rivero had brought to London with him.

Two days later, in response to a message from Rivero, I called at the Hotel Cecil on leaving the office. He met me in the marble-paved entrance hall, and I noticed at once a grave expression upon his face.

"Come up to my room," he said in French. "We can talk quietly there."

In surprise I went with him up in the lift to the third floor where, in a bedroom which overlooked the Embankment and the Thames beyond, he turned suddenly to me and exclaimed, still in French:

"I am very troubled and mystified, Monsieur Garfield. When you made those curious allegations against Monsieur De Gex I confess that I laughed them to scorn, but I have to-day learned several facts which put an entirely fresh complexion upon the present circumstances. Last night Mateo Sanz visited De Gex again. The financier gave a musical evening, but after the departure of all the guests, Sanz called and was at once admitted to De Gex's library."

[Pg 297]

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "I know that room. I have sad cause to remember it!"

"He remained there till nearly two o'clock in the morning. Then he returned on foot to his hotel. My information is that on his walk back he was whistling to himself, as though in high spirits."

"But that is surely no extraordinary circumstance!" I remarked. "Did I not tell you that De Gex is as friendly with Sanz as he was with Despujol?"

"I know. But in face of other facts I have learnt, the problem presented is an amazing one."

As he spoke a tap came upon the door, and a page-boy handed in a card.

"Show the gentleman up," Rivero said in his broken English.

"Here is someone who will relate some very strange facts. He is my friend Gonzalez Maura, an advocate who practised in Madrid before his appointment to our Consulate here. I called at the Consulate yesterday and saw him, when he related to me some curious facts which I have asked him to repeat to you. He is here for that purpose."

A few moments later the page-boy ushered in a middle-aged, well-dressed, black-bearded man who bowed elegantly when we were introduced.

"Now, my dear friend," exclaimed Rivero, when we were all three seated. "Will you please tell Mr. Garfield what you explained to me yesterday."

"Certainly. I merely tell you what I know," he replied in very fair English. "It is like this. Before I left Madrid I was very friendly with a country lawyer named Ruiz Serrano, who lived at Valladolid. For some reason the late Count de Chamartin took a great fancy to my friend, and constituted him his legal adviser, an appointment which brought him in quite a large income. To the lawyer of a great financier fees are always rolling in. The Count naturally took Serrano into his confidence and told him how, years ago, he had married the daughter of an Englishman in rather humble circumstances, living in Madrid. A daughter was born to them, but later he divorced his wife, who died soon afterwards, and then he married a lady of the Madrid aristocracy, the present widow. Apparently he made a will leaving the whole of his fortune to his daughter by his first wife—save for a small annuity to his second wife—and according to the will, on the death of his daughter the fortune was to go to his trusted partner, your English financier, Mr. Oswald De Gex."

[Pg 298]

I sat staring at the stranger, but uttered no word, for I was reflecting deeply.

"Señor Serrano arrived in London a week ago, and came to consult me regarding the will, because it seems that the Count's daughter—who came here to learn English, she having lived in Madrid all her life—is dead."

"Hence De Gex has inherited the Count's fortune?" I gasped. "What was the girl's name?"

"Her name was, of course, Chamartin, but in obedience to her father's wish, after the divorce she took her mother's maiden name, and was known as Gabrielle Engledue."

"Gabrielle Engledue!" I echoed. "*Gabrielle Engledue!*"

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

### LOVE THE CONQUEROR

[Pg 299]

The sudden revelation of the motive of the crime at Stretton Street staggered me.

An hour later I saw the Count's lawyer, Señor Serrano, at his hotel in Russell Square, and from him learned much more regarding his late client's disposition of his property. The Count had apparently not been on very affectionate terms with his second wife, which accounted for him leaving the bulk of his fortune to his daughter Gabrielle, and in case of her death, to his partner De Gex, whom he had, of course, believed to be an honest man.

