The Pawns Count

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THE PAWNS COUNT

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

1918

FOREWORD

"I am for England and England only," John Lutchester, the Englishman, asserted.

"I am for Japan and Japan only," Nikasti, the Jap, insisted.

"I am for Germany first and America afterwards," Oscar Fischer, the German-American pronounced.

"I am for America first, America only, America always," Pamela Van Teyl, the American girl, declared.

They were all right except the German-American.

CHAPTER I

Mefiez-Vous!

Taisez-Vous!

Les Oreilles Ennemies Vous Ecoutent!

The usual little crowd was waiting in the lobby of a fashionable London restaurant a few minutes before the popular luncheon hour. Pamela Van Teyl, a very beautiful American girl, dressed in the extreme of fashion, which she seemed somehow to justify, directed the attention of her companions to the notice affixed to the wall facing them.

"Except," she declared, "for you poor dears who have been hurt, that is the first thing I have seen in England which makes me realise that you are at war."

The younger of her two escorts, Captain Richard Holderness, who wore the uniform of a well-known cavalry regiment, glanced at the notice a little impatiently.

"What rot it seems!" he exclaimed. "We get fed up with that sort of thing in France. It's always the same at every little railway station and every little inn. 'Mefiez-vous! Taisez-vous!' They might spare us over here."

John Lutchester, a tall, clean-shaven man, dressed in civilian clothes, raised his eyeglass and read out the notice languidly.

"Well, I don't know," he observed. "Some of you Service fellows—not the Regulars, of course—do gas a good deal when you come back. I don't suppose you any of you know anything, so it doesn't really matter," he added, glancing at his watch.

"Army's full of Johnnies, who come from God knows where nowadays," Holderness assented gloomily. "No wonder they can't keep their mouths shut."

"Seems to me you need them all," Miss Pamela Van Teyl remarked with a smile.

"Of course we do," Holderness assented, "and Heaven forbid that any of us Regulars should say a word against them. Jolly good stuff in them, too, as the Germans found out last month."

"All the same," Lutchester continued, still studying the notice, "news does run over London like quicksilver. If you step down to the American bar here, for instance, you'll find that Charles is one of the best-informed men about the war in London. He has patrons in the Army, in the Navy, and in the Flying Corps, and it's astonishing how communicative they seem to become after the second or third cocktail."

"Cocktail, mark you, Miss Van Teyl," Holderness pointed out. "We poor Englishmen could keep our tongues from wagging before we acquired some of your American habits."

"The habits are all right," Pamela retorted. "It's your heads that are wrong."

"The most valued product of your country," Lutchester murmured, "is more dangerous to our hearts than to our heads."

She made a little grimace and turned away, holding out her hand to a new arrival —a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a strong, cold face and keen, grey eyes, aggressive even behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. There was a queer change in his face as his eyes met Pamela's. He seemed suddenly to become more human. His pleasure at seeing her was certainly more than the usual transatlantic politeness.

"Mr. Fischer," she exclaimed, "they are saying hard things about our country! Please protect me."

He bowed over her fingers. Then he looked up. His tone was impressive.

"If I thought that you needed protection, Miss Van Teyl—"

"Well, I can assure you that I do," she interrupted, laughing. "You know my

friends, don't you?"

"I think I have that pleasure," the American replied, shaking hands with Lutchester and Holderness.

"Now we'll get an independent opinion," the former observed, pointing to the wall. "We were discussing that notice, Mr. Fischer. You're almost as much a Londoner as a New Yorker. What do you think?—is it superfluous or not?"

Fischer read it out and smiled.

"Well," he admitted, "in America we don't lay much store by that sort of thing, but I don't know as we're very good judges about what goes on over here. I shouldn't call this place, anyway, a hotbed of intrigue. Excuse me!"

He moved off to greet some incoming guests—a well-known stockbroker and his partner. Lutchester looked after him curiously.

"Is Mr. Fischer one of your typical millionaires, Miss Van Teyl?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"We have no typical millionaires," she assured him. "They come from all classes and all States."

"Fischer is a Westerner, isn't he?"

Pamela nodded, but did not pursue the conversation. Her eyes were fixed upon a girl who had just entered, and who was looking a little doubtfully around, a girl plainly but smartly dressed, with fluffy light hair, dark eyes, and a very pleasant expression. Pamela, who was critical of her own sex, found the newcomer attractive.

"Is that, by any chance, one of our missing guests, Captain Holderness?" she inquired, turning towards him. "I don't know why, but I have an idea that it is your sister."

"By Jove, yes!" the young man assented, stepping forward. "Here we are, Molly, and at last you are going to meet Miss Van Teyl. I've bored Molly stiff, talking about you," he explained, as Pamela held out her

hand.

The girls, who stood talking together for a moment, presented rather a striking contrast. Molly Holderness was pretty but usual. Pamela was beautiful and unusual. She had the long, slim body of a New York girl, the complexion and eyes of a Southerner, the savoir faire of a Frenchwoman. She was extraordinarily cosmopolitan, and yet extraordinarily American. She impressed every one, as she did Molly Holderness at that moment, with a sense of charm. One could almost accept as truth her own statement—that she valued her looks chiefly because they helped people to forget that she had brains.

"I won't admit that I have ever been bored, Miss Van Teyl," Molly Holderness assured her, "but Dick has certainly told me all sorts of wonderful things about you—how kind you were in New York, and what a delightful surprise it was to see you down at the hospital at Nice. I am afraid he must have been a terrible crock then."

"Got well in no time as soon as Miss Van Teyl came along," Holderness declared. "It was a bit dreary down there at first. None of my lot were sent south, and a familiar face means a good deal when you've got your lungs full of that rotten gas and are feeling like nothing on earth. I wonder where that idiot Sandy is. I told him to be here a quarter of an hour before you others—thought we might have had a quiet chat first. Will you stand by the girls for a moment, Lutchester, while I have a look round?" he added.

He hobbled away, one of the thousands who were thronging the streets and public places of London—brave, simple-minded young men, all of them, with tangled recollections in their brains of blood and fire and hell, and a game leg or a lost arm to remind them that the whole thing was not a nightmare. He looked a little disconsolately around, and was on the point of rejoining the others when the friend for whom he was searching came hurriedly through the turnstile doors.

"Sandy, old chap," Holderness exclaimed, with an air of relief, "here you are at last!"

"Cheero, Dick!" was the light-hearted reply. "Fearfully sorry I'm late, but listen —just listen for one moment."

The newcomer threw his hat and coat to the attendant. He was a rather short, freckled young man, with a broad, high forehead and light-coloured hair. His

eyes just now were filled with the enthusiasm which trembled in his tone.

"Dick," he continued, gripping his friend's arm tightly, "I'm late, I know, but I've great news. I've motored straight up from Salisbury Plain. I've done it! I swear to you, Dick, I've done it!"

"Done what?" Holderness demanded, a little bewildered.

"I've perfected my explosive—the thing I was telling you about last week," was the triumphant reply. "The whole world's struggling for it, Dick. The German chemists have been working night and day for three years, just for one little formula, and I've got it! One of my shells, which fell in a wood at daylight this morning, killed every living thing within a mile of it. The bark fell off the trees, and the labourers in a field beyond threw down their implements and ran for their lives. It's the principle of intensification. The poison feeds on its own vapours. The formula—I've got it in my pocket-book—"

"Look here, old fellow," Holderness interrupted, "it's all splendid, of course, and I'm dying to hear you talk about it, but come along now and be introduced to Miss Van Teyl. Molly's over there, waiting, and we're all half starved."

"So am I," was the cheerful answer. "Hullo, Lutchester, how are you? Just one moment. I must get a wash, I motored straight through, and I'm choked with dust. Where do I go?"

"I'll show you," Lutchester volunteered. "Hurry up."

The two men sprang up the stairs towards the dressing-room, and Holderness strolled back to where his sister and Pamela were talking to a small, dark young man, with rather high cheek-bones and olive complexion. Pamela turned around with a smile.

"I have found an old friend," she told him. "Baron Sunyea—Captain Holderness. Baron Sunyea used to be in the Japanese Embassy at Washington."

The two men shook hands.

"I was interested," the Japanese said slowly, "in your conversation just now about that notice. Your young friend was telling you news very loudly indeed, it

seemed to me, which you would not like known across the North Sea. Am I not right?"

"In a sense you are, of course," Holderness admitted, "but here at Henry's—why, the place is like a club. Where are the enemies' ears to come from, I should like to know?"

"Where we least expect to find them, as a rule," was the grave reply.

"Quite right," Lutchester, who had just rejoined them, agreed. "They still say, you know, that our home Secret Service is just as bad as our foreign Secret Service is good."

Holderness smiled in somewhat superior fashion.

"Can't say that I have much faith in that spy talk," he declared. "No doubt there was any quantity of espionage before the war, but it's pretty well weeded out now. I say, how good civilisation is!" he went on, his eyes dwelling lovingly on the interior of the restaurant. "Tophole, isn't it, Lutchester—these smart girls, with their furs and violets and perfumes, the little note of music in the distance, the cheerful clatter of plates, the smiling faces of the waiters, and the undercurrent of pleasant voices. Don't laugh at me, please, Miss Van Teyl. I've three weeks more of it, by George—perhaps more. I don't go up before my Board till Thursday fortnight. Dash it, I wish Sandy would hurry up!"

"You never told me how you got your wound," Pamela observed, as the conversation flagged for a moment.

"Can't even remember," was the careless reply. "We were all scrapping away as hard as we could one afternoon, and nearly a dozen of us got the knock, all at the same time. It's quite all right now, though, except for the stiffness. It was the gas did me in…. What a fellow Sandy is! You people must be starving."

They waited for another five minutes. Then Holderness limped towards the stairs with a little imprecation. Lutchester stopped him.

"Don't you go, Holderness," he begged. "I'll find him and bring him down by the scruff of the neck."

He strode up the stairs on a mission which ended in unexpected failure.

Presently he returned, a slight frown upon his forehead.

"I am awfully sorry," he announced, "but I can't find him anywhere. I left him washing his hands, and he said he'd be down in a moment. Are you quite sure that we haven't missed him?"

"There hasn't been a sign of him," Molly declared promptly. "I am so hungry that my eyes have been glued upon the staircase all the time."

Pamela, who had slipped away a few moments before, rejoined them with a little expression of surprise.

"Isn't Captain Graham here yet?" she asked incredulously.

"Not a sign of him," Holderness replied. "Queer set out, isn't it? We won't wait a moment longer. Take my sister and Miss Van Teyl in, will you?" he went on, laying his hand on Lutchester's shoulder. "Ferrani will look after you. I'll follow directly."

The chief maitre d'hotel advanced to meet them with a gesture of invitation, and led them to a table arranged for five. The restaurant was crowded, and the coloured band, from the space against the wall on their left, was playing a lively one-step. Ferrani was buttonholed by an important client as they crossed the threshold, and they lingered for a moment, waiting for his guidance. Whilst they stood there, a curious thing happened. The leader of the orchestra seemed to draw his fingers recklessly across the strings of his instrument and to produce a discord which was almost appalling. A half-pained, half-amused exclamation rippled down the room. For a moment the music ceased. The conductor, who was responsible for the disturbance, was sitting motionless, his hand hanging down by his side. His features remained imperturbable, but the gleam of his white teeth, and a livid little streak under his eyes gave to his usually good-humoured face an utterly altered, almost a malignant expression. Ferrani stepped across and spoke to him for a moment angrily. The man took up his instrument, waved his hand, and the music re-commenced in a subdued note. Pamela turned to the chief maitre d'hotel, who had now re-joined them.

"What an extraordinary breakdown!" she exclaimed. "Is your leader a man of nerves?"

"Never have I heard such a thing in all my days," Ferrani assured them fervently.

"Joseph is one of the most wonderful performers in the world. His control over his instrument is marvellous…. Captain Holderness asked particularly for this table."

They seated themselves at the table reserved for them against the wall. Their cicerone was withdrawing with a low bow, but Pamela leaned over to speak to him.

"Your music," she told him, "is quite wonderful. The orchestra consists entirely of Americans, I suppose?"

"Entirely, madam," Ferrani assented. "They are real Southern darkies, from Joseph, the leader, down to little Peter, who blows the motor-horn."

Pamela's interest in the matter remained unabated.

"I tell you it makes one feel almost homesick to hear them play," she went on, with a little sigh. "Did they come direct from the States?"

Ferrani shook his head.

"From Paris, madam. Before that, for a little time, they were at the Winter Garden in Berlin. They made quite a European tour of it before they arrived here."

"And he is the leader—the man whom you call Joseph," Pamela observed. "A broad, good-humoured face—not much intelligence, I should imagine."

Ferrani's protest was vigorous and gesticulatory. He evidently had ideas of his own concerning Joseph.

"More, perhaps, than you would think, madam," he declared. "He knows how to make a bargain, believe me. It cost us more than I would like to tell you to get these fellows here."

Pamela looked him in the eyes.

"Be careful, Monsieur Ferrani," she advised, "that it does not cost you more to get rid of them."

She leaned back in her place, apparently tired of the subject, and Ferrani, a little puzzled, made his bow and withdrew. The music was once more in full swing. Their luncheon was served, and Lutchester did his best to entertain his companions. Their eyes, however, every few seconds strayed towards the door. There was no sign of the missing guest.

CHAPTER II

Molly Holderness, for whom Graham's absence possessed, perhaps, more significance than the others, relapsed very soon into a strained and anxious silence. Pamela and Lutchester, on the other hand, divided their attention between a very excellent luncheon and an even flow of personal, almost inquisitorial conversation.

"You will find," Pamela warned her companion almost as they took their places, "that I am a very curious person. I am more interested in people than in events. Tell me something about your work at the War Office?"

"I am not at the War Office," he replied.

"Well, what is it that you do, then?" she asked. "Captain Holderness told me that you had been out in France, fighting, but that you had some sort of official position at home now."

"I am at the Ministry of Munitions," he explained.

"Well, tell me about that, then?" she suggested. "Is it as exciting as fighting?"

He shook his head.

"It has advantages," he admitted, "but I should scarcely say that excitement figured amongst them."

She looked at him thoughtfully. Lutchester was a little over thirty-five years of age, tall and of sinewy build. His colouring was neutral, his complexion inclined to be pale, his mouth straight and firm, his grey eyes rather deep-set. Without possessing any of the stereotyped qualifications, he was sufficiently good-looking.

"I wonder you didn't prefer soldiering," she observed.

He smiled for a moment, and Pamela felt unreasonably annoyed at the twinkle in his eyes.

"I am not a soldier by profession," he said, "but I went out with the Expeditionary Force and had a year of it. They kept me here, after a slight wound, to take up my old work again."

"Your old work," she repeated. "I didn't know there was such a thing as a Ministry of Munitions before the war."

He deliberately changed the conversation, directing Pamela's attention to the crowded condition of the room.

"Gay scene, isn't it?" he remarked.

"Very!" she assented drily.

"Do you come here to dance?" he inquired.

She shook her head.

"You must remember that I have been living in Paris for some months," she told him. "You won't be annoyed if I tell you that the way you English people are taking the war simply maddens me. Your young soldiers talk about it as though it were a sort of picnic, your middle-aged clubmen seem to think that it was invented to give them a fresh interest in their newspapers, and the rest of you seem to think of nothing but the money you are making. And Paris…. No, I don't think I should care to dance here!"

Lutchester nodded, but Pamela fancied somehow or other that his attitude was not wholly sympathetic. His tone, with its slight note of admonition, irritated her.

"You must be careful," he said, "not to be too much misled by externals."

Pamela opened her lips for a quick reply, but checked herself.

Captain Holderness and Ferrani had entered the room and were approaching their table, talking earnestly. The latter especially was looking perplexed and

anxious.

"It's the queerest thing I ever knew," Holderness pronounced. "We've searched every hole and corner upstairs, and there isn't a sign of Sandy."

"Have you tried the bar?" Lutchester inquired.

"Both the bar and the grillroom," Ferrani assured him.

"If he had been suddenly taken ill—" Molly murmured.

"But there is no place in which he could have been taken ill which we have not searched," Ferrani reminded her.

"And besides," Holderness intervened, "Sandy was in the very pink of health, and bubbling over with high-spirits."