The Count had died suddenly several months before his daughter. He had died from orosin, no doubt administered by someone in De Gex's pay. Then almost before the will could be proved in the girl's favour, Señor Serrano learned that the girl herself had died in England. Since then he had been constantly occupied in straightening out his late client's affairs, and had now come to London for the first time in order to see Oswald De Gex, who had been constantly pressing for a settlement of the estate. He had seen him on the previous day, when he appeared to be anxious that the affair should be cleared up.

"As he spoke of his late partner, and of his daughter, tears came to his eyes," said the Spanish lawyer, speaking in French.

Tears in the eyes of Oswald De Gex! I smiled at the thought.

As for Rivero he now became just as puzzled as I was myself.

[Pg 300]

To me the motive of poor Gabrielle Engledue's death was now quite apparent, and, moreover, it seemed that the reason De Gex required a forged death certificate was because he was not exactly certain whether by a post-mortem examination any trace of the drug could be found. He was not quite sure that one or other of the great London pathologists might not identify orosin. With the Count's death on the Continent he had taken the risk, well knowing that any ordinary doctor would pronounce death as being due to heart failure, as indeed it was. In London, however, he felt impelled to take precautions, and they were very elaborate and cunning ones, as I now knew.

With the motive thus apparent, I felt myself on the verge of triumph. Yet without full knowledge of what occurred to my poor beloved on that night how could I denounce the arch-criminal whose favours were now being sought by the great ones of the land.

I was still in a quandary. I had established to my own satisfaction that Tito Moroni, the doctor of the Via Cavezzo, was the person who had distilled the orosin, and who had no doubt introduced it to his wealthy but unscrupulous patient as a means of ridding himself of unwanted persons and enriching himself at the same time. Indeed, these facts were eventually proved up to the hilt.

The motives for the deaths of the Conde de Chamartin, his daughter, and the philanthropic Dutch financier, were all quite plain, but, of course, I had said nothing to Rivero, or to anybody else, regarding my acceptance of a bribe to assist De Gex in the committal of a crime.

I confess that on that night of horror I had no suspicion of foul play, for knowing the great financier as a person of very high standing, I naturally believed the story of his niece's sudden death. It was not until I found myself in the hospital at St. Malo that I realized how cleverly I had been tricked. The drug had been administered to me in just sufficient dose to ensure that my brain should be affected, and that any story I might afterwards tell should be discredited.

[Pg 301]

Happily, however, I had now nearly completely recovered. I was the third person known to return to their normal senses after a dose of orosin. Would there be a fourth?

Three further days went past, watchful, anxious days. De Gex was still at Stretton Street, apparently quite unconscious that his hireling Sanz was being kept under close surveillance. Another plot was in progress, without a doubt. Twice again had the elusive Spaniard, who was such a close friend of the notorious Despujol, visited Stretton Street.

It seemed, too, that De Gex, though anxious to return to Italy, still remained in London in the hope that Señor Serrano would arrange for the immediate transfer of the Count's property.

One could scarcely take up a newspaper without finding that Oswald De Gex had attended this function or that, for he was apparently courting the favours of certain high political personages, no doubt with a view to a place in the next Honours List.

I smiled within myself as I read of all the great man's doings, of his vast financial interests, of his estates in England and in Italy, and his assistance to the Ministry of Finance of Spain. Often indeed when at home I discussed the situation with Hambledon, yet without the evidence of Gabrielle Tennison we could not act.

Nearly a week had passed since my first meeting with the Spanish lawyer Serrano. Tito Moroni had apparently returned to Italy, for he had not been again to Stretton Street. His last visit there had no doubt resulted in a quarrel with his wealthy client, whom I had suspicions he was blackmailing, for such would undoubtedly be the procedure of a blackguard of his calibre. More than once Rivero seemed anxious to secure the arrest of Mateo Sanz, but I constantly urged him to remain patient. He frequently begged me to reveal the true extent of my knowledge, but I always evaded his questions because I was not yet in a position to make a triumphant coup, and avenge poor Gabrielle.

[Pg 302]

Daily, hourly indeed, was she in my thoughts. The letters I received from Lyons were the reverse

of hopeful. The last one indeed reported that little or no progress had been noted during the weeks she had been under the care of the kindly old professor.

One evening, on returning from the office, I found upon the hall-table a note in Mrs. Tennison's well-known hand. It had been written from Longridge Road a few hours before, and in it she asked me to call that evening as they had returned from France.

Naturally I lost no time in dashing over to Earl's Court, and with failing heart I entered the well-remembered artistic little drawing-room where Gabrielle herself, in a cool frock of cream washing silk trimmed with narrow edgings of jade green, rose smiling to greet me.

Her face was changed, for her countenance was now bright and vivacious, and her eyes merry and sparkling. The hard set expression had gone, and she looked very alert and indescribably sweet.

"Well, Mr. Garfield!" she cried merrily, shaking my hand in warm welcome, so different from her usual apathetic attitude towards me. "You see we're back again! Mother has just gone round to Aunt Alice's in Cromwell Road, but she told me that you would call."

[Pg 303]

"Well, Miss Tennison!" I exclaimed, holding her soft little hand in mine, and looking into her eyes. "I hope—I hope that you feel better. Indeed, you look quite changed!"

"Yes. I can recollect everything now! All the past has come back to me, thanks to the old Professor. He was so very kind, and so patient that I can never thank him sufficiently—or you, Mr. Garfield, for discovering him. I feel quite myself again. And it was all so sudden. At first, the treatment gave me no relief, my brain seemed so muddled, but quite suddenly one day I found that I could recollect the past—all that happened to me on that terrible night. And in three days the Professor announced that I had quite recovered!"

My heart leapt with joy! She was cured!—cured!

"Tell me all that you recollect regarding the events of that night," I urged breathlessly as we sat together in the little London drawing-room. I looked at her countenance and realized now that it was full of life and animation, how very beautiful she was. How different from when I had seen her half dragged along the streets of Florence by her pretended friend Moroni.

But justice was at hand. So I urged her to tell me exactly what happened. I give it to you, my reader, in my love's own words, just as she related it to me.

"Well," she said, drawing a long breath. "One night about twelve months ago I was at a private dance at the house of a friend in Holland Park, when I was introduced to a young married woman named Cullerton, the wife of a man on the Stock Exchange. I rather liked her, and as she invited me to a small dance which she gave a week later we soon became friends. One day, while we were walking together in Bond Street we met Mr. De Gex, the great financier, to whom she introduced me. His car was standing at the kerb, so he took us back to tea at his house in Stretton Street. While we were at tea a tall, dark Spanish-looking girl came in and was introduced to us as Gabrielle Engledue. As we sat at tea we laughed over the similarity of our names, and she told me that though her mother had been English she had lived all her life in Madrid, and had been over here for the purpose of studying English. She had been staying with a family somewhere in Essex, but was now at an hotel in London, for she was returning to Madrid in a few days. I rather liked her, and as Mr. De Gex was charming to us both, I accepted his invitation to dine there a few days later. I did not tell mother about this, for I feared that being rather old-fashioned she might disapprove of my new friendships. We had a delightful dinner, and Mr. De Gex took us all three to the theatre afterwards, and drove each of us home. I was the first, and he put me down at the corner of Earl's Court Road.

[Pg 304]

"On the night of November the seventh at very short notice Mr. De Gex had again invited Miss Engledue and myself through Mrs. Cullerton to dinner, for she was leaving for Madrid next day, her luggage having already been sent to the station cloak-room, she told me. We understood that Mr. and Mrs. Cullerton were also coming. We did not put on dinner-dresses as Mr. De Gex said he intended to take us to a show at Olympia afterwards. I was, I know, foolish not to tell mother where I was going, but the reason for it I have already explained. When I arrived at Stretton Street, after my dancing lesson, Gabrielle Engledue was already there chatting with Mr. De Gex in the library. He told me that he had just received a telephone message from Mr. Cullerton saying that his wife had been taken rather unwell and therefore could not come. So we three sat down, the only other guest being a man I now recollect as one who afterwards proved my friend, Doctor Moroni.