"One noticed that," Lutchester remarked, a little drily.

"He might almost have been called garrulous," Pamela agreed.

Ferrani took grave leave of them, and Holderness seated himself at the table.

"Well, let's get on with luncheon, anyway," he advised. "It's no good bothering. The best thing we can do is to conclude that the impossible has happened—that Sandy has met with some pals and will be here presently."

"Or possibly," Lutchester suggested, "that he has done what certainly seems the most reasonable thing—gone straight off to the War Office with his formula and forgotten all about us. Let us return the compliment and forget all about him."

They finished their luncheon a little more cheerfully. As the cigarettes were handed round, Pamela's eyes looked longingly at a tray of Turkish coffee which was passing.

"I'm a rotten host," Holderness declared, "but, to tell you the truth, this queer prank of Sandy's has driven everything else out of my mind. Here, Hassan!"

The coloured man in gorgeous oriental livery turned at once with a smile. He approached the table, bowing to each of them in turn. Pamela watched him

intently, and, as his eyes met hers, Hassan's hands began to shake.

"The waiter is bringing us ordinary coffee," Holderness explained. "Please countermand it and bring us Turkish coffee for four."

The man had lost his savoir faire. His wonderful smile had turned into something sickly, his bland speech of thanks into a mumble. He turned away almost sheepishly.

"Hassan doesn't seem to like us to-day," Molly remarked.

"I should have said that he was drunk," her brother observed, looking after him curiously.

There was certainly something the matter with Hassan, for it was at least a quarter of an hour before he reappeared and served his specially prepared concoction with the usual ceremony but with more restraint. Molly and the two men, after Hassan had sprinkled the contents of his mysterious little flask into their coffee, gave him their hands for the customary salute. When he came to Pamela he hesitated. She shook her head and he fell back, bowing respectfully, his hand tracing cabalistic signs across his heart. For a moment before he departed, he raised his eyes and glanced at her. It was like the mute appeal of some hurt or frightened animal.

"You don't approve of Hassan's little ceremony?" Lutchester asked her.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"In America," she observed, "I think we look upon coloured people of any sort a little differently. Well, we've certainly given your friend a chance," she went on, glancing at the little jewelled watch upon her wrist, "We've outstayed almost every one here."

Their host paid the bill, and they strolled reluctantly towards the door, Holderness and Pamela a few steps behind.

"Now what are your sister and Mr. Lutchester studying again?" the latter inquired, as they reached the lobby.

Molly had paused once more before the notice on the wall, which seemed

somehow to have fascinated her. She read it out, lingering on every word:

MEFIEZ-VOUS! TAISEZ-VOUS! LES OREILLES ENNEMIES VOUS ECOUTENT!

Holderness listened with a frown. Then he turned suddenly to Lutchester, who was standing by his side.

"It would be too ridiculous, wouldn't it—you couldn't in any way connect the idea behind that notice with Sandy's disappearance?"

"I was wondering about that myself," Lutchester confessed. "To tell you the truth, I have been wondering all luncheon-time. If ever a man broke the letter and the spirit of that simple warning I should say your excitable young friend, Captain Graham, did."

"But here at Henry's," Holderness protested, "with friends on every side! Isn't it a little too ridiculous! We'll wait until the last person is out of the place, anyway," he added.

The crowd soon began to thin. Ferrani, seeing them still waiting, approached with a little bow.

"Your friend," he asked, "he has not arrived, eh?"

"No sign of him," Holderness replied gloomily.

"What about his hat and coat?" Ferrani inquired, with a sudden inspiration.

"Great idea," Holderness assented, turning towards the cloakroom attendant. "Don't you remember my friend, James?" he went on. "He arrived about half-past one, and threw his coat and hat over to you."

The attendant nodded and glanced towards an empty peg.

"I remember him quite well, sir," he acknowledged. "Number sixty-seven was his number."

"Where are his things, then?"

"Gone, sir," the man replied.

"Do you remember his asking for them?"

The attendant shook his head.

"Can't say that I do, sir," he acknowledged, "but they've gone right enough."

A party of outgoing guests claimed the man's attention. Holderness turned away.

"This thing is getting on my nerves," he declared. "Does it seem likely that Sandy should chuck his luncheon without a word of explanation, come out and get his coat and hat and walk off? And, besides, where was he all the time we were looking for him?"

It was unanswerable, inexplicable. They all looked at one another almost helplessly. Pamela held out her hand.

"Well," she announced, "I am sorry, but I'm afraid that I must go. I have a great many things to attend to this afternoon."

"You are going away soon?" Lutchester inquired.

She hesitated, and at that moment Mr. Fischer, who had been saying farewell to his guests, turned towards her.

"You are not thinking of the trip home yet, Miss Van Teyl?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered a little evasively. "I'm out of humour with London just now."

"Perhaps we shall be fellow-passengers on Thursday?" he ventured. "I am going over on the *New York*."

"I never make plans," she told him.

"In any case," Mr. Fischer continued, "I shall anticipate our early meeting in New York. I heard from your brother only yesterday."

She looked at him with a slight frown.

"From James?"

Mr. Fischer nodded.

"Why, I didn't know," she observed, "that you and he were acquainted."

"I have had large transactions with his firm, and naturally I have seen a good deal of Mr. Van Teyl," the other explained. "He looks after the interests of us Western clients."

Pamela turned a little abruptly away, and Lutchester walked with her to the door.

"You will let me see that they bring your car round?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Thank you, no," she replied, holding out her hand. "I have not yet said good-by to Captain Holderness and his sister. Good-by, Mr. Lutchester!"

Her farewell was purposely chilly. It seemed as though the slight sparring in which they had indulged throughout luncheon-time, had found its culmination in an antipathy which she had no desire to conceal. Lutchester, however, only smiled.

"Nowadays," he observed, "that is a word which it is never necessary to use."

She withdrew her hand from his somewhat too tenacious clasp. Something in his manner puzzled as well as irritated her.

"Do you mean that you, too, are thinking of taking a holiday from your strenuous labours?" she asked. "Perhaps America is the safest country in the world just now for an Englishman who—"

She stopped short, realising the lengths towards which her causeless pique was carrying her.

"Prefers departmental work to fighting, were you going to add?" he said quietly. "Well, perhaps you are right. At any rate, I will content myself by saying au revoir."

He passed through the turnstile door and disappeared. Pamela made her adieux to Holderness and his sister, and then, recognising some acquaintances, turned

back into the restaurant to speak to them. Fischer, who had just received his hat and cane from the cloakroom attendant, stood watching her.

CHAPTER III

Pamela, after a brief conversation with her friends, once more left the restaurant. In the lobby she called Ferrani to her.

"Has Mr. Fischer gone, Ferrani?" she asked.

"Not two minutes ago," the man replied. "You wish to speak to him? I can stop him even now."

She shook her head.

"On the contrary," she said drily, "Mr. Fischer represents a type of my countrymen of whom I am not very fond. He is a great patron of yours, is he not?"

"He is a large shareholder in the company," Ferrani confessed.

"Then your restaurant will prosper," she told him. "Mr. Fischer has the name of being very fortunate…. That was a wonderful luncheon you gave us to-day."

"Madame is very kind."

"Will you do me a favour?"

Ferrani's gesture was all-expressive. Words were entirely superfluous.

"I want two addresses, please. First, the address of Joseph, your head musician, and, secondly, the address of Hassan, your coffee-maker."

Ferrani effectually concealed any surprise he might have felt. He tore a page from his pocket-book.

"Both I know," he declared. "Hassan lodges at a shop eighty yards away. The name is Haines, and there are newspaper placards outside the door."

"That is quite enough," Pamela murmured.

"As for Monsieur Joseph," Ferrani continued, "that is a different matter. He has, I understand, a small flat in Tower Mansions, Tower Street, leading off the Edgware Road. The number is 18C. So!"

He wrote it down and passed it to her. Pamela thanked him and stood up.

"Now that I have done as you asked me," Ferrani concluded, "let me add a word. Both these men are already off duty and have left the restaurant. If you wish to communicate with either of them, I advise you to do so by letter."

"You are a very courteous gentleman, Mr. Ferrani," Pamela declared, dropping him a little mock curtsey, "and good morning!"

She made her way into the street outside, shook her head to the commissionaire's upraised whistle, and strolled along until she came to a cross street down which several motor-cars were waiting. She approached one—a very handsome limousine—and checked the driver who would have sprung from his seat.

"George," she said, "I am going to pay a call at a disreputable-looking news-shop, just where I am pointing. You can't bring the car there, as the street is too narrow. You might follow me on foot and be about."

The young man touched his hat and obeyed. A few yards down the street Pamela found her destination, and entered a gloomy little shop. A slatternly woman looked at her curiously from behind the counter.

"I am told that Hassan lodges here, the coffee-maker from Henry's," Pamela began.

The woman looked at her in a peculiar fashion.

"Well?"

"I wish to see him."

"You can't, then," was the curt answer. "He's at his prayers."

"At what?" Pamela exclaimed.

"At his prayers," the woman repeated brusquely. "There," she added, throwing open the door which led into the premises behind, "can't you hear him, poor soul? He's been pinching some more charms from ladies' bracelets, or something of the sort, I reckon. He's always in trouble. He goes on like this for an hour or so and then he forgives himself."

Pamela stood by the open door and listened—listened to a strange, wailing chant, which rose and fell with almost weird monotony.

"Very interesting," she observed. "I have heard that sort of thing before. Now will you kindly tell Hassan that I wish to speak to him, or shall I go and find him for myself?"

"Well, you've got some brass!" the woman declared, with a sneer.

"And some gold," Pamela assented, passing a pound note over to the woman.

"Do you want to see him alone?" the latter asked, almost snatching at the note, but still regarding Pamela with distrustful curiosity.

"Of course," was the calm reply.

The woman opened her lips and closed them again, sniffed, and led the way down a short passage, at the end of which was a door.

"There you are," she muttered, throwing it open. "You've arst for it, mind. 'Tain't my business."

She slouched her way back again into the shop. At first Pamela could scarcely see anything except a dark figure on his knees before a closed and shrouded window. Then she saw Hassan rise to his feet, saw the glitter of his eyes.

"Pull up the blind, Hassan," she directed.

He came a step nearer to her. The gloom in the apartment was extraordinary. Only his shape and his eyes were visible.

"Do as I tell you," she ordered. "Pull up the blind. It will be better."

He hesitated. Then he obeyed. Even then the interior of the room seemed shadowy and obscure. Pamela could only see, in contrast with the rest of the house, that it was wonderfully and spotlessly clean. In one corner, barely concealed by a low screen, his bed stood upon the floor. Hassan muttered something in an Oriental tongue. Pamela interrupted him. She spoke in the soothing tone one uses towards a child.

"That's all right, Hassan," she said. "Sorry to have interrupted you at your prayers, but it had to be done. You know me?"

"Yes, mistress," he answered unwillingly. "I your dragoman one year in Cairo. What you want here, mistress?"

"You know that I know," she went on, "that you are a Turk and a Mohammedan, and not an Egyptian at all."

"Yes, mistress, you know that," he muttered.

"And you also know," she continued, "that if I give you away to the authorities you will be sent at once to a very uncomfortable internment camp, where you won't even have an opportunity to wash more than once a day, where you will have to herd with all sorts of people, who will make fun of your colour and your religion—"

"Don't, mistress!" he shouted suddenly. "You will not tell. I think you will not tell!"

He was sidling a little towards her. Again one of those curious changes seemed to have transformed him from a dumb, passive creature into a savage. There was menace in his eyes. She waved him back without moving.

"I have come to make a bargain with you, Hassan," she said, "just a few words, that is all. Not quite so near, please."

He paused. There was a moment's silence. His face was within a foot of hers, lowering, black, bestial. Her eyes met his without a tremor. Her full, sweet lips only curved into a faintly contemptuous line.

"You cannot frighten me, Hassan," she declared. "No man has ever done that. And outside I have a chauffeur with muscles of iron, who waits for me. Be reasonable. Listen. There are secrets connected with your restaurant."

"I know nothing," he began at once; "nothing, mistress—nothing!"

"Quite naturally," she continued. "I only need one piece of information. A man disappeared there this morning. I just have to find him. That's all there is about it. At half-past one he was inveigled into the musicians' room and by some means or other rendered unconscious. At three o'clock he had been removed. I want to know what became of him. You help me and the whole world can believe you to be an Egyptian for the rest of their lives. If you can't help me it is rather unfortunate for you, because I shall tell the police at once who and what you are. Don't waste time, Hassan."

He stood thinking, rubbing his hands and bowing before her, yet, as she knew very well, with murder in his heart. Once she saw his long fingers raised a little.

"Quite useless, Hassan," she warned him. "They hang you in England, you know, for any little trifle such as you are thinking of. Be sensible, and I may even leave a few pound notes behind me."

"Mistress should ask Joseph," he muttered. "I know nothing."

"Oh, mistress is going to ask Joseph all right," she assured him, "but I want a little information from you, too. You've got to earn your freedom, you know, Hassan. Come, what do they do with the people who disappear from the restaurant?"

"Not understand," was the almost piteous reply.

Pamela sighed. She had again the air of one being patient with a child.

"See here, Hassan," she went on, "a few days ago I went over that restaurant from top to bottom with the manager. There is the musicians' room, isn't there, just over the entrance hall? I suppose those little glass places in the floor are movable, and then one can hear every word that is spoken below. I am right so far, am I not?"

Hassan answered nothing. His breathing, however, had become a little deeper.

"An unsuspecting person, passing from the toilet rooms upstairs, could easily be induced to enter. I think that there must be another exit from that room. Yes?"

"Yes!" Hassan faltered.

"To where?"

"The wine-cellars."

"And from there?"

Hassan was suddenly voluble. Truth unlocked his tongue.

"Not know, mistress—not know another thing. No one enters wine-cellar but three men. One of those not know. If I guess—I, Hassan—I look at little chapel left standing in waste place. Perhaps I wonder sometimes, but I not know."

Pamela drew three notes from her gold purse, smoothed them out and handed them over.

"Three pounds, Hassan, silence, and good day! You'll live longer if you open your windows now and then, and get a little fresh air, instead of praying yourself hoarse."

Again the black figure swayed perilously towards her. She affected not to notice, not to notice the hand which seemed for a moment as though it would snatch the door handle from her grasp. She passed out pleasantly and without haste. The last sound she heard was a groan.

"Done your bit o' business, eh?" the landlady asked curiously.

Pamela nodded assent.

"Rather an odd sort of lodger for you, isn't he?"

"Not so odd as his visitors," the woman retorted, with an evil sneer.

Pamela passed into the narrow street and drew a long sigh of relief. Then she entered her car and gave the chauffeur an address from the slip of paper which she carried in her hand. When they stopped outside the little block of flats he

prepared to follow her.

"Tough neighbourhood this, madam," he said.

"Maybe, George," she replied, waving him back, "but you've got to stay down here. If the man I am going to see thought I was frightened of him I wouldn't have a chance. If I am not down in half an hour you can try number 18C."

The chauffeur resumed his place on the driving-seat of the car. Pamela, heartily disliking her surroundings, was escorted by a shabby porter to a shabbier lift.

"You'll find Mr. Joseph in," the lift boy assured her with a grin.

Pamela found the number at the end of an unswept stone passage. At her third summons the door was cautiously opened by a large, repulsive-looking woman, with a mass of peroxidised hair. She stared at her visitor first in amazement, then in rapidly gathering resentment.

"Mr. Joseph is at home," she admitted truculently, in response to Pamela's inquiry. "What might you be wanting with him?"

"If you will be so good as to let me in I will explain to Mr. Joseph," Pamela replied.

The woman seemed on the point of slamming the door. Suddenly there was a voice from behind her shoulder. Joseph appeared—not the smiling, joyous Joseph of Henry's but a sullen-looking negro, dressed in shirt and trousers only, with a heavy under-lip and frowning forehead.

"Let the lady pass and get into the kitchen, Nora," he ordered, "Come this way, mam."

Pamela followed her guide into a parlour, redolent of stale cigar smoke, with oilcloth on the floor and varnished walls, an abode even more horrible than Hassan's lair. Joseph closed the door carefully behind him, and made no apology for his dishabille. He simply faced Pamela.

"Say, what is it you want with me?" he demanded truculently.

"A trifle," she answered. "The key of the chapel in the little plot of waste ground

next Henry's."

She meant him to be staggered, and he was. He reeled back for a moment.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he gasped.

"Facts," Pamela replied. "Do you want to save yourself, Joseph? You can do it if you choose."

He folded his arms and stood in front of the closed door. Without a collar, his neck bulged unpleasantly behind. There was nothing whatever left of the suave and genial chef d'orchestra.

"Save myself from what, eh? Just let me get wise about it."

Pamela's eyebrows were daintily elevated.

"Dear me!" she murmured. "I thought you were more intelligent. Listen. You know where we met last? Let me remind you. You were playing in the Winter Garden at Berlin, and the gentleman whom I was with, an attache at the American Embassy, spoke to you. He told me a good deal about your past life, Joseph, and your present one. You are in the pay of the Secret Service of Germany. Am I to go to Scotland Yard and tell them so?"

He looked at her wickedly.

"You'd have to get out of here first."

"Don't be silly," she advised him contemptuously. "Remember you're talking to an American woman and don't waste your breath. You can be in the Secret Service of any country you like, without interference from me. On the other hand, there's just one thing I want from you."

"What is it? I haven't got any key."

"I want to discover exactly what has become of Captain Graham," she declared.

"What, the guy that missed his lunch to-day?" he growled.

"I see you know all about it," she continued equably.

"So he's your spark, is he?" Joseph observed slowly, his eyes blinking as he leaned a little forward.

"On the contrary," Pamela replied, "I have never met him. However, that's beside the point. Do I have the key of that chapel?"

"You do not."

"Have you got it?"

"Right here," Joseph assented, dangling it before her eyes.

"I think it's a fair bargain I'm offering you," she reminded him. "You lose the key and keep your place. You only have to keep your mouth shut and nothing happens."

"Nothing doing," the negro declared shortly. "Keys as important as this ain't lost. If I part with it, I get the chuck, and I probably get into the same mess as the others. If I keep it—"

"If you keep it," Pamela interrupted, "you will probably stand with your back to the light in the Tower within the next few days. They've left off being lenient with spies over here."

He looked at her, and there were things in his eyes which few women in the world could have seen without terror. Pamela's lips only came a little closer together. She pressed the inside of the ring upon her third finger, and a ray of green fire seemed to shoot forward.

"I guess I'm up against it," he growled, taking a step forward. "I'll have something of what's coming to me, if I swing for it."

His arm was suddenly around her, his face hideously close. He gave a little snarl as he felt the pinprick through his shirt sleeve. Then he went spinning round and round with his hand to his head.

"What in God's name!" he spluttered. "What in hell—!"

He reeled against the horsehair easy-chair and slipped on to the floor. Pamela calmly closed her ring, stooped over him, withdrew the key from his pocket,

crossed the room and the dingy little hall with swift footsteps, and, without waiting for the lift, fled down the stone steps. Before she reached the bottom, she heard the shrill ringing of the lift bell, the angry shouting of the woman. Pamela, however, strolled quietly out and took her place in the car.

"Back to the hotel, George," she directed the chauffeur. "Don't stop if they call to you from the flats."

The young man sprang up to his seat and the car glided off. Pamela leaned forward and looked at herself in the mirror. There was a shade more colour in her face, perhaps, than usual, but her low waves of chestnut hair were unruffled. She used her powder puff with attentive skill and leaned back.

"That's the disagreeable part of it over, anyway," she sighed to herself contentedly.

CHAPTER IV

The last of the supper-guests had left Henry's Restaurant, the commissionaire's whistle was silent. The light laughter and frivolous adieux of the departing guests seemed to have melted away into a world somewhere beyond the pale of the unseasonable fog. The little strip of waste ground adjoining was wrapped in gloom and silence. The exterior of the bare and deserted chapel, long since unconsecrate, was dull and lifeless. Inside, however, began the march of strange things. First of all, the pinprick of light of a tiny electric torch seemed as though it had risen from the floor, and Hassan, pushing back a trap-door, stepped into the bare, dusty conventicle. He listened for a moment, then made a tour of the windows, touched a spring in the wall, and drew down long, thick blinds. Afterwards he passed between the row of dilapidated benches and paused at the entrance door. He stooped down, examined the keyless lock, shook it gently, gazed upwards and downwards as though in vain search of bolts that were never there. His white teeth gleamed for a moment in the darkness. He turned away with a little shiver.

"Not my fault," he muttered to himself. "Not my fault."

He listened for a moment intently, as though for footsteps outside. The disturbance, however, came from the other end of the building. There was a sharp knocking from the trap-door by which he had ascended. He touched an electric knob. The place was dimly yet sufficiently illuminated. He hastened towards the further end of the place and pulled up the trap-door. A melancholy-looking little procession slowly emerged. First of all came Joseph, stepping backwards, supporting the head and shoulders of Graham, still bound and gagged. After him came a dark, swarthy-faced wine waiter, who supported Graham's feet. Behind followed Fischer, carrying his silk hat and cane in his hand. He paused for a moment as he stepped on the floor of the chapel, and brushed the dust from his trousers.

"You can take out the gag now," he ordered the two men. "There isn't much shout in him."

They laid him upon a couch, and Joseph obeyed the order. Graham's head swung helplessly on one side. His eyes opened, however, and he struggled for consciousness. His lips twitched for a moment. In these long hours he had almost forgotten the habit of speech. The words, when they came, sounded strange to him.

"What—where am I? What do you want with me?"

Fischer laid his hat and stick upon a table, on which also stood a telephone instrument.

"The formula, my young friend," he replied, "for that wonderful explosive of which you spoke in the lobby."

A sudden accession of nervous strength brought something almost like passion into the young man's reply, although to himself there still seemed some unreality in the words which might have come from the walls or the roof—surely not from his lips.

"I'll see you damned first!"

Fischer smiled. The man was good-looking, in his way, but this was a pale and ugly smile.

"My request was merely a matter of courtesy," he remarked. "The difficulty of searching you is not formidable. It would have been undertaken long ago but for the fact that the restaurant has been crowded and gags sometimes slip. Besides, there was no hurry. Observe!"

He leaned over Graham, who for the first time struggled furiously but ineffectually with his bonds. His fingers all the time were straining towards the inside pocket of his coat. Fischer nodded understandingly.

"Allow me to anticipate you," he said.

With a quick thrust he drew a little handful of papers from the pocket of his captive. One by one he glanced them through and flung them on to the floor. As

he came towards the end of his search, however, his expression of confident complacency vanished. His lips shrivelled up a little, his eyes narrowed. The last folded sheet of paper—a little perfumed note from Peggy, thanking Sandy for his beautiful roses—he crumpled fiercely into a little ball. He opened his lips to speak, then he paused. A new light broke in upon him. The fury had passed from Sandy Graham's face. In its stead there was an expression of blank astonishment.

"Where is the formula?" Fischer asked fiercely.

There was no reply. Sandy Graham was still staring at the little pile of papers upon the floor. Fischer made a brief examination of the other pockets. Then he stepped back. His voice shook, his face was dark and malevolent.

"Joseph, Hassan, Jules—listen to me!" he ordered. "Did any one else enter the musicians' room whilst he was lying in the alcove?"

"Impossible!" Jules declared.

"The door was locked," Hassan murmured.

"Stop!" Joseph exclaimed.

Fischer wheeled round upon him.

"Well?" he exclaimed. "Get on, then. Who?"

Joseph moistened his lips. He was still feeling sore and dizzy, but he began to see his way.

"You noticed, perhaps," he said, "the American girl—the beautiful young lady with this guy's friends? She was waiting with the others for Captain Graham to come down. I saw her go up the stairs. I saw her come down again, three minutes later."

"Miss Van Teyl?" Fischer exclaimed, with a frown. "You're mad, Joseph!"

The negro laughed grimly.

"Am I!" he retorted. "I tell you this, Master Fischer. She was in Berlin where I was, and she was at the Embassy every day. She was asked to leave there. They

put her over the frontier into Holland. I knew her when she came into the restaurant. She's no society young lady, she ain't! Bet you she was on to the goods."

Fischer hesitated for a moment. The thoughts were chasing one another through his brain. Then he took up the receiver from the telephone instrument which stood upon the table.

"1560 Mayfair," he asked in a low tone.

They all stood listening, grouped around Graham's writhing figure.

"Hullo! Is that Claridge's Hotel?" Fischer went on. "I am speaking from Giro's. Put me through, if you please, to Miss Van Teyl's apartments… What? Repeat that, will you?… Thank you."

Fischer laid down the receiver. He turned towards the others. He was breathing a little quickly, and his eyes glittered behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Miss Van Teyl," he announced, "has left for Tilbury. She is going out on the *Lapland* this morning. My God, she's got the formula!"

There was a moment's silence. Joseph was standing by with a wicked look on his face.

"I saw her slip away," he muttered, "and I watched her come down again. There was just time."

Fischer turned suddenly to where Graham was lying. He drew a sheet of writing paper from the rack upon the table, and a pencil from his pocket. There was an evil and concentrated significance in his tone.

"That formula," he said, "can be written again. I think you had better write it."

"I'll see you damned first!" was the weak but prompt reply.

Fischer bent a little lower over the prostrate figure, "Look here," he went on, "we don't run risks like this for nothing. You're better dead than alive, so far as we are concerned, anyway. We'd planned to take the formula from you, and you can guess the rest. There are cellars underneath here into which no one ever goes

who matters. Now here's a chance of life for you. Write down that formula—truthfully, mind—and we'll discuss the matter of taking your parole."

"See you damned first!" Graham repeated, his voice a little more tremulous but still convincing.

Fischer stood upright and turned to Jules.

"Get a bottle of brandy and a glass," he ordered.

The man pushed open the trap-door and disappeared. He came back again in a few moments, with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. Fischer poured out some of the cordial and drew a small table up to Graham's side.

"There," he said, loosening the cord around his left wrist, "drink that, and think it over. We shall be gone for about ten minutes. If you change your mind before, ring that little hand-bell. If you have not changed your mind when we return, it will be the cellars."

"Beasts!" Graham muttered.

Fischer shrugged his shoulders. For a moment he had straightened himself. His face had softened, but it was in tune with his thoughts.

"I would twist the necks of a million fools like you," he said, "for the sake of—"

He paused, leaving his sentence uncompleted, and beckoned to the other men. They followed him through the trap-door and down into the cellars below. The place was once more silent. Graham rolled from side to side, drew a long breath, and tugged vainly at his bonds. The effort overtaxed his strength. He seemed to feel the darkness closing in upon him, the rushing of the sea in his ears….

CHAPTER V

So far as Sandy Graham was concerned, his unconsciousness might have lasted an hour or a day. As a matter of fact, it was scarcely a minute after the disappearance of Fischer and his confederates when he was conscious of a rush of cold air in the place, and beheld the vision of a tiny flash of light at the lower end of the gloomy building. Immediately afterwards he heard the soft closing of a door and beheld a tall, shadowy figure slowly approaching. He lay quite still and looked at it, and his heart began to beat with hope. One of the lights had been left burning, and there was something in the bearing and attitude of the man who finally came to a standstill by his side, which was entirely reassuring.

"Lutchester!" he faltered. "My God, how did you get here?"

"Offices of a young lady," Lutchester observed, producing a knife from his pocket. "Allow me!"

He cut the cords which still secured Graham's limbs. Then he looked around him.

"How did they bring you here?" he whispered. "I suppose there is a passage from the restaurant?"

"Up through a trapdoor there," Graham explained, pointing.

Lutchester stood over it and listened intently.

Then he turned around, lifted the glass of brandy from the table, smelt it approvingly, and tasted it.

"Excellent!" he pronounced. "The 1840. Allow me!"

He refilled the glass and handed it to Sandy, who gulped down the contents. The effect was almost instantaneous. In less than a minute he had staggered to his feet.

"Feel strong enough to walk about fifty yards?" Lutchester inquired.

"I'd walk to hell to get out of this place!" was the prompt reply.

Lutchester took his arm, and they passed down the dusty aisle between the worm-eaten and decaying benches and through the outside door, which Lutchester closed and locked behind them. The rush of cold air was like new life to Graham.

"I can walk all right now," he muttered. "My God, we'll give these fellows hell for this!"

They made their very difficult way across a plot of ground from which a row of dilapidated cottages had been razed to the ground. The fog still hung around them and seemed to bring with it a curious silence, although the dying traffic from one of the main thoroughfares reached them in muffled notes. Lutchester climbed to the top of a pile of rubbish and then, turning around, held out his hand.

"Up here," he directed.

Graham struggled up until he stood by his companion's side. The latter stood quite still, listening for a moment. Then he climbed a little higher and swung around, holding out his hand once more.

"I'm on top of the wall," he said. "Come on."

Graham's knees were shaking, but with Lutchester's help he staggered up and reached his side. On the pavement below a man in chauffeur's livery was standing, holding out his hands, and by the side of the curbstone a closed car was waiting. Somehow or other the two reached the pavement. Lutchester almost pushed his companion into the limousine and stepped in after him. The chauffeur sprang to his seat and the car glided off. Graham just realised that there was a woman by his side whose face was vaguely familiar. Then the waves broke in upon his ears once more.

"I was right, then, it seems," Pamela observed approvingly. "You were just the man for this little affair."

Lutchester sighed.

"Unfortunately," he confessed, "a messenger boy would have been as effective. I stumbled over to the chapel—rubber shoes, you observe," he remarked, pointing downwards—"and soon discovered that blinds had been let down all round and that there were people inside. There was just a faint chink in one, and I caught a glimpse of several men, your friend Oscar amongst them. Having," he went on, "an immense regard for my personal safety, I was hesitating what means to adopt when the lights were lowered, and it seemed to me that the men were disappearing."

"Do go on," Pamela murmured. "This is most exciting."

"In a sense it was disappointing," Lutchester complained. "I had pictured for myself a dramatic entrance … a quiet turning of the key, a soft approach—owing to my shoes," he reminded her—"a cough, perhaps, or a breath … discovery, me with a revolver in my hand pointed to the arch-villain—'If you stir you're a dead man!' … Natural collapse of the villain. With my left hand I slash the bonds which hold Graham, with my right I cover the miscreants. One of them, perhaps, might creep behind me, and I hesitate. If I move my revolver the other two will get the drop on me—I think that is the correct expression? A wonderful moment, that, Miss Van Teyl!"

"But it didn't happen," she protested.

"Ah! I forgot that," he acknowledged. "Still, I was prepared, I had the revolver all right. But as you say, it didn't happen. I made my way to the chapel door, let myself in, found our friend lying in a half-comatose state upon one of the blue plush Henry sofas, in the shadow of a horrible deal pulpit. I gathered that he had been left there to reflect upon his sins. There was a bottle of remarkably fine brandy within reach, which I tested, and with which I dosed our friend here. I then cut away his bonds, arm in arm we walked down the aisle, I locked up the place, threw the key away, kicked my shins half-a-dozen times crossing that disgusting little plot of land, climbed boldly to the top of the wall, and behold!"

Pamela smiled upon him in congratulatory fashion.

"On the whole," she said, "I am quite glad that I telephoned to you."

"You showed a sound discretion," he admitted.

"If he had not been lame," she confessed, "I should have sent to Captain Holderness."

"That would have been a great mistake," Lutchester assured her. "Holderness is a good fellow but devoid of imagination. He is great on constituted authority. He would have probably marched up with a squad of heavy-footed policemen—and found nothing."

"Yet I must confess," Pamela persisted, with a frankness unaccountable even to herself, "that if I could have thought of any one else I should never have telephoned to you."

"And why not?"

"Because I should not have classified you as being of the adventurous type," she declared.

Lutchester looked injured.

"After all," he protested, "that is not my fault. That is due to your singular lack of perception. However, I am able to return the compliment. I, for my part, should have thought that you were more interested in the fashions than in paying exceedingly rash visits to degenerate orientals and negroes."

"Perhaps some day," she remarked, "we may understand one another better."

He met her gaze with a certain seriousness.

"I hope that we may," he said.

For some reason they were both silent for a moment. Her tone had changed a little when she spoke again.

"You are sure," she asked, "that you do not mind my leaving the rest of this affair in your hands? There are reasons, which I cannot tell you of just now, which make me anxious not to appear in it at all."