[Pg 305]

"The meal was quite a merry one for Mr. De Gex was quite a lady's man when his wife was absent. At that time I understood that Mrs. De Gex was remaining in Italy. The meal was served by a man whom the great financier addressed as Horton, and just before coffee was brought in I recollect that Moroni left the table and went to the telephone. Then, on his return, the man Horton brought in the cups which were already filled. The man put down a cup before me, but De Gex noticing that it was a little too full, politely exchanged his for mine.

"We were chatting, and Mr. De Gex had just said that it was about time we were off to Olympia, when I sipped my coffee. I noticed that both Doctor Moroni and our host glanced at me curiously. The coffee tasted unusually sweet, and also it seemed to be slightly perfumed, I remember, almost like *pot-pourri*. I had just replaced the cup upon the table when I felt a most violent pain

in my head, and cried out. Miss Engledue was at my side in an instant, but I felt a sensation of giddiness, and next moment I knew nothing more."

I remained silent for a few seconds, thinking deeply over her remarkable story.

"Then Miss Engledue was quite well at the time?" I asked.

"Quite, she sprang to my assistance."

"Then you were taken ill before she became similarly affected?"

"Was she? I did not know that!" said my beloved in surprise.

"Yes. You were rendered unconscious by a drug which produced all the symptoms of death, but Miss Engledue was afterwards deliberately killed." [Pg 306]

Gabrielle stared at me as though she believed that I was bereft of my senses.

"Was Gabrielle Engledue killed?" she gasped. "Surely she was not!"

"She was," I replied. "And her body was afterwards cremated!"

My beloved gave vent to a shriek of horror—and what more natural? She now realized, for the first time, that she had been the victim of a clever and amazing plot.

"I recollect," she said, "that just at the moment of my sudden seizure I seemed to become fascinated by the gorgeous Spanish shawl which Gabrielle Engledue had around her shoulders. It was a most beautifully embroidered silk shawl with long, heavy fringe, and flowers worked in red, green and gold upon a silk fabric. I had been admiring it all the time I sat at the table, but the colours seemed so dazzling as to bewilder me, to muddle my senses—red, green and gold."

How often had those words of hers puzzled me! Now I knew the truth! That magnificent Spanish shawl had stood out in her recollection as the last object she had seen before the deadly orosin had done its work.

Then I told her my own story.

"I was inveigled by a specious story into that house soon after you had sipped your coffee—perhaps even before," I said. "The library was filled with a curious, overpowering perfume of *pot-pourri* which overcame me, and then De Gex gave me a liqueur glass of brandy into which there had been introduced that most baneful of all drugs orosin! It took immediate effect upon me, and a few moments later I was shown you lying upon the bed, as though you were dead! Indeed, I believed you to be dead, and in the muddled state of my brain I actually gave a certificate with which that fiend De Gex had already provided himself. I declared that you had died of heart disease, a malady for which I had for some months treated you!" [Pg 307]

"But I knew nothing more until I was found on the road in Hampshire," she said.

"And I knew nothing more until I found myself in a hospital over at St. Malo," I went on. "The drug orosin in small doses destroys the memory; in large doses it produces an effect of death, and in still larger ones—like that administered to your friend the Anglo-Spanish girl Miss Engledue—causes instant death, with no symptoms that the post-mortem can distinguish other than the natural cause of sudden heart failure."

"Was I given the drug deliberately?" asked Gabrielle, looking at me with her wonderful wide-open eyes—eyes so different from those dulled fixed ones which I had seen in the Duomo in old Florence, when she had raised herself from praying in her half-demented state while the sinister Italian doctor stood behind her.