"I accept the charge as a privilege," he assented. "We are within a few yards of my rooms now. I promise you that I will look after Captain Graham and advise him as to the proper course for him to pursue."

The car came to a standstill.

"This then," she said, holding out her hand, "will be good-by for the present."

He held her fingers for a moment without reply. Quite suddenly she decided that she liked him. Then he lifted Graham, who was half asleep, half unconscious, to his feet, and assisted him from the car.

"Where shall I tell the man to go to?" he inquired.

"He knows," she answered with sudden taciturnity.

"Wherever it may be, then," he replied, "bon voyage!"

CHAPTER VI

It was about half-an-hour later when Sandy Graham opened his eyes and began to feel the life once more warm in his veins. He was seated in the most comfortable easy-chair of John Lutchester's bachelor sitting-room. By his side was a coffee equipage and a decanter of brandy. His head still throbbed, and his bones ached, but his mind was beginning to grow clearer. Lutchester, who had been seated at the writing table, swung round in his chair at the sound of his guest's movement.

"Feeling better, eh?" he asked.

"I am all right now," was the somewhat shaky reply. "Got a head like a turnip and a tongue like a lime-kiln, but I'm beginning—to feel myself."

"How's your memory?"

"Hazy. Let me see…. My God, I've been robbed, haven't I!"

"So I imagine," Lutchester replied. "You rather asked for it, didn't you?"

Graham moved uneasily in his place. He had suddenly the feeling of being back at school—and in the presence of the headmaster.

"I suppose I did in a way," he admitted, "but at Henry's—why, I've always looked upon the place as a club more than anything else."

"I am afraid that I can't agree with you there," Lutchester observed. "I should consider Henry's a remarkably cosmopolitan restaurant, where a man in your position should exercise more than even ordinary restraint."

"I suppose I was wrong," Graham muttered, "but I had been working for about

ten hours on end, and then rushed up to London in the car to try and keep my appointment with Holderness."

"Stop anywhere on the way?"

"We had a few drinks," Graham confessed. "I was so done up. Perhaps I had more than I meant to. However, it's no use bothering about that now. I've been robbed, and that's all there is about it. Could we get on to Scotland Yard from here?"

"We could, but I don't think we will," Lutchester replied.

Graham was puzzled.

"Why not?" he demanded. "That formula was the most wonderful thing that has ever been put together, and the whole thing's so simple. I've been afraid every second that some one else might stumble upon it."

"It is without doubt a great loss," Lutchester admitted. "All the same, I don't fancy that it's a Scotland Yard business exactly. Have you any idea who robbed you?"

Graham paused to think. His eyes were still troubled and uncertain.

"It's coming back to me," he muttered. "I remember that beastly barn of a chapel. There were Jules, and that musician fellow, and the big American. He emptied my pockets … Why, of course, I remember how angry he was … My pocketbook was gone! They left me alone to write out the formula again, and then you came…. How on earth did you tumble on to my being there, Lutchester?"

"It was Miss Pamela Van Teyl whom you must thank," Lutchester told him, "not me. It seems she knew more about Henry's than any of us. She'd come up against some of the crew in Berlin, and she guessed they were holding you for that formula. She got the key out of one of those men and then telephoned to me for my help."

"And I never even thanked her," Graham murmured weakly.

There was a moment's silence. The recovering man's consciousness of his

position and of events was evidently as yet incomplete. He sat up suddenly in his chair, gripping the sides of it. His eyes were large with reminiscent trouble.

"My pocketbook had gone when they searched me," he muttered.

"Are you sure that you had it with you when you came into Henry's?" Lutchester inquired.

"Absolutely certain."

"Do you think you can remember now what happened when you went upstairs?"

"I reached the lavatory all right—you were with me then, weren't you?" Graham said reflectively. "I hung up my coat while I washed, but there was no one else in the room. Then you went downstairs and I brushed my hair and just stopped to light a cigarette. You know that on the right-hand side of the landing there is a room where the musicians change. Joseph, that black devil, was standing in the doorway. He grinned as I came into sight. 'Lady wants to speak to you for a moment, Captain Graham,' he said. Well, you know how harmless the fellow looks—just a good-natured, smiling nigger. I never dreamed of anything wrong. As a matter of fact, I thought that Peggy Vincent—that's a young lady I often go to Henry's with—wanted to have a word with me before I joined our party. I stepped inside the room, and that's just about all I can remember. It must have been jolly quick. His arm shot round my neck, the door was closed, and that other brute—Hassan, I think it was—held something over my face."

"But that room was searched," Lutchester reminded him.

"Well I came to just a little," Graham explained, "I found that I was in a sort of cupboard place, behind the lockers these fellows have for their clothes. It opens with a spring lock, and you'd never notice it, searching the room."

"Who was the first person you saw when you recovered consciousness?"

Graham's forehead was wrinkled in the effort to remember.

"I can't quite get hold of it," he confessed, "but I have a sort of fancy I can't altogether get rid of that there was a woman about."

Lutchester looked at the end of the cigarette he had just lit.

"A woman?" he repeated. "That's queer."

"I can't remember anything definitely until I woke up in that chapel," Graham continued, "but when they searched me and found that the pocketbook had gone, Fischer, the big American, muttered some woman's name. I was queer just at the moment, but it sounded very much to me like Miss Van Teyl's. He rang her up on the telephone."

"Did they suspect Miss Van Teyl, then, of having taken your pocketbook?"

Graham shook his head.

"I lost the drift of things just then," he admitted. "She couldn't have done, in any case. Forgive me, but aren't we wasting time, Mr. Lutchester? We must do something. Couldn't you ring up Scotland Yard now?"

"I certainly could," Lutchester assented, "but, as I told you just now, I don't think that I will."

Graham stared at him.

"But why not?"

"For certain very definite reasons with which you needn't trouble yourself just now," Lutchester pronounced. "The formula has gone, without a doubt, but it certainly isn't in the hands of any of the people at Henry's."

"But there's that American fellow—Fischer!" Graham exclaimed. "He was the ringleader!"

"Just so," Lutchester murmured thoughtfully. "However, he hasn't got the formula."

"But he planned the attack upon me," Graham protested. "He is an enemy—a German—sheltering himself under his American naturalization. Surely we're going for him?"

"He's a wrong 'un, of course," Lutchester admitted, "but he hasn't got the formula."

"But we must do something!" Graham continued, his anger rising as his strength returned. "Why, the place is a perfect den of conspirators! I expect Ferrani himself is in it, and there's that other maitre d'hotel, Jules, and those black beasts, Joseph and Hassan, besides Fischer. My God, they shall pay for this!"

Lutchester nodded.

"I dare say they will," he admitted, "but not quite in the way you are thinking of."

Graham half rose to his feet.

"Look here," he said, "I'm sane enough now, aren't I, and in my proper senses? You are not going to suggest that we don't turn the police on to that damned place?"

"I certainly am," was the brief reply.

Graham was aghast.

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"Leave them alone for the present. Not one of them has the formula. Not one of them even knows where it is."

"But the attack upon me?"

"You asked for all you got," Lutchester told him curtly, "and perhaps a little more."

The first tinge of colour came back to Graham's cheeks. His eyes flashed with anger.

"Perhaps I did," he admitted, "but that doesn't alter the fact that I'm going to have some of my own back out of them."

Lutchester crossed his legs and turned round in his chair. For the first time he directly faced his visitor. His tone, though not unkindly, was imperative.

"Young fellow," he said, "you'll have to listen to me about this."

A smouldering sense of revolt suddenly found words.

"Listen to you? What the devil have you got to do with it?" Graham demanded.

"I hate to remind any one of an obligation," Lutchester answered, "but I am under the impression that, together with Miss Van Teyl, of course, I rescued you from an exceedingly inconvenient situation."

"I haven't had time yet to tell you how grateful I am," Graham said awkwardly. "You were a brick, of course, and how you and Miss Van Teyl tumbled on to the whole thing I can't imagine. But I don't understand what you're getting at now. You can't suggest that I am to leave these fellows alone and not give information to the police?"

"The character of the place," Lutchester assured him, "is already perfectly well known to the heads of the police. The matter will be dealt with, but not in the way you suggest. And so far as regards Fischer, I do not wish him interfered with for the present."

"You do not wish him interfered with?" Graham repeated. "Where the devil do you come in at all?"

"You can leave me out of the matter for the present. You want the formula back, don't you?"

"My God, yes!" Graham muttered fervently. "It's all very well to give one a pencil and a piece of paper and say 'Write it out,' but there are calculations and proportions—"

"Precisely," Lutchester interrupted. "You want it back again. Why not let Fischer do the business? He has an idea where it's gone. The thing to do seems to me to follow him."

"To follow Fischer?" Graham repeated vaguely.

"Precisely. If he thinks the formula is in England, Fischer will stay in England. If he thinks that it has gone abroad he will go abroad. If we leave him free we can watch which he does."

Graham swallowed half a wineglassful of the brandy by his side. Then he leaned

forward.

"Look here," he said, "you'll forgive me if I repeat myself and ask you once more—what the hell has all this got to do with you?"

"Just this much," Lutchester replied, "that I insist upon your taking the course of action in this matter which I propose."

"You mean," Graham protested, working himself gradually into a state of wrath, "that I am to go back to my rooms as though nothing had happened, see Holderness and the others to-morrow, and not have a word of explanation to offer? That I am to leave those blackguards at Henry's to try their dirty games on some one else, and let Fischer, the man who was fully inclined to become my murderer, go away unharmed? I think not, Mr. Lutchester. I am much obliged for your help, but you are talking piffle."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"I am going round to Scotland Yard myself."

Lutchester rose to his feet.

"Stay where you are for a minute, please," he begged.

He passed into a smaller room, and Graham could hear faintly the sound of the telephone. In a minute or two his host returned.

"Go in there and speak, Graham," he invited. "You will find some one you know at the other end."

Graham did as he was bidden, and Lutchester closed the door after him. For a few minutes the latter sat in his chair, smoking quietly, his eyes fixed upon the fire. Then his unwilling guest reappeared. He came into the room a little unsteadily and looked with new eyes at the man who seemed so unaccountably to have taken over the control of his affairs.

"I don't understand all this," he muttered. "Who the devil are you, anyway, Lutchester?"

"A very ordinary person, I can assure you," was the quiet reply.

"However, you are satisfied, I suppose, that my advice is good?"

"Yes, I am satisfied," Graham answered nervously. "You know that—that I'm under arrest?"

Lutchester nodded.

"Well, you're not asking for my sympathy, I suppose?" he observed drily.

The young man flushed.

"I know that I behaved like a fool," he admitted. "All the same, I've been working night and day for weeks on this problem. I haven't even been up to town once. I must say I think they seem inclined to be a little hard on me."

"No one is going to be in the least hard on you," Lutchester assured him. "You have committed a frightful indiscretion, and all that is asked of you now is to keep your mouth shut. If you do that, I think a way will be found for you out of your troubles."

"But what is to become of me?" Graham demanded.

"I understand that you are to be taken to Northumberland to-morrow," Lutchester informed him. "There you will be allowed every facility for fresh experiments. In the meantime, I have promised to give you a shakedown here for the night. You will find a soldier on guard outside your door, but you can treat him as your servant."

"You are very kind," Graham faltered, a little vaguely. "If only I could understand—"

Lutchester rose to his feet. His manner became more serious, his tone had in it a note of finality.

"Captain Graham," he interrupted, "don't try to understand. I will tell you as much as this, if it helps you. Henry's Restaurant will be placed under the closest surveillance, but we wish nothing disturbed there at the moment until we have discovered the future plans of Mr. Oscar Fischer."

"The big German-American," Graham muttered. "He's the man you ought to get

hold of."

"Some day I hope that we may," Lutchester declared. "For the moment, however, we want him undisturbed. You would scarcely believe it, perhaps, if I told you that the theft of your formulas is only a slight thing compared to the bigger business that man has on hand. There is something else at the back of his head which is worth heaven and earth to us to understand. We want the formula and we shall have it, but more than anything else in the world we want to know why Fischer has pledged his word in Berlin to bring this war to an end within three months. We have to find that out, and we are going to find it out—from him. You see, I have treated you with confidence, Captain Graham. Now let me show you to your room." Graham put his hand to his forehead.

"I feel as though this were some sort of nightmare," he muttered. "I've known you for several months, Mr. Lutchester, and I have never heard you say a serious word. You dance at Henry's; you made a good soldier, they said, but you'd had enough of it in twelve months; you play auction bridge in the afternoons; and you talk about the war as though it were simply an irritating circumstance. And to-night—"

Lutchester threw open the door of his own bedroom and pointed to the bathroom beyond.

"My man has put out everything he thinks you may want," he said. "Try and get a good night's sleep. And, Graham."

"Yes?"

"Don't bother your head about me, and don't ask any more questions."

CHAPTER VII

The *Lapland* was two days out from Tilbury before Pamela appeared on deck, followed by her maid with an armful of cushions, and the deck steward with her rugs. She had scarcely made herself comfortable in a sunny corner when she was aware of the approach of a large, familiar figure. Her astonishment was entirely genuine.

"Mr. Fischer!" she exclaimed. "Why, how on earth did you catch this steamer? I thought you were coming on the Thursday boat?"

"Some inducement to change my mind," Mr. Fischer replied, drawing a chair up to her side.

"Meaning me?"

"I guess that's so!"

"Of course, I'm exceedingly flattered," Pamela observed, "or rather I should be if I believed you, but I don't see how you could leave a supper-party at Henry's and go straight to Tilbury."

"Say, how did you know I was supping at Henry's?" he inquired.

"Because I was there for luncheon myself, as you know," she answered carelessly, "and I heard you order your table for supper."

Mr. Fischer nodded reminiscently.

"I always wind up with a little supper at Henry's, on my last night in London," he remarked. "It left me two hours to get down to Tilbury, but it don't take me long to start for anywhere when I once make up my mind. That's the American of us,

I suppose. Besides, I never need much in the way of luggage. I keep clothes over on the other side and clothes in New York, and a grip always ready packed for a journey."

"You're so typical," she murmured, smiling.

"I don't know about that," he replied. "My business makes it necessary for me to be always on the go. Have you heard from your brother lately?"

Pamela shook her head.

"Jimmy is the most terrible correspondent," she complained. "I don't think I've had any mail from him for two months."

"You didn't know that he and I were sharing rooms together, then, in the Plaza Hotel, I suppose?"

Pamela turned her head a little and gazed at her companion in genuine surprise.

"Sharing rooms in the Plaza Hotel?" she repeated…. "You and Jimmy?"

"I guess that's so," Mr. Fischer assented. "We were doing business together one day, and the subject cropped up somehow or other. Your brother was thinking of making a move, and I'd just been shown these rooms, which were a trifle on the large side for me. I made him an offer and he jumped at it."

"I hope you're not leading James into extravagant ways," she remarked anxiously. "I loved his little apartment in Forty-Second Street and it was so inexpensive."

"Your brother's share of these rooms isn't anything more than he can afford," Mr. Fischer assured her. "That I can promise you. I guess his firm is doing well just now. If they've many more clients like me they are."

"It is very nice of you to put business in his way," Pamela said thoughtfully. "I wonder why you do it, Mr. Fischer?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Well," Pamela went on, her eyes travelling out seaward for a moment, "you

seem to be one of those sort of men, Mr. Fischer, who never do anything without an object."

"*Some* powers of observation," he admitted blithely.

"You have an object in being kind to Jimmy, then?"

Mr. Fischer produced a cigar case and selected a cheroot.

"Mind my smoking?"

"Not in the least. The only time I mind things is when people don't answer my questions."

"I was only kind of hesitating," Mr. Fischer went on, leaning back once more in his chair. "You want the truth, don't you?"

"I never think anything else is worth while."

"In the first place, then," her companion began, "your brother belongs to what I suppose is known as the exclusive set in New York. I am a Westerner with few friends there. Through him I have obtained introductions to several people whom it was interesting to me, from a business point of view, to know."

"I see," Pamela murmured. "You are at least frank, Mr. Fischer."

"I am going to be more frank still," he promised her. "Then another reason, of course, was because I liked him, and a third, which I am not sure wasn't the chief of all, because he was your brother."

Pamela laughed gaily.

"Is that necessary?"

"Necessary or not, it's the truth," he assured her. "I am a man of quick impressions and lasting ones."

"But we've never met except on a steamer," Pamela reminded him.

"I know it's the fashion," Mr. Fischer said, "to turn up one's nose at steamer acquaintances. It isn't like that with me. You see, I don't have as much

opportunity of meeting folk as some others, perhaps. The most interesting people I've known socially I've met on steamers. I sat at your table, side by side with you, Miss Van Teyl, for seven days a few months ago. I guess I'll remember those seven days as long as I live."

Pamela turned her head and looked at him. The faintly derisive smile died away from her lips. The man was in earnest. A certain curiosity stole into her eyes as the seconds passed. She studied his hard, strong face, with its great jaw and prominent forehead; the mouth, a little too full, and belying the rest of his physiognomy, yet with its own peculiar strength. He had taken off his spectacles, and it seemed to her that the cold, flinty light of his eyes had caught for a moment some touch of the softer blue of the sea or the sky. Seated, he lost some of the awkwardness of his too great and ill-carried height. It seemed to her that he was at least a person to be reckoned with, either in friendship or enmity.

"Are you an American born, Mr. Fischer," she asked him.

He shook his head.

"I was born at Offenbach," he told her, "near Frankfurt. My father brought me out to America when I was eleven years old."

"You must find the present condition of things a little trying for you," she observed.

Oscar Fischer put on his glasses again. He did not answer for several moments.

"That opens up a subject, Miss Van Teyl," he said, "which some day I should like to discuss with you."

"Why not now?" she invited. "I feel much more inclined for conversation than reading."

"Tell me, then, to begin with," he asked thoughtfully, "on which side are your sympathies?"

"I try to do my duty as an American citizen," she replied promptly, "and that is to have no sympathies. Our dear country has set the world an example of what neutrality should be. I think it is the duty of us Americans to try and bring ourselves into exactly the same line of feeling."

He changed his position a little uneasily. His attitude became less of a sprawl. His eyes were fixed upon her face.

"I fear," he said, "that we are going to begin by a disagreement. I do not consider that America has realised in the least the duties of a neutral nation."

"You must explain that at once, if you please, before we go any further," Pamela insisted.

"Is this neutrality?" Fischer demanded, his rather harsh voice almost raucous now with a touch of real feeling. "America ships daily millions of dollars' worth of those things that make war possible, to France, to Italy, above all to England. She keeps them supplied with ammunition, clothing, scientific instruments, food —a dozen things which make war easier. To Germany she sends nothing. Is that neutrality?"

"But America is perfectly willing to deal in the same way with Germany," Pamela pointed out. "German agents can come and place their orders and take away whatever they want. The market is as much open to her as to the Allies."

Fischer was sitting bolt upright in his chair now. There was a little spot of colour in his cheeks and his eyes flashed behind his spectacles. He struck the side of the chair. He was very angry.

"That is Jesuitical," he declared. "It is perfectly well-known that Germany is not in a position to fetch munitions from America. Therefore, I say that there is no neutrality in supplying one side in the war with goods which the other is unable to procure."

"Then you place upon America the onus of Germany's naval inferiority," Pamela remarked drily.

"Germany's maritime inferiority does not exist," Mr. Fischer protested. "When the moment arrives that the High Seas fleet comes out for action the world will know the truth."

"Then hadn't it better come," Pamela suggested, "and clear the ocean for your commerce?"

"That isn't the point," Fischer insisted. "We have wandered from the main issue.

I say that America abandons its neutrality when it helps the Allies to continue the war."

"I don't think you will find," Pamela replied, "that international law prevents any neutral country from supplying either combatant with munitions. If one country can fetch the things and the other can't, that is the misfortune of the country that can't. For one moment look at the matter from England's point of view. She has built up a mighty navy to keep the seas clear for exactly this purpose—to continue her commerce from abroad. Germany instead has built up a mighty army, with which she has overrun Europe. Germany has had the advantage from her army. Why shouldn't England have the advantage from her navy?"

"Let me ask you the question you asked me a few minutes ago," her companion begged. "Were you born in America—or England?"

"I was born in America," Pamela told him; "so were my parents and my grandparents. I claim to be American to the backbone. I claim even to treat any sympathies I might have in this affair as prejudices, and not even to allow them a single corner in my brain."

Mr. Fischer sat quite still for several moments. He was struggling very hard to keep his temper. In the end he succeeded.

"We will not, then, pursue the subject of America's neutrality," he said, "because it is obvious that we disagree fundamentally. But tell me this, now, as an American and a patriot. Which do you think would be better for America—That Germany and Austria won this war, or the Allies?"

"Upon that question I have not altogether made up my mind," Pamela confessed.

"Then there is room there for a discussion," Mr. Fischer pointed out eagerly. "I should like to put my views before you on this matter."

"And I should love to hear them," Pamela replied, "but I feel just now as though we had talked enough politics. Do you know that I came up on deck in a state of great agitation?"

"Submarine alarms from the stewardess?" Mr. Fischer suggested.

"I am not afraid of submarines, but I have a most profound dislike for thieves,"

Pamela declared.

"You have not had anything stolen?" he asked quickly.

"I have not," Pamela replied, "but the only reason seems to be that I have nothing worth stealing. When I got back from luncheon this afternoon I found that my stateroom had been systematically searched."

She turned her head a little lazily and looked at her neighbour. His expression was entirely sympathetic.

"Your jewellery?"

"Deposited with the purser."

"I congratulate you," he said.

"Nothing has been stolen," she observed, "but one hates the feeling of insecurity, all the same. Both my steward and stewardess are old friends. It must have been a very clever person who found his way into my room."

"A very clever person," Mr. Fischer objected, "would have known that you had deposited your jewels with the purser."

"If it was my jewels of which they were in search," Pamela murmured. "By the bye, do you remember all that fuss about the disappearance of a young soldier that morning at Henry's?"

Fischer nodded.

"I heard something about it," he confessed. "They were talking about it at dinner-time."

"I had an idea that you might be interested," Pamela went on. "He was rather a foolish young man. He came into the restaurant telling every one at the top of his voice that he had made a great discovery! Even in London, which is, I should think, the most prosaic city in the world, there must be people who are on the lookout to pick up war secrets."

"Even in London, as you remark," Fischer assented.

"You didn't hear the end of the affair, I suppose?" she asked him.

The steward had arrived with afternoon tea. Fischer threw into the sea the cigar which he had been smoking.

"I do not think," he said, "that the end has been reached yet."

Pamela sighed.

"Les oreilles ennemies!" she quoted. "I suppose one has to be careful everywhere."

CHAPTER VIII

It was one evening towards the end of the voyage, and about an hour after dinner. A huge form loomed out of the darkness, continuing its steady promenade along the unlit portion of the deck. Pamela, moved by some caprice, abandoned her caution of the last few days and called out.

"Mr. Fischer!"

He stopped short. The sparks flew from the red end of his cigar, which he tossed into the sea. He hastened towards her.

"Miss Van Teyl?" he replied, a little hesitatingly.

"How clever of you to know my voice!" she observed. "I am in the humour to talk. Will you sit down, please?"

Mr. Fischer humbly drew a chair to her side.

"I had an idea," he said, "that you had been avoiding me the last two or three days."

"I have," she admitted.

"Have I offended you, then?"

"Scarcely that," she replied, "only, you see, it seemed waste of time to talk to you with the foils on, and a little dangerous, perhaps, to talk to you with them off."

His face reflected his admiration.

"Miss Van Teyl," he declared, "you are quite a wonderful person. I have never believed very much in women before. Perhaps that is the reason why I have

never married."

"Dear me, are you a woman-hater?" she asked.

He looked at her steadfastly.

"I have made use of women as playthings," he confessed. "Until I met you I never thought of them as companions, as partners."

She laughed at him through the darkness, and at the sound of her laugh his eyes glowed.

"Really, I am very much flattered," she said. "You give me credit for intelligence, then?"

"I give you credit for every gift a woman should have," he answered enthusiastically. "I recognise in you the woman I have sometimes dreamed of."

Again she laughed.

"Don't tell me, Mr. Fischer," she protested, "that ever in your practical life you have spent a single moment in dreams?"

"I have spent many," he assured her, "but they have all been since I knew you."

Pamela sighed.

"I have never been through a voyage," she observed, "without a love affair. Still, I never suspected you, Mr. Fischer."

"You suspected me, perhaps, of other things."

She nodded.

"I am full of suspicions about you," she admitted. "I am not going to tell you what they are, of course."

"There is one thing of which I am guilty," he confessed. "I should like to tell you about it right now."

"Could I guess it?"

"You're clever enough."

"You like me, don't you, Mr. Fischer?"

"Better than any woman in the world," he answered promptly. "And my confession is—well, just that. Will you marry me?"

Pamela shook her head.

"Quite early in life," she confided, "I made up my mind that I would never give a definite answer to any one who proposed to me on a steamer. I suppose it's the wind, or is it the stars, or the silence, or what? I have known the sanest of men, even like you, Mr. Fischer, become quite maudlin."

"I am brimful of common sense at the present moment," he declared earnestly. "You and I could do great things together, if only I could get you to look at one certain matter from my point of view; to see it as I see it."

"A political matter?" she inquired naively.

"I want to try and persuade you," he confessed, "that America has everything in the world to gain from Germany's success, and everything to lose if the Allies should triumph in this war and Great Britain should continue her tyranny of the seas."

"It's an extraordinarily interesting subject," Pamela admitted.

"It is almost as absorbing," he declared, "as the other matter which just now lies even nearer to my heart."

She withdrew her fingers from his sudden clutch.

"Mr. Fischer," she told him, "what I said just now was quite final. I will not be made love to on a steamer."

"When we land," he continued eagerly, "you will be coming to see your brother, won't you?"

She nodded.

"Of course! I am coming to the Plaza Hotel. That, I suppose, is good news for you, Mr. Fischer."

"Of course it is," he answered, "but why do you say so?"

"It will give you so many opportunities," she murmured.

"Of seeing you?"

She shook her head.

"Of searching my belongings."

There was a moment's silence. She heard his quick breath through the darkness. His voice assumed its harsher tone.

"You believe that it was I who searched your stateroom?"

"I am sure that it was you, or some one acting for you."

"What is it, then, of which I am in search?" he demanded.

"Captain Graham's formula," she replied. "I think you want that a good deal more than you want me."

"You have it then?" he asked fiercely.

She sighed.

"You jump so to conclusions. I didn't say so."

"You went up the stairs … you were the only person who went up just at that one psychological moment! He had his pocketbook with him when he came in—he told Holderness so."

"And when you searched him it was gone," she remarked calmly. "Dear me!"

"How do you know that I searched him?" Fischer demanded.

"How dare you ask me to give away my secrets?" she replied.

"Listen," he began, striving with an almost painful effort to keep his voice down to the level of a whisper, "you and I together, we could do the most marvellous things. I could let you into all my schemes. They are great. They will be successful. After the war is over—"

He held his breath for a moment. The tramp of approaching footsteps warned him of the coming of an intruder. The Captain came to a standstill before their chairs and saluted.

"Miss Van Teyl," he said, "there will be a mutiny in the saloon if you don't come down and sing."

She almost sprang to her feet. The ship was rolling a little, and she laid her fingers upon his arm.

"I meant to come long ago," she declared, "but Mr. Fischer has been so interesting. You will finish telling me your experiences another time, won't you?" she called out over her shoulder. "There is so much that I still want to hear."

Fischer's reply was almost ungracious. He watched their departure in silence, and afterwards leaned further back in his chair. With long, nervous fingers he drew a black cigar from his case and lit it. Then he folded his arms. For more than half an hour he sat there motionless, smoking furiously. He looked out into the chaos of the windy darkness, he heard voices riding upon the seas, shrieking and calling to him, voices to which he had been deaf too long. The burden of these later years of turbulent, brazen, selfish struggling, rolled back. He had been a sentimentalist once, a willing seeker after things which seemed to have passed him by. At his age, he told himself, a man should still find more than one place in the world.

CHAPTER IX

James Van Teyl glanced curiously at the small, dark figure standing patiently before him, and then back again at the wireless cable which he held in his fingers. He was just back from a tiring day in Wall Street, and was reclining in the most comfortable easy-chair of his Hotel Plaza sitting-room.

"Gee!" he murmured. "This beats me. The last thing I should have thought we wanted here was a valet. The fellow who looks after this suite has scarcely anything else to do. What did you say your name was?"

"Nikasti, sir."

Van Teyl carefully reconsidered the cable. It certainly seemed to leave no room for misunderstanding.

Please engage for our service, as valet, Nikasti. See that he enters on his duties at once. Hope land this evening. Your sister on board sends love.—F.

"Well that seems clear enough," the young man muttered, thrusting the form into his waistcoat pocket. "You're here to stay, I guess, Nikasti? I see you've brought your kit along."

"In case you decided to engage me, sir," the man replied.

"Oh, you are engaged right enough," Van Teyl assured him. "You'd better make the best job you can of putting out my evening clothes. If you ring for the floor valet, he'll help you. The bedrooms are through that door."

"Very good, sir!"

"I am going down to the barber's now," Van Teyl continued, rising to his feet.

"Just remember this, Nikasti—what a name, by the bye!"

"I could be called Kato," the man suggested.

"Kato for me all the time," his prospective employer agreed. "Well, listen. My sister, Miss Van Teyl, arrives from Europe on the *Lapland* this evening. If she comes in or rings up, say I'm here and I want to see her at once. You understand?"

"I understand, sir."

Van Teyl strolled out, and Kato disappeared into the inner room. The floor valet, dressed in the dark blue livery of the hotel, was already laying out his master's dinner clothes. He eyed the intruder a little truculently.

"Who are you, anyway?" he inquired.

"My name is Nikasti," was the quiet reply. "Mr. Van Teyl has engaged me as his valet, to wait upon him and Mr. Fischer."

The man laid down the shirt into which he was fixing the studs.

"That's some news," he remarked bitterly.

"To wait on Mr. Van Teyl and Mr. Fischer, eh? What the hell do they want you for?"

Nikasti shook his head slowly. He was very small, and his dark eyes seemed filled with melancholy.

"It is not for a very long time," he ventured.

"Long enough to do me out of my five dollars' tip every week," the man grumbled. "I'm a married man, too, and a good American. Blast you fellows, coming and taking our jobs away! Can't think what they let you into the country for."

"I am sorry," Nikasti murmured.

"Your sorrow don't bring me in my five dollars," the valet retorted bitterly.

"There's only two suites on this floor to work for, anyway, and this is the only one worth a cent."

"I am taking the situation," the other explained, "for the sake of experience. I do not wish to rob you of your earnings. I will pay you the five dollars a week while I stay here. You shall help me with the work."

"That's a deal, my little yellow-skinned kid," the valet agreed in a tone of relief. "I'll show you where the things are kept."

His new coadjutor bowed.

"The telephone is ringing in the master's room," he observed. "You shall remain here, and I will answer it."

"That goes, Jappy," the man acquiesced. "If it's a young lady take her name, but don't say that Mr. Van Teyl's about. Forward young baggages some of them are."

Nikasti glided from the room, closed the door, and approached the telephone receiver.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "these are the rooms of Mr. Van Teyl… No, madam, Mr. Van Teyl is not in at present."

There was a moment's pause. Nikasti's face was impenetrable as he listened, but his eyes glowed.

"Yes, I understand, madam," he said softly. "You are Miss Van Teyl, and you wish to speak to your brother. The moment Mr. Van Teyl returns I will ring you up or fetch you."

He replaced the receiver upon its hook, and returned to the bedroom. For some little time he was initiated into the mysteries of his new master's studs, boots and shoes, and general taste in wearing apparel. Then the latter entered the sitting-room, and Nikasti obeyed his summons.

"Anyone called me up?" he inquired.

"No one, sir."

Van Teyl glanced at the clock in an undecided manner.

"I'll change right away," he decided. "Just set things to rights in here, fill my cigarette case, and hang round by the telephone."