"Yes," I said. "De Gex passed his coffee cup to you, smiling and without compunction, well knowing the effect it must have upon you, at the same time his intention being to kill your friend Miss Engledue by administering a stronger dose. This must have been accomplished by the infection of some wound or slight abrasion of the skin so that the drug should be introduced directly into the system and not by the mouth. Such a method would cause almost instant death."

"But did Gabrielle Engledue die?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes. She did. And by her death De Gex inherits the fortune of her father, a rich Spaniard, the Conde de Chamartin." [Pg 308]

She looked at me utterly bewildered, and well the poor girl might be. She now realized that she had been the victim of an amazing plot conceived by a master criminal, who was at the same time immensely wealthy, yet who cared nothing for human life so long as he amassed a colossal fortune.

"All this, Mr. Garfield, is most astounding!" she declared, gazing with bewilderment around the room. "It seems incredible!"

"Yes, Miss Tennison, I know it does," I replied. "But have patience, and I will prove to you the true depth of the villainy of our mutual enemy and his well-paid sycophants."

Then, of a sudden, I grasped her soft hand in mine and for a few seconds held it. I looked steadily into her wonderful eyes, and then slowly I raised her hand to my lips and kissed it.



"Gabrielle," I whispered, bending to her in deep earnestness. "My triumph over your enemies is yours—*yours!* Wait, and I will reveal to you the whole facts—facts more astounding than have ever been conceived in the most sensational pages of modern fiction."

She did not withdraw her hand, and by her inert attitude, I realized with indescribable joy that she really reciprocated my love!

I am not an emotional man, neither am I an ideal lover. I am only a mere man-of-the-world. Hence perhaps the reader will forgive me if I fail to describe all the ecstasy of affection which I experienced at that moment.

I loved Gabrielle Tennison with all my soul, and I now knew that she loved me. That surely was all-sufficient!

With Gabrielle I had been a fellow-victim of a deeply laid and most foul plot. That I had been purposely marked down with the aid of De Gex's accomplice and sycophant, Gaston Suzor, was made more than plain as I pursued my inquiries. [Pg 309]

The plot by which De Gex had hoped to secure his partner's fortune was indeed worthy the evil ever-scheming mind of the mystery-man of Europe; the man whose unseen influence made itself felt in every great political move on the Continent—the man whose hundred agents were ready in secret to do his bidding and perform any dirty work for payment.

After the Conde de Chamartin had been secretly attacked in the train on his way to Paris and had died in the hospital at San Sebastian, Oswald De Gex suddenly found to his dismay that whatever claim he made upon his late partner's estate, practically the whole would go to his daughter. Therefore, while being a little apprehensive lest orosin could be detected in a body after death by an expert pathologist, he resorted to that elaborate and remarkable plot in order to exhibit to me what I presumed to be the body of Gabrielle Engledue, and induce me to forge a death certificate in the name of a doctor whose surname was the same as my own.

The fact that he had actually provided himself with a genuine sheet of the doctor's notepaper, and that—as I now learnt for the first time—Moroni was actually in the house when the drug was given to Gabrielle and myself prior to the death of the chief victim, showed the utter callousness of the crime. Indeed, Gabrielle Engledue was actually witness of my beloved's mysterious seizure, little dreaming that in a short hour she herself would fall victim to the cupidity of that relentless poisoner who, by his crimes, hoped to amass one of the most colossal fortunes in the world.

I sat with Gabrielle discussing the amazing affair until darkness slowly fell. I told her of my own astounding adventures, and my narrow escape from death in Madrid, to all of which she listened with breathless interest. [Pg 310]

Then, rising, I took her hand again, and with whispered words I pressed my lips to hers for the first time in a long but sacred caress.

She sighed. I felt her quiver as I pressed her to me, and then to my delight I felt her sweet warm lips cling at last affectionately to mine.