Nikasti bowed, and the young man disappeared into the inner room. His new attendant waited until the door was closed. Then he removed the receiver from its hook, laid it upon the table, and moved stealthily towards the open fireplace. For several moments he remained in an attitude of listening, then with quick, lithe fingers he drew from his pocket a cable dispatch, reread it with an air of complete absorption, and committed it to the flames. He watched it burn, and turned away from the contemplation of its grey ashes with a sigh of content. Suddenly he started. The door of the sitting-room had been opened and closed. A tall, broad-shouldered man, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, a long travelling coat and a Homburg hat, was standing watching him. Nikasti was only momentarily disturbed. His look of gentle inquiry was perfect.

"You wish to see my master—Mr. Van Teyl?" he asked.

"Where is he?" Fischer demanded.

"He is dressing in the next apartment. I will take him your name."

Fischer threw his coat and hat upon the table.

"That'll do directly," he replied. "So you're Nikasti?"

They looked at one another for a moment. The face of the Japanese was smooth, bland, and imperturbable. His eyes were innocent even of any question. Fischer's forehead was wrinkled, and his brows drawn close together.

"I am Nikasti," the other acknowledged—"Kato Nikasti. Mr. Van Teyl has just engaged me as his valet."

"You can take off the gloves," Fischer told him. "I am Oscar Fischer."

"Oscar Fischer," Nikasti repeated.

"Yes! … Burning something when I came in weren't you? Looked like a cable, eh?"

"A dispatch from London," Nikasti confided.

"Nothing that would interest me, eh?"

"It was a family message," was the calm response. "It did not concern the affair which is between us."

"How came you to speak English like this?" Fischer inquired.

"I was at Oxford University for two years," Nikasti told him, "and in the Embassy at London for five more."

"Before you took up your present job, eh?"

Nikasti assented silently. Fischer glanced around as though to make sure that they were still alone.

"I have the communication with me," he announced, "which we are to discuss. The terms of our proposal are clearly set out, and they are signed by the Highest of all himself. The letter embodying them was handed to me three weeks ago to-day in Berlin. Have you been to Washington?"

Nikasti shook his head.

"I do not go to Washington," he said. "You will understand that diplomatically, as you would put it, I do not exist. Neither is it necessary. I am here to listen."

Fischer nodded.

"There need be very little delay, then," he observed, "before we get to work."

Nikasti bowed and raised his forefinger in warning.

"I think," he whispered, "that Mr. Van Teyl has finished dressing."

CHAPTER X

Van Teyl, as he hastened forward to meet his friend, presented at first sight a very good type of the well-groomed, athletic young American. He was over six feet tall, with smooth, dark hair brushed back from his forehead, a strong, clean-shaven face and good features. Only, as he drew nearer, there was evident a slight, unnatural quivering at the corner of his lips. The cordiality of his greeting, too, was a little overdone.

"Welcome home, Fischer! Why, man, you're looking fine. Had a pleasant voyage?"

"Storms for the first few days—after that all right," Fischer replied.

"Any submarines?"

"Not a sight of one. Seen your sister yet?"

"Not yet. I've been waiting about for a telephone message. She hadn't arrived, a few minutes ago."

Fischer frowned.

"I want us three to meet—you and she and I—the first moment she sets foot in the hotel," he declared.

"What's the hurry?" Van Teyl demanded. "You must have seen plenty of her the last ten days."

"That," Fischer insisted, "was a different matter. See here, Jimmy,
I'll be frank with you."

He walked to the door of the bedroom, opened it, and looked inside. Its sole

occupant was Nikasti, who was at the far end, putting away some clothes. Fischer closed the door firmly and returned.

"I want you to understand this, James," he began. "Your sister is meddling in certain things she'd best leave alone."

Van Teyl lit a cigarette.

"No use talking to me," he observed. "Pamela's her own mistress, and she's gone her own way ever since she came of age."

"She's got to quit," Fischer pronounced. "That's all there is about it. You and I will have to talk this out. Where are you dining?"

"Downstairs," Van Teyl replied gloomily. "I was thinking of waiting for Pamela."

"You leave word to have your people let you know directly she arrives," Fischer advised, "and come along with me."

Van Teyl allowed himself to be led towards the door. Nikasti, with a due sense of his new duties, glided past them, rang for the lift, and watched them descend. Fischer turned at once towards the dining room.

"Thank God we're in a civilised country," he observed, "and that I don't have to change when I don't want to!"

They found a quiet table, and Fischer, displaying much interest in the menu, ordered a somewhat extensive dinner.

"Grapefruit and Maryland chicken are worth coming back to," he declared. "Now see here, James, let's get to business. You've got to help me with your sister."

"But how?" Van Teyl demanded. "Pamela and I are good pals, of course, but she has a will of her own in all she does, and I don't fancy that anything I could say would influence her very much."

"There are two things about your sister," Fischer continued. "The first is that she's got to quit this secret service business she's got herself mixed up in."

"Don't talk nonsense!" Van Teyl exclaimed. "Pamela doesn't care a fig about politics."

Fischer grunted scornfully.

"You don't know much about your sister, young fellow," he said. "Internal politics over here may not interest her a cent, but she's crazy about America as a country, and she's shrewd enough to see things coming that a great many of you over here aren't looking for. Anyway, she came bang up against me in a little scheme I had on the night before I left Europe, and somewhere about her she's got concealed a document which I'd gladly buy for a quarter of a million dollars."

Van Teyl drank off his second cocktail.

"Some money!" he observed. "How did she come by the prize?"

"Played up for it, just as I did," Fischer replied. "She was clever enough to make use of my scaffolding, and got up the ladder first. I'm not squealing, but I've got to have that document, whatever it costs me."

Van Teyl was silent for a moment. There was an undercurrent of something threatening in his companion's manner, of which he had taken note.

"And the second thing you mentioned?" he asked. "What is that?"

Fischer, as though to give due emphasis to his statement, indulged in a brief pause. Then he leaned a little forward and spoke very slowly and very forcibly.

"I want to marry her," he declared.

Van Teyl learned back in his chair and gazed at his vis-a-vis in blank astonishment.

"You must be a damned fool, Fischer!" he exclaimed.

"You think so?" was the unruffled reply. "I wonder why?"

"I'll tell you why, if you want to know," Van Teyl continued bluntly. "I know of four of the richest and best-looking young men in America, two ambassadors, an

English peer, and an Italian prince, who have proposed to Pamela during the last twelve months alone. She refused every one of them."

"Well," Fischer remarked, "she must marry some time."

Van Teyl looked at him insolently.

"I shouldn't think you'd have a dog's chance," he pronounced.

There was a little glitter behind Fischer's spectacles.

"Up till now," he admitted smoothly, "I have not been fortunate. I must confess, however, that I was hoping for your good offices."

"Pamela wouldn't take the slightest notice of anything I might say,"
Van Teyl declared. "Besides, I should hate you to marry her."

"A little blunt, are you not, my young friend?" Fischer remarked amiably. "Still, to continue, there is also the matter of that document. I must confess that I exercised all my ingenuity to obtain possession of it on the steamer."

"You would!" Van Teyl muttered.

"Your sister, however," Fischer continued, "was wise enough to have it locked up in the purser's safe the moment she set foot upon the steamer. She gave me the slip when she got it back, and eluded me, somehow, on the quay. She will scarcely have had time to part with it yet, though. When she arrives here to-night, it will in all probability be in her possession."

"Well?" Van Teyl demanded. "You don't suggest that I should rob her of it, I suppose?"

"Not at all," Fischer replied. "On the other hand, you might very well induce her to give it up voluntarily, or at least to treat with me."

"You don't know Pamela," was Van Teyl's curt reply.

"I know her sufficiently," Fischer went on, leaning over the table, "to believe that she would sacrifice a great deal to save her brother from Sing Sing."

Van Teyl took the thrust badly. He started as though he had been stabbed, and his face became almost ghastly in its pallor. He tossed off a glass of wine hastily.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked thickly.

"Are you prepared," Fischer continued, "to have me visit your office to-morrow morning and examine my accounts and securities in the presence of your partners?"

"Why not?" Van Teyl faltered. "What the hell do you mean?"

"I mean, James Van Teyl," his companion declared, "that I should find you a matter of a hundred thousand dollars short. I mean that you've realised on some of my securities, gambled on your own account with the proceeds, and lost. You did this as regards one stock at least, with a forged transfer, which I hold."

Van Teyl looked almost piteously around. Life seemed suddenly to have become an unreal thing—the crowds of well-dressed diners, the gentle splashing of the water from the fountains in the winter garden, the distant murmuring of music from behind the canopy of palms. So this was the end of it! All that week he had hoped against hope. He had been told of a sure thing. Next week he had meant to have a great gamble. Everything was to have gone his way, after all. And now it was too late. Fischer knew, and Fischer was a cruel man!…

The unnatural silence came to an end. Only Fischer's voice seemed to come from a long way off.

"Drink your wine, James Van Teyl," he advised, "and listen to me. You've been under obligations to me from the start. I meant you to be. I brought a great business to your firm, and I insisted upon having you interested. I had a motive, as I have for most things I do. You are well placed socially in New York, and I am not. You are also above suspicion, which I am not. It suited me to take this suite in the Plaza, nominally in our joint names, but to pay the whole account myself. It suited me because I required the shelter of your social position. You understand?"

"I always understand," Van Teyl muttered.

"Just so. Only, whereas you simply thought me a snob, I had in reality a different and very definite purpose. We come now, however, to your present obligation to

me. I can, if I choose, tear up your forged transfer, submit to the loss of my money, and leave you secure. I shall do so if you are able to induce your sister to hand over to me those few lines of writing—to which, believe me, she has no earthly right—and to accept me as a prospective suitor."

Van Teyl was drinking steadily now, but every mouthful of food seemed almost to choke him. Red-eyed and defiant, he faced his torturer.

"You're talking rot!" he declared. "Pamela wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth, and if she's got anything she wants to keep, she'll keep it."

"And see her brother disgraced," Fischer reminded him, "tried at the Criminal Court for theft and sent to Sing Sing? It's a good name in New York, yours, you know. The Van Teyls have held up their heads high for more than one generation. Your sister will not fancy seeing it dragged down into the mire."

For a single moment the young man seemed about to throw himself upon his companion, Fischer, perfectly unmoved, watched him, nevertheless, like a cat.

"Better sit tight," he enjoined. "Drop it now or people will be watching us. I have ordered some of the old brandy. A liqueur or two will steady you, perhaps. Afterwards we will go upstairs and take your sister into our confidence."

Van Teyl nodded.

"Very well," he agreed hoarsely. "We'll hear what Pamela has to say."

CHAPTER XI

Nikasti, with a low bow, watched the disappearance of the lift into which his two new masters, James Van Teyl and Oscar Fischer, had stepped. He waited until the indicator registered its safe arrival on the ground floor. Then he slowly retraced his steps along the corridor, entered the sitting-room, and took up the telephone receiver, which was still lying upon the table.

"Will you give me number 77," he asked—"Miss Van Teyl's suite?"

There was a moment's silence—then a voice at the other end to which he made obeisance.

"It is Miss Van Teyl who speaks? I am Mr. Van Teyl's valet. Mr. Van Teyl is here now and will be glad if you will come in."

He replaced the receiver, listened and waited. In a few moments there was the sound of a light footstep outside. The door was opened and Pamela entered. She was still wearing the grey tailor-made costume in which she had left the steamer.

"Why, where is Mr. Van Teyl?" she asked, looking around the room. "I have been ringing up for the last ten minutes and couldn't get any answer. I did not realise that it was the next suite."

"Mr. Van Teyl is close at hand, madam," Nikasti replied. "If you will kindly be seated, I will fetch him."

"How long have you been valet here?" Pamela asked curiously.

"For a few hours only, madam," was the grave reply. "If you will be so good as to wait."

He bowed low and left the room. Pamela took up an evening paper and for a few minutes buried herself in its contents. Then suddenly she held it away from her and listened. A queer and unaccountable impulse inspired her with a certain mistrust. There was no sound of movement in the adjoining bedchamber, nor any sign of her brother's presence. She opened the door and peered in. It was empty and in darkness. Then, moved by that same unaccountable impulse, she crossed the room and listened at the door which led into her own suite, and which she perceived was bolted on this side as well as her own. She listened at first idly, afterwards breathlessly. In a few moments she was convinced that her senses were not playing her false. Some one was moving stealthily about in her room, the key to which was even at that moment in her hand. She hastened to the door, to be confronted by another surprise. The handle turned but the door refused to open. She was locked in.

Pamela was both generous and insistent in the matter of bells. She found four, and she rang them all together. The consequences were speedy, and in their way satisfactory. Nikasti himself, a breathless chambermaid, a hurt but dignified waiter, and the floor valet, who had not even stopped to put on his coat, entered together. They seemed a little stupefied at finding Pamela alone and no sign of any disturbance.

"Why was I locked in here?" Pamela demanded indignantly, taking them en bloc.

There was a little chorus of non-comprehension. Nikasti stepped forward, waved to the others to be silent, and bowed almost to the ground.

"It was a mistake easily to be understood, madam," he explained. "The handle is a little stiff, perhaps, but the door was not locked. We all reached here together, I myself barely a yard in advance. No key was used—and behold!"

Pamela was disposed to argue, but a moment's reflection induced her to change her mind. This falsehood of Nikasti's was at least interesting. She waved the hotel servants away.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," she said. "I will remember it when I pay my bill."

They took their leave, Nikasti showing them out. When the last had departed, he turned back to the centre table, from the other side of which Pamela was watching him curiously.

"I cannot imagine," she remarked, "how I could have made such a mistake about the door. I tried it twice or three times and it certainly seemed to me to be locked."

Nikasti moved a step nearer towards her. Something of the servility of his manner had gone. For the first time she looked at him closely, appreciated the tense immobility of his features, the still, penetrating light of his cold eyes. A queer premonition of trouble for a moment unsteadied her.

"There was no mistake," he said softly. "The door was locked."

Even then she did not fully understand the position. She leaned a little towards him.

"It was locked?" she repeated.

"I locked it," he told her. "It is locked now, securely. I have been searching in your room for something which I did not find. I think that you had better give it to me. It will save trouble."

"Are you mad?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Do I seem so?" he replied. "There is no person more sane than I. I require from you the formula of the new explosive, which you stole in Henry's restaurant eleven days ago."

The sense of mystery passed. It was simply trouble of the ordinary sort from an unexpected source.

"Dear me!" she murmured. "Every one seems interested in my little adventure. How did you hear about it?"

"I destroyed the cable telling me of all that happened only a few minutes ago," he explained. "It was the foolish talk of the young inventor which gave his secret to the world to scramble for."

"It was very clever of your informant," she remarked, "to suggest that I was the fortunate thief. Why not Oscar Fischer? It was his plot, not mine."

The eyes of the little Japanese seemed suddenly to narrow. He realised quite well

that she was talking simply to gain time.

"Madam," he insisted, "the formula. It is for my country, and for my country I would risk much."

"I do not doubt it," she replied; "but if I hold it, I hold it for my country, too, and there is nothing you would risk for Japan from which I should shrink for America."

He laid his hands upon the table. She turned her ring and clenched her hand. She could see his spring coming, realised in those few seconds that here was an opponent of more desperate and subtle calibre than Joseph. Whether her wits might have failed her, fate remained her friend. There was a knock at the door.

"You hear?" she cried breathlessly. "There is some one there. Shall I call out?"

His hands and knee were gone from the table. He was once more his old self, so completely the servant that for a moment even Pamela was puzzled. It seemed as though the events of the last few seconds might have been part of a disordered dream. Nikasti played to the cue of her fevered question and entirely ignored them. He opened the door with a respectful flourish—and John Lutchester walked in.

CHAPTER XII

Pamela's first shock of surprise did not readily pass. In the first place, John Lutchester's appearance in America at all was entirely unexpected. In the second, by what possible means could he have arrived at this precise and psychological moment?

"You!" she exclaimed, a little helplessly. "Mr. Lutchester!"

He smiled as he shook hands. Nikasti had slipped noiselessly from the room. Pamela made no effort to detain him. She had a curious feeling that the things which had passed between them concerned their two selves only. So had no desire whatever to hand him over to retributive justice.

"You are surprised," he observed. "So far as my presence here is concerned, I knew quite well that I was coming some time ago, but it was one of those matters, you understand, Miss Van Teyl, that one is scarcely at liberty to talk about. I am here in connection with my work."

"Your work," she repeated weakly. "I thought that you were in the Ministry of Munitions?"

"Precisely," he admitted. "I have a travelling inspectorship. You see, I don't mind telling you this, but it is just as well, if you will forgive my mentioning it, Miss Van Teyl, that these things are not spoken of to any one. My business over here is supposed to be secret. I am going round some of the factories from which we are drawing supplies."

She drew a long breath and began to feel a little more like herself.

"Well, after this," she declared, "I shall be surprised at nothing. I have had one shock already this evening, and you are the second."

"The first, I trust, was not disagreeable?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Without flattering you," she answered, "I think I could say that I prefer the second."

"I had an idea," Lutchester remarked diffidently, "that my arrival seemed either opportune or inopportune—I could not quite tell which. Were you in any way troubled or embarrassed by the presence of the little Japanese gentleman?"

"Of course not," she replied. "Why, he is Jimmy's valet."

"How absurd of me!" Lutchester murmured. "By the bye, if Jimmy is your brother—Mr. Van Teyl—I have a letter to him from a pal in town—Dicky Green. It was to present it that I found my way up here this evening. I was told that he might put me in the way of a little golf during my spare time over here."

He produced the note and laid it upon the table. Pamela glanced at it and then at Lutchester. He was carefully dressed in dinner clothes, black tie and white waistcoat. He was, as usual, perfectly groomed and immaculate. He had what she could only describe to herself as an everyday air about him. He seemed entirely free from any mental pressure or the wear and tear of great events.

"Golf?" she repeated wonderingly. "You expect to have a little spare time, then?"

"Well, I hope so," Lutchester replied. "One must have exercise. By the bye," he went on, "is your brother in, do you happen to know? Perhaps it would be more convenient if I came round in the morning? I am staying in the hotel."

"Oh, for goodness sake, don't go away," she begged. "Jimmy will be here presently, for certain. To tell you the truth, we have been rather playing hide-and-seek this evening, but it hasn't been altogether his fault. Please sit down over there—you will find cigarettes on the sideboard—and talk to me."

"Delighted," he agreed, taking the chair opposite to her. "I suppose you want to know what became of poor Graham?"

A sudden bewilderment appeared in her face. She leaned towards him. Her forehead was knitted, her eyes puzzled. There was a new problem to be solved.

"Why, Mr. Lutchester," she demanded, "how on earth did you get here?"

"Across the Atlantic," he replied amiably. "Bit too far the other way round."

"Yes, but what on?" she persisted. "I went straight on to the *Lapland* after we parted last week, and only arrived here an hour or so ago. There was no other passenger steamer sailing for three days."

"I was a stowaway," he told her confidentially—"helped to shovel coals all the way over."

"Don't talk nonsense!" she protested a little sharply. "I dislike mysteries. Look at you! A stowaway, indeed! Tell me the truth at once?"

He leaned forward in his chair towards her. An ingenuous smile parted his lips. He had the air of a schoolboy repeating a mischievous secret.

"The fact is, Miss Van Teyl," he confided, "I don't want it talked about, you know, but I had a joy ride over."

"A what?"

"A joy ride," he repeated. "A cousin of mine is in command of a destroyer, and she was under orders to sail for New York. He hadn't the slightest right, really, to bring a passenger, as she was coming over on a special mission, but I had word about the trip over here, so I slipped on board late one night—not a word to any one, you understand—and—well, here I am. A more awful voyage," he went on impressively, "you couldn't imagine. I was sore all over within twenty-four hours of starting. There's practically no deck on those things, you know, for sitting out or anything of that sort. The British Navy's nowhere for comfort, I can tell you. The biggest liner for me, going back!"

Pamela was still a little dazed. Lutchester's story did not sound in the least convincing. For the moment, however, she accepted his account of himself.

"Tell me now," she begged, "about Captain Graham?"

"You haven't heard, then?"

"I have heard nothing. How should I hear?"

"I took him straight back to my rooms after we left you," Lutchester began. "He was in an awful state of nerves and drugs and drink. Then I put him to bed as soon as I could, and rang up a pal of mine at the War Office to take him in hand."

"Do you believe," she asked curiously, "that he had really been robbed of his formula?"

"Those amiable people who were interviewing him in the chapel seemed to think so," Lutchester observed.

"But you! What do you think?" she persisted. He smiled in superior fashion.

"I find it rather hard to bring myself to believe that any one would take the trouble," he confided. "I have heard it said in my department that there have been thirty-one new explosives invented since the beginning of the war. Two of them only are in use, and they're not much better than the old stuff."

Pamela nodded understandingly.

"All the same," she remarked, "I am not at all sure that was the case with Captain Graham's invention. There were rumours for days before that something wonderful was happening on Salisbury Plain. They had to cover up whole acres of ground after his last experiments, and a man who was down there told me that it seemed just as though the life had been sucked out of it."

"Where did you collect all this information?" her visitor inquired.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"One hears everything in London."

Lutchester was sitting with his finger-tips pressed together. For a moment his attention seemed fixed upon them.

"There are things," he said, "which one hears, too, in the far corners of the world —on the Atlantic, for instance."

"You have had some news?" she interrupted.

"It is really a private piece of information," he told her, "and it won't be in the

papers—not the way the thing happened, anyway—but I don't suppose there's any harm in telling you, as we were both more or less mixed up in the affair. Graham was shot the next day, on his way up to Northumberland."

"Shot?" she exclaimed incredulously.

"Murdered, if you'd like the whole thrill," Lutchester continued. "Of course, we didn't get many particulars in the wireless, but we gathered that he was shot by some one passing him in a more powerful car on a lonely stretch of the Great North Road."

Pamela shuddered. She was for the moment profoundly impressed. A certain air of unreality which had hung over the events of that night was suddenly banished. The whole tragedy rose up before her eyes. The effect of it was almost stupefying.

"Gave me quite a shock," Lutchester confided. "Somehow or other I had never been able to take that night quite seriously. There was more than a dash of melodrama in it, wasn't there? Seems now as though those fellows must have been in earnest, though."

"And as though Captain Graham's formula," she reminded him gravely, "was the real thing."

"Whereupon," Lutchester observed, "our first interest in the affair receives a certain stimulus. Some one stole the formula. To judge from the behaviour of those amiable gentlemen connected with Henry's Restaurant, it wasn't they. Some one had been before them. Have you any theories, Miss Van Teyl?"

"I can tell you who has," she replied. "Do you remember when we were all grouped around that notice—Mefiez-vous! Taisez-vous! Les oreilles ennemies vous ecoutent!?"

"Of course I do," he assented.

"Do you remember Baron Sunyea making a remark afterwards? He had been standing by and heard everything Graham said."

"Can't say that I do," Lutchester regretted, "but I remember seeing him about the place."

"You promise to say or do nothing without my permission, if I tell you something?" she went on.

"Naturally!"

"See, then, how diplomacy or secret service work, or whatever you like to call it, can gather the ends of the world together! Only a quarter of an hour ago that Japanese valet of my brother's, having searched my rooms in vain, demanded from me that formula!"

"From you?" Lutchester gasped. "But you haven't got it!"

"Of course not. On the other hand Sunyea pitched upon me as being one of the possible thieves, and cabled his instructions over."

"Have you got it?" he asked abruptly.

"If I had," she smiled, "I should not tell you."

"But come," he expostulated, "the thing's no use to you."

"So Baron Sunyea evidently thought," she laughed. "We'll leave that, if you don't mind."

Lutchester was still looking a little bewildered.

"I had an idea when I came in," he muttered, "that things were a little scrappy between you and the Japanese gentleman."

She was suddenly serious.

"Now that I have told you the truth," she said, "I really ought to thank you. You certainly seem to have a knack of appearing when you are wanted."

"Fluke this time, I'm afraid," he acknowledged, "but I rather like the suggestion. You ought to see a great deal of me, Miss Van Teyl. Do you realise that I am a stranger in New York, and any hospitality you can show me may be doubly rewarded? Are you going to take me round and show me the sights?"

"Are you going to have any time for sight-seeing?"

"Well, I hope so. Why not? A fellow can't do more than a certain number of hours' work in a day."

She looked at him curiously.

"And yet," she murmured, "you expect to win the war!"

"Of course we shall win the war," he assured her confidently. "You haven't any doubt about that yourself, have you, Miss Van Teyl?"

"I don't know," she told him calmly.

Lutchester was almost horrified. He rose to his feet and stood looking down at his companion.

"Tell me what on earth you mean?" he demanded. "We always win in the long run, even if we muddle things about a little."

"I was just contrasting in my mind," she said thoughtfully, "some of the Germans whom I have met since the war, with some of the Englishmen. They are taking it very seriously, you know, Mr. Lutchester. They don't find time for luncheon parties or sight-seeing."

"That's just their way," he protested. "They turn themselves into machines. They are what we used to call suckers at school, but you can take my word for it that before next autumn they will be on the run."

"You call them suckers," she observed. "That's because they're always working, always studying, always experimenting. Supposing they got hold of something like this new explosive?"

"First of all," he told her, "I don't believe in it, and secondly, if it exists, the formula isn't in their hands."

"Supposing it is in mine?" she suggested. "I might sell it to them."

"I'd trust you all the time," he laughed lightheartedly. "I can't see you giving a leg up to the Huns…. Will you lunch with me at one o'clock to-morrow, please?"

"Certainly not," she replied. "You must attend to your work, whatever it is."

"That's all very well," he grumbled, "but every one has an hour off for luncheon."

"People who win wars don't lunch," she declared severely. "Here's Jimmy—I can hear his voice—and he's brought some one up with him. I'll—let you know about lunch."

The door opened. James Van Teyl and Fischer entered together.

CHAPTER XIII

The first few seconds after the entrance of the two men were monopolised by the greetings of Pamela with her brother. Fischer stood a little in the background, his eyes fixed upon Lutchester. His brain was used to emergencies, but he found himself here confronted by an unanswerable problem.

"Say, this is Mr. Lutchester, isn't it?" he inquired, holding out his hand.

"The same," Lutchester assented politely. "We met at Henry's some ten days ago, didn't we?"

"Mr. Lutchester has brought us a letter from Dicky Green, Jimmy," Pamela explained, as she withdrew from her brother's arms. "Quite unnecessary, as it happens, because I met him in London just before we sailed."

"Very glad to meet you, Mr. Lutchester," Jimmy declared, wringing his hand with American cordiality. "Dicky's an old pal of mine—one of the best. We graduated in the same year from Harvard."

Conversation for a few minutes was platitudinous. Van Teyl, although he showed few signs of his recent excesses, was noisy and boisterous, clutching at this brief escape from a situation which he dreaded. Fischer on the other hand, remained in the back-ground, ominously silent, thinking rapidly, speculating and theorising as to the coincidence, if it were coincidence, of finding Lutchester and Pamela together. He listened to the former's polite conversation, never once letting his eyes wander from his face. All his thoughts were concentrated upon one problem. The mysterious escape of Sandy Graham, which had sent him flying from the country, remained unsolved. Of Pamela's share in it he had already his suspicions. Was it possible that Lutchester was the other and the central figure in that remarkable rescue? He waited his opportunity, and, during a momentary lull in the cheerful conversation, broke in with his first question.

"Say, Mr. Lutchester, you haven't any twin brother, have you?"

"No brother at all," Lutchester admitted.

"Then, how did you get over here? You were at Henry's weren't you, on the night the *Lapland* sailed? You didn't cross with us, and there's no other steamer due for two days."

"Then I can't be here," Lutchester declared. "The thing's impossible."

"Guess you'll have to explain, if you want to save me from a sleepless night," Fischer persisted.

Lutchester smiled. He had the air of one enjoying the situation immensely.

"Well," he said, "I have had to confess to Miss Van Teyl here, so I may as well make a clean breast of it to you. To every one else I meet in New York, I shall say that I came over on the *Lapland*. I really came over on a destroyer."

Fischer's face seemed to become more set and grim than ever.

"A British destroyer," he muttered to himself.

"It was kind of a joy ride," Lutchester explained confidentially, "a cousin of mine who was in command came in to see me and say good-by, just after I'd received my orders from the head of my department to come out here on the next steamer, and he smuggled me on board that night. Mum's the word, though, if you please. We asked nobody's leave. It would have taken about a month to have heard anything definite from the Admiralty."

"A British destroyer come across the Atlantic, eh?" Mr. Fischer muttered. "She must have come out on a special mission, then, I imagine."

"That is not for me to say," Lutchester observed, with stiff reticence.

Pamela suddenly and purposely intervened. She turned towards Fischer.

"Mr. Lutchester brought some rather curious news," she observed. "He got it by wireless. Do you remember all the fuss there was about the disappearance of Captain Holderness' friend at Henry's?"

"I heard something about it," he admitted grimly.

"Well, Captain Graham was in my party, so naturally I was more interested than any one else. To all appearance he entered Henry's Restaurant, walked up the stairs, and disappeared into the skies. The place was ransacked everywhere for him, but he never turned up. Well, the very next day he was murdered in a motor-car on his way to Northumberland."

"Incredible!" Fischer murmured.

"Seems a queer set out," Lutchester remarked, "but it's quite true. He was supposed to have discovered a marvellous new explosive, the formula for which had been stolen. He was on his way up to Northumberland to make fresh experiments."

"For myself I have little faith," Fischer observed, "in any new explosives. In Germany they believe, I understand, that the limit of destructiveness has been attained."

"The Germans should know," Lutchester admitted carelessly. "I'm afraid they are still a good deal ahead of us in most scientific matters. I will take the liberty, of calling some time to-morrow, Miss Van Teyl, and hope I shall have the pleasure of improving my acquaintance with your brother. Good night, Mr. Fischer."

"Are you staying in the hotel?" the latter inquired.

"On the fifteenth floor," was the somewhat gloomy reply. "I shan't be able to shave in front of the window without feeling giddy. However, I suppose that's America. Good-by, everybody."

With a little inclusive and farewell bow he disappeared. They heard him make his way down the corridor and ring for the lift. Rather a curious silence ensued, which was broken at last by Pamela.

"Is that," she asked, throwing herself into an easy-chair and selecting a cigarette, "just an ordinary type of a nice, well-bred, unintelligent, self-sufficient Englishman, or—"

"Or what?" Fischer asked, with interest.

Pamela watched the smoke curl from the end of her cigarette.

"Well, I scarcely know how to finish," she confessed, "only sometimes when I am talking to him I feel that he can scarcely be as big a fool as he seems, and then I wonder. Jimmy," she went on, shaking her head at him, "you're not looking well. You've been sitting up too late and getting into bad habits during my absence. Open confession, now, if you please. If it's a girl, I shall give you my blessing."

Van Teyl groaned and said nothing. A foreboding of impending trouble depressed Pamela. She turned towards Fischer and found in his grim face confirmation of her fears.

"What does this mean?" she demanded.

"Your brother will explain," Fischer replied. "It is better that he should tell you everything."

"Everything?" she repeated. "What is there to tell. What have you to do with my brother, anyway?" she added fiercely.

"You must not look at me as though I were in any way to blame for what has happened," was the insistent reply. "On the contrary, I have been very lenient with your brother. I am still prepared to be lenient—upon certain conditions."

The light of battle was in Pamela's eyes. She fought against the significance of the man's ominous words. This was his first blow, then, and directed against her.

"I begin to understand," she said. "Please go on. Let me hear everything."

Van Teyl had turned to the sideboard. He mixed and drank off a whisky and soda. Then he swung around.

"I'll make a clean breast of it in a few words, Pamela," he promised. "I've gambled with Fischer's money, lost it, forged a transfer of his certificates to meet my liabilities, and I am in his power. He could have me hammered and chucked into Sing Sing, if he wanted to. That's all there is about it."

Pamela stood the shock well. She turned to Fischer.

"How much of this are you responsible for?" she asked.

"That," he objected, "is an impotent question. It is not I who had the moulding of your brother's character. It is not I who made him a forger and a weakling."

Van Teyl's arm was upraised. An oath broke from his lips. Pamela seized him firmly and drew him away.

"Be quiet, James," she begged. "Let us hear what Mr. Fischer is going to do about it."

"That depends upon you," was the cold reply.