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## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-NINTH

[Pg 311]

### ANOTHER PLOT

Among my letters on the following morning was a small packet which I opened. Within was a tablet of dark-brown toilet-soap bearing the name of a well-known firm of manufacturers. With it was a typewritten letter upon dark-blue commercial paper with a printed heading. I was addressed as "H. Granfield, Esq.," and the letter proved to be a polite intimation that as the firm in question was putting on to the market a new brand of toilet-soap, they begged me to accept with their compliments the enclosed sample. I was also informed that, if I liked it, I could purchase it of their agents, a certain firm of chemists in King Street, Hammersmith.

"Looks rather decent soap!" remarked Harry as I passed it to him, and then I re-wrapped it in its paper and placed it aside.

At eleven o'clock I sat with Rivero, Gabrielle and Harry Hambleton in the dull reception-room at Scotland Yard, that same room wherein I had given information concerning the whereabouts of Mateo Sanz.

The Superintendent who received us was a well-dressed courtly man, rather stout and elderly, who became intensely interested when I related the whole story, much as I have set it down in the foregoing pages.

The consultation was a momentous one. Rivero sat amazed when I described my chance meeting with Gaston Suzor, and the clever manner in which I had been inveigled into De Gex's house in Stretton Street. Indeed, on comparing Gabrielle's story with my own, I now saw that at the time I entered the house both she and the girl Engledue were in their normal health. The coffee had not then been served though Moroni had gone out of the room, no doubt to put the drug into the cup [Pg 312]

which was to be offered to Gabrielle Tennison, and which apparently was placed by mistake before the mystery-man himself. Or else the changing of the cups was to allay any suspicion that might arise in the mind of the other victim, which was perhaps most likely.

According to Gabrielle, it seemed that at the moment of her seizure Horton re-entered the room and said some words in a low tone to his master, whereupon the latter rose, left the table, and evidently went to greet me, leaving Gabrielle in Miss Engledue's care.

Horton, even though he had been engaged in serving the dinner at the rear of the house, was apparently also on the look-out for me, and now I recollected that on my journey down from York, I had mentioned to Suzor my habit of going to visit my uncle in Orchard Street on certain evenings. He had asked me to dine with him on the seventh, but I had excused myself as my uncle would expect me that evening. He evidently held previous knowledge that the route I habitually took was through Stretton Street, hence the plot to get me within that house. Besides, it was quite likely that Suzor himself was watching for me and had sent Horton out to call me. In any case, the plot had been well-timed and elaborately thought out.

The fact was plain that Gabrielle Engledue, who had sent her luggage to the station cloak-room and was about to return to Madrid, was killed, probably by the scratch of a pin upon which orosin had been placed.

"All this is most astounding," declared Superintendent Fletcher. "Of course, De Gex contrived that no inquiry would be made concerning the dead girl. He might have shown you the body of Miss Engledue, but he had some motive in keeping it from you, and obtaining a death certificate for the girl who was still living."

[Pg 313]

"The motive was that he was not quite certain whether the orosin could be detected. Since then he has grown bolder, as witness the murder of the Baron van Veltrup," I replied.

"But why should he not have shown you the dead girl?" queried the Superintendent.

"Because he no doubt wished to mystify me in case of my recovery from the effects of the drug," was my reply. "He was not quite certain of the effect that the dose might have upon me, so in order to entirely mislead me, so that if I recovered my statements would be discredited, he showed me a girl who was still living, though to all intents dead. Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that, aided by Moroni, he purposely contrived that I should meet and recognize in Miss Tennison the girl I had been told was the dead girl Gabrielle Engledue. And I confess that I have been sorely puzzled all along that the girl whom I had seen dead was actually alive, even though her mental state was such as to show that she had met with foul play."

"Yes," remarked Rivero. "The plot was very cunningly conceived, especially the manner in which you were entrapped and induced to give the certificate."

"Here is the money which De Gex gave me for my share in the crime," I said openly, laying the bank notes upon the Superintendent's table. "I suppose some action will be taken against me, but I am prepared to take the consequences, now that I have unmasked one of the greatest and most dangerous criminals of modern times."

"You certainly have done that, Mr. Garfield," remarked Superintendent Fletcher. "And I venture to think that the part which you have played in solving this problem will be taken into account when your own actions are considered."

[Pg 314]

"It seems to me," remarked Rivero, "that the reason the poison-maker, Moroni, evinced such a keen interest in Miss Tennison, and his reason for taking her to a number of specialists was solely in order to gain their opinions and so further study the effects of the deadly drug which he prepared."

"I have learnt," I said, "that Moroni was the laboratory assistant of the late Professor Orosi, the discoverer of the drug."

"Ah! Then of course he knows the secret of its preparation, how to administer it, and in what doses," remarked Fletcher.

"Even to-day," I said, "I have had yet another attempt upon my life made by these scoundrels," and from my pocket I drew the little packet containing the sample cake of toilet-soap, which I displayed to them all. Then, handling it in the thick brown paper wrapping, I took my pocket-knife and scraped the soap, quickly revealing a number of sharp steel points imbedded in it.

"You see there are sharp clippings in it! Each has no doubt been treated with orosin!" I said. "Had I washed my hands with it as a trial, they would have become scratched and infected with the deadly poison before I was aware of it."

"Sanz has no doubt sent you that!" remarked Rivero instantly.

"Well, Hugh, it is certainly a providential escape that you discovered in time this latest plot against you!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "Really the craft and cunning of De Gex is without limit."

[Pg 315]

"But I think, Miss Tennison, that you need have nothing further to fear from him," said the Superintendent with satisfaction. "He has no doubt, very powerful friends, and if the evidence were not so damning and direct as that collected after so much patience and perseverance by Mr. Garfield, he might perhaps wriggle out of it. But once we have him he can hope for no escape,"

he added. "And we shall arrest him before an hour is out. Fortunately he is still quite unsuspecting, though his chief fear is of Mr. Garfield, and of the ugly revelations which either Moroni or Sanz could make. Nevertheless we shall see!"

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## CONCLUSION

[Pg 316]

Just after noon I accompanied Superintendent Fletcher and Señor Rivero with three detectives from Scotland Yard to the little hotel at Notting Hill Gate, where Mateo Sanz was then staying, for he had twice changed his abode within the past week. Rivero saw the proprietor, and giving his name as Sanchez Orozco, a well-known criminal and friend of his, asked to see his visitor who we knew had taken the name of Nardiz, and represented himself as an agent of a firm of Spanish wine exporters.

Mention of the name of Orozco at once brought the much-sought-after bandit downstairs, and as he entered the little sitting-room Rivero covered him instantly with his automatic pistol, shouting to him authoritatively in Spanish.

The notorious bandit staggered, so completely was he taken aback.

"You know me, Sanz!" exclaimed Rivero. "You are under arrest. Now tell me who prepared that cake of soap which you sent to Mr. Garfield?"

The question was quite an unorthodox procedure in English justice. But it was the Chief of the Spanish Detective Department who had arrested a Spanish criminal.

"Find out," was the fellow's defiant retort.

"It was Oswald De Gex," said Rivero. "You won't deny that! You may as well tell the truth, and things may go better with you. He was Despujol's friend, as well as yours—was he not?"

"Yes," the dark-faced man admitted sullenly. "We have both done his dirty work—and Moroni assisted him." [Pg 317]

"You sent that soap to Mr. Garfield—eh?"

The man under arrest with Rivero's pistol still pointed at him nodded in the affirmative.

"And you went to The Hague and there met the Baron van Veltrup. You put that little piece of steel into his glove. I know that you did," Rivero went on relentlessly.

"Yes. De Gex paid me for it," was his reply.

"As he paid Despujol—eh?"

"Yes."

"Very well," replied Rivero. "I will note your replies. De Gex is expecting you to call upon him to-day, is he not?"

"Yes. At one o'clock. I was to receive some money," he laughed grimly.

The Spaniard having been taken away in a taxi to Bow Street Police Station, together with his luggage, we went on to Stretton Street.

"Mr. De Gex is not in," replied the man-servant who appeared in answer to my ring.

"Never mind," I said. "My friends and I have some business with him." And I walked into that big familiar hall, followed by Superintendent Fletcher, Señor Rivero, and two detectives.

"We have a meeting here," I explained casually to the smart man-servant who in surprise at our sudden entry showed us to the library, that same room in which I remembered sitting on that fateful November night.

It was nearly a year ago since I had last been in that big, handsomely furnished apartment. I did not remain there, for it was my intention to greet my would-be murderer on his return. Therefore I went to the hall and there awaited him. [Pg 318]

Just before one o'clock he entered with his latchkey, and he having closed the door I stepped forward in his path.

"I think you know me—Mr. De Gex!" I exclaimed very firmly, my eyes fixed on him.

He started, and for a second went pale. Then in indignation, he exclaimed:

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I am here to see you, Mr. De Gex," I replied quite calmly.

"I don't know you," he declared angrily.

"Perhaps not," I laughed. "But there are others with me here who wish to speak a few words with you."

As I said this Superintendent Fletcher stepped forward, while behind him came the others.

"Mr. Oswald De Gex?" he asked. "Is that your name?"

The owner of the big mansion went pale to the lips, and muttered an affirmative.

"I hold a warrant for your arrest on the charge of the wilful murder of Gabrielle Engledue on the seventh of November last," said the Superintendent. "Your accomplice Sanz is already under arrest, I may tell you, and orders have gone out to Paris and to Florence for the arrest of your friends Suzor and Moroni." Then turning to his lieutenants, he gave orders for the great financier to be secured.

So utterly aghast was the guilty man at our sudden appearance, and the terrible charge levelled against him, that he was quite unable to speak. He tried to articulate, to protest, but his tongue seemed tied. Only a low, gurgling sound escaped his lips, and the next second he had collapsed into the arms of the detectives who half carried him out to the taxi which stood near by in readiness.

[Pg 319]

He was placed in a cell at Bow Street to await his appearance before the stipendiary on the following day, but an hour later when the warder went to him he found him dead. Upon the thumb of his left hand was a slight punctured wound.

Rather than face a trial and the penalty for his crimes, he had killed himself by that same most deadly drug by which he had sought to enrich himself.

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Next day all the world rang with the sensational news of the arrest and suicide of the mighty millionaire of Europe, but De Gex had many influential friends, hence to the public the actual truth was never disclosed.

Mateo Sanz was extradited to Spain, where at the Assize Court at Madrid he was, six months later, sentenced to death and in due course executed, while Moroni, after many delays, as is usual in the Italian Courts, was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for being in the possession of orosin, and also attempting to administer it. The charge against him of having had a hand in the heartless murder of poor Gabrielle Engledue was unfortunately not substantiated for lack of evidence.

Though the police are still seeking everywhere for Gaston Suzor, he has not up to the present been found. They, however, do not despair of arresting him.

At first it was resolved to seek the man-servant Horton and arrest him, but as it seemed that he had had no actual hand in the girl's assassination, and as, moreover, the murderer had committed suicide, his evidence was not required, the hue-and-cry after him was dropped.

And myself?

What need I say, except that to-day I am extremely happy. Owing to the sudden great rise of some securities which my father left me I later found myself quite well off. Indeed, upon the death of old Mr. Francis a few months ago, I was able to purchase a partnership in the firm, and I am thankful to say we are doing quite well in face of the strenuous competition in electrical engineering.

[Pg 320]

Gabrielle Tennison, the sweet, open-hearted girl whom I first met under such extraordinary circumstances, is now my wife. We live very happily in a charming, old-world farmhouse embowered in roses and honeysuckle, on the Portsmouth Road at Cobham, in Surrey.

Life nowadays is one of idyllic bliss, of perfect love and undisturbed peace, different indeed from that fevered year of struggle, adventure, travel and unrest during which I strove so steadily and with all my might to avenge the crimes of Oswald De Gex, and to unravel that tangled skein of the misdeeds of the international financier—the Stretton Street Affair.

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