Pamela stood at the head of the table, between the two men, and laughed. Her brother had sunk into a chair, and his head had dropped moodily upon his folded arms. She looked from one to the other and a new sense of strength inspired her. She felt that if she were not indeed entirely mistress of the situation, yet the elements of triumph were there to her hand.

"This is living, at any rate," she declared. "First of all I discover that your Japanese servant is a spy—"

"Nikasti!" Van Teyl interrupted furiously. "Blast him! I knew that there was something wrong about that fellow, Fischer."

Fischer frowned.

"What's he been up to?" he inquired.

"Well, to begin with," Pamela explained, "he searched my room, then he locked me in here, and was proceeding to threaten me when fortunately Mr. Lutchester arrived."

"Threaten you—what about?" Fischer demanded.

"He seemed to have an absurd idea," Pamela explained sweetly, "that I might have somewhere concealed upon my person the formula which was stolen from Captain Graham last Monday week at Henry's Restaurant. It makes quite a small world of it, doesn't it?"

"I will deal with Nikasti for this," Fischer promised, "if it is true. Meanwhile?"

"No sooner have I got over that little shock," Pamela went on, "than you turn up with this melodramatic story, and an offer from Mr. Fischer, which I can read in his face. Really, I feel that I shall hear the buzz of a cinema machine in a moment. How much do you owe him, Jimmy?"

"Eighty-nine thousand dollars," the young man groaned.

"I'll write you a cheque to-morrow morning," Pamela promised. "Will that do, Mr. Fischer?"

"It is the last thing I desire," was the calm reply.

"Really! Well, perhaps now you will come to the point. Perhaps you will tell me what it is that you do want?"

"Stolen property," Fischer announced deliberately—"stolen property, however, to which I have a greater right than you."

She laughed at him mockingly.

"I think not, Mr. Fischer," she said. "You really don't deserve it, you know."

"And why not?"

"Just see how you have bungled! You bait the trap, the poor man walks into it, and you allow another to forestall you. Not only that, but you actually allow Japan to come into the game, and but for Mr. Lutchester's appearance we might both of us have been left planté là. No, Mr. Fischer! You don't deserve the formula, and you shall not have it. I'll pay my brother's debt to you in dollars—no other way."

"Dollars," Mr. Fischer told her sternly, "will never buy the forged transfer. Dollars will never keep your brother out of the city police court or Sing Sing afterwards. There isn't much future for a young man who has been through it."

Van Teyl was upon him suddenly with a low, murderous cry. Fischer had no time to resist, no chance of success if he had attempted it. He was borne backwards

on to the lounge, his assailant's hand upon his throat. The young man was beside himself with drink and fury. The words poured from his lips, incoherent, hot with rage.

"You—hound! You've made my life a hell! You've plotted and schemed to get me into your power!… There! Do you feel the life going out of you?… My sister, indeed! You!… You scum of the earth! You …"

"James!"

The sound of Pamela's voice unnerved him. His fit of passion was spent. She dragged him easily away.

"Don't be a fool, Jimmy!" she begged. "You can't settle accounts like that."

"Can't I?" he muttered. "If we'd been alone, Pamela … my God, if he and I had been alone here!"

"Jimmy," she said, "you're a fool, and you've been drinking. Fetch the water bottle."

He obeyed, and she dashed water in Fischer's face. Presently he opened his eyes, groaned and sat up. There were two livid marks upon his throat. Van Teyl watched him like a crouching animal. His eyes were still lit with sullen fire. The lust for killing was upon him. Fischer sat up and blinked. He felt the atmosphere of the room, and he knew his danger. His hand stole into his hip pocket, and a small revolver suddenly flashed upon his knees. He drew a long breath of relief. He was like a fugitive who had found sanctuary.

"So that's the game, James Van Teyl, is it?" he exclaimed. "Now listen."

He adjusted the revolver with a click. His cruel, long fingers were pressed around its stock.

"I am not threatening you," he went on. "I am not fond of violence, and I don't believe in it. This is just in case you come a single yard nearer to me. Now, Miss Van Teyl, my business is with you. We won't fence any longer. You will hand over to me the pocketbook which you stole from Captain Graham in Henry's Restaurant. Hand it over to me intact, you understand. In return I will give you the forged transfer of stock, and leave it to your sense of honour as to whether

you care to pay your brother's debt or not. If you decline to consider my proposition, I shall ring up Joseph Neville, your brother's senior partner. I shall not even wait for to-morrow, mind. I shall make an appointment, and I shall place in his hands the proof of your brother's robbery."

"Perhaps," Pamela murmured, "I was wrong to stop you. Jimmy…. Anything else, Mr. Fischer?"

"Just this. I would rather have carried this matter through in a friendly fashion, for reasons at which I think you can guess."

She shook her head.

"You flatter my intelligence!" she told him scornfully.

"I will explain, then. I desire to offer myself as your suitor."

She laughed at him without restraint or consideration.

"I would rather marry my brother's valet!" she declared.

"You are entirely wrong," he protested. "You are wrong, too, in holding up cards against me. We are on the same side. You are an American, and so am I. I swear that I desire nothing that is not for your good. You have wonderful gifts, and I have great wealth and opportunities. I have also a sincere and very heartfelt admiration for you."

"I have never been more flattered!" Pamela scoffed.

He looked a little wistfully from one to the other. Antagonism and dislike were written in their faces. Even Pamela, who was skilled in the art of subterfuge, made little effort to conceal her aversion. Nevertheless, he continued doggedly.

"What does it matter," he demanded, "who handles this formula—you or I? Our faces are turned in the same direction. There is this difference only with me. I want to make it the basis of a kindlier feeling in Washington towards my father's country."

Pamela's eyebrows were raised.

"Are you sure," she asked, "that the formula itself would not find its way into your father's country?"

"As to that I pledge my word," he replied. "I am an American citizen."

"Looks like it, doesn't he!" Van Teyl jeered.

"Tell us what you have been doing in Berlin, then?" Pamela inquired.

"I had a definite mission there," Fischer assured them, "which I hope to bring to a definite conclusion. If you are an American citizen in the broadest sense of the word, England is no more to you than Germany. I want to place before some responsible person in the American Government, a proposal—an official proposal—the acceptance of which will be in years to come of immense benefit to her."

"And the quid pro quo?" Pamela asked gently.

"I am not here for the purpose of gratifying curiosity," Fischer replied, "but if you will take this matter up seriously, you shall be the person through whom this proposal shall be brought before the American Government. The whole of the negotiations shall be conducted through you. If you succeed, you will be known throughout history as the woman who saved America from her great and growing danger. If you fail, you will be no worse off than you are now."

"And you propose to hand over the conduct of these negotiations to me," Pamela observed, "in return for what?"

"The pocketbook which you took from Captain Graham."

"So there we are, back again at the commencement of our discussion," Pamela remarked. "Are you going to repeat that you want this formula for Washington and not for Berlin?"

"My first idea," Fischer confessed, "was to hand it over to Germany. I have changed my views. Germany has great explosives of her own. This formula shall be used in a different fashion. It shall be a lever in the coming negotiations between America and Germany."

"We have had a great deal of conversation to no practical purpose,"

Pamela declared. "Why are you so sure that I have the formula?"

Fischer frowned slightly. He had recovered himself now, and his tone was as steady and quiet as ever. Only occasionally his eyes wandered to where James Van Teyl was fidgetting about the table, and at such times his fingers tightened upon the stock of his revolver.

"It is practically certain that you have the papers," he pointed out. "You were the first person to go up the stairs after Graham had been rendered unconscious. Joseph admits that he had been forced to leave him—the orchestra was waiting to play. He was alone in that little room. That you should have known of its existence and his presence there is surprising, but nothing more. Furthermore, I am convinced that you were in some way concerned with his rescue later. You visited Hassan and you visited Joseph. From the latter you procured the key of the chapel. If only he had had the courage to tell the truth—well, we will let that pass. You have the papers, Miss Van Teyl. I am bidding a great price for them. If you are a wise woman, you will not hesitate."

There was a knock at the door. They all three turned towards it a little impatiently. Even Pamela and her brother felt the grip of an absorbing problem. To their surprise, it was Lutchester who reappeared upon the threshold. In his hand he held a small sealed packet.

"So sorry to disturb you all," he apologised. "I have something here which I believe belongs to you, Miss Van Teyl. I thought I'd better bring it up and explain. From the way your little Japanese friend was holding on to it, I thought it might be important. It is a little torn, but that isn't my fault."

He held it out to Pamela. It was a long packet torn open at one end. From it was protruding a worn, brown pocketbook. Pamela's hand closed upon it mechanically. There was a dazed look in her eyes. Fischer's fingers stole once more towards the pocket into which, at Lutchester's entrance, he had slipped his revolver.

CHAPTER XIV

Lutchester, to all appearance, remained sublimely unconscious of the tension which his words and appearance seemed to have created. He had strolled a little further into the room, and was looking down at the packet which he still held.

"You are wondering how I got hold of this, of course?" he observed. "Just one of those simple little coincidences which either mean a great deal or nothing at all."

"How did you know it was mine?" Pamela asked, almost under her breath.

"I'll explain," Lutchester continued. "I was in the lobby of the hotel, a few minutes ago, when I heard the fire bell outside. I hurried out and watched the engines go by from the sidewalk. I have always been rather interested in—"

"Never mind that, please. Go on," Pamela asked, almost under her breath.

"Certainly," Lutchester assented. "On the way back, then, I saw a little Japanese, who was coming out of the hotel, knocked down by a taxicab which skidded nearly into the door. I don't think he was badly hurt—I'm not even sure that he was hurt at all. I picked up this packet from the spot where he had been lying, and I was on the point of taking it to the office when I saw your name upon it, Miss Van Teyl, in what seemed to me to be your own handwriting, so I thought I'd bring it up."

He laid it upon the table. Pamela's eyes seemed fastened upon it. She turned it over nervously.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Lutchester," she murmured.

"I'll be perfectly frank," he went on. "I should have found out where the little man who dropped it had disappeared to, and restored it to him, but I fancied—of

course, I may have been wrong—that you and he were having some sort of a disagreement, a few minutes ago, when I happened to come in. Anyway, that was in my mind, and I thought I'd run no risks."

"You did the very kindest and most considerate thing," Pamela declared.

"The little Japanese must have been our new valet," James Van Teyl observed. "I'm beginning to think that he is not going to be much of an acquisition."

"You'll probably see something of him in a few minutes," Lutchester remarked. "I will wish you good night, Miss Van Teyl. Good night!"

Pamela's reiterated thanks were murmured and perfunctory. Even James Van Teyl's hospitable instincts seemed numbed. They allowed Lutchester to depart with scarcely a word. With the closing of the door, speech brought them some relief from a state of tension which was becoming intolerable. Even then Fischer at first said nothing. He had risen noiselessly to his feet, his right hand was in the sidepocket of his coat, his eyes were fixed upon the table.

"So this is why you insisted upon a valet!" James Van Teyl exclaimed, his voice thick with anger. "He's planted here to rob for you! Is that it, eh, Fischer?"

Pamela drew the packet towards her and stood with her right palm covering it. Fischer seemed still at a loss for words.

"I can assure you," he said at last fervently, "that if that packet was stolen from Miss Van Teyl by Nikasti, it was done without my instigation. It is as much a surprise to me as to any of you. We can congratulate ourselves that it is not on the way to Japan."

Pamela nodded.

"He is speaking the truth," she asserted. "Nikasti is not out to steal for others. He is playing the same game as all of us, only he is playing it for his own hand. Mr. Fischer has brought him here for some purpose of his own, without a doubt, but I am quite sure that Nikasti never meant to be any one's cat's-paw."

"Believe me, that is the truth," Fischer agreed. "I will admit that I brought Nikasti here with a purpose, but upon my honour I swear that until this evening I never dreamed that he even knew of the existence of the formula."

"Oh! we are not the only people in the world who are clever," Pamela declared, with an unnatural little laugh. "The first man who took note of Sandy Graham's silly words as he rushed into Henry's was Baron Sunyea. I saw him stiffen as he listened. He even uttered a word of remonstrance. Japan in London heard. Japan in your sitting-room here, in ten days' time, knew everything there was to be known."

"I didn't bring Nikasti here for this," Fischer insisted.

"Perhaps not," Pamela conceded, "but if you're a good American, what are you doing at all with a Japanese secret agent?"

"If you trust me, you shall know," Fischer promised. "Listen to reason. Let us have finished with one affair at a time. You very nearly lost that formula to Japan. Hand over the pocketbook. You see how dangerous it is for it to remain in your possession. I'll keep my share of the bargain. I'll put my scheme before you. Come, be reasonable. See, here's the forged transfer."

He drew a paper from his pocket and spread it out upon the table. His long, hairy fingers were shaking with nervousness.

"Come, make it a deal," he persisted, "You can pay me the defalcations or not, as you choose. There is your brother's freedom and the honour of your name, in exchange for that pocketbook."

Pamela, after all her hesitation, seemed to make up her mind with startling suddenness. She thrust the pocketbook towards Fischer, took the transfer from his fingers and tore it into small pieces.

"I give in," she said. "This time you have scored. We will talk about the other matter tomorrow."

Fischer buttoned up the packet carefully in his breast pocket. His eyes glittered. He turned towards the door. On the threshold he looked around. He stretched out his hand towards Pamela.

"Believe me, you have done well," he assured her hoarsely. "I shall keep my word. I will set you in the path of great things."

He left the room, and they heard the furious ringing of the lift bell. Pamela was

tearing into smaller pieces the forged transfer. Van Teyl, a little pale, but with new life in his frame, was watching the fragments upon the floor. There was a tap at the door. Nikasti entered. Pamela's fingers paused in their task. Van Teyl stared at him. The newcomer was carrying the evening papers, which he laid down upon the table.

"Is there anything more I can do before I go to bed, sir?" he asked, with his usual reverential little bow.

"Aren't you hurt?" Van Teyl exclaimed.

"Hurt?" Nikasti replied wonderingly. "Oh, no!"

"Weren't you knocked down by a taxicab," Pamela asked, "outside the hotel?"

Nikasti looked from one to the other with an air of gentle surprise.

"I have been to my rooms in the servants' quarters," he told them, "on the upper floor. I have not been downstairs at all. I have been unpacking and arranging my own humble belongings."

Van Teyl clasped his forehead.

"Let me get this!" he exclaimed. "You haven't been down in the lobby of the hotel, you haven't been knocked down by a taxicab that skidded, you haven't lost a pocketbook which you had previously stolen from my sister?"

Nikasti shook his head. He seemed completely mystified. He watched Pamela's face carefully.

"Perhaps there has been some mistake," he suggested quietly. "My English is sometimes not very good. I would not dream of trying to rob the young lady. I have not lost any pocketbook. I have not descended lower down in the hotel than this floor."

Van Teyl waved him away, accepted his farewell salutation, and waited until the door was closed.

"Look here, Pamela," he protested, turning almost appealingly towards her, "my brain wasn't made for this sort of thing. What in thunder does it all mean?"

Pamela looked at the fragments of paper upon the floor and sank back in an easy chair.

"Jimmy," she confided, "I don't know."

CHAPTER XV

Pamela opened her eyes the next morning upon a distinctly pleasing sight. At the foot of her bed was an enormous basket of pink carnations. On the counterpane by her side lay a smaller cluster of twelve very beautiful dark red Gloire de Dijon roses. Attached to these latter was a note.

"When did these flowers come, Leah?" Pamela asked the maid who was moving about the room.

"An hour ago, madam," the girl told her.

"Read the name on the card," Pamela directed, pointing to the mass of pink blossoms.

"Mr. Oscar H. Fischer," the girl read out, "with respectful compliments."

Pamela smiled.

"He doesn't know, then," she murmured to herself. "Get my bath ready, Leah."

The maid disappeared into the inner room. Pamela tore open the note attached to the roses by her side, and read it slowly through:

Dear Miss Van Teyl,

I am so very sorry, but the luncheon we had half-planned for to-day must be postponed. I have an urgent message to go south; to inspect—but no secrets! It's horribly disappointing. I hope we may meet in a few days.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN LUTCHESTER.

Pamela laid down the note, conscious of an indefined but distinct sensation of disappointment. After all, it was not so wonderful to wake up and find oneself in New York. The sun was pleasant, the little puffs of air which came in through the window across the park, delightful and exhilarating, yet something had gone out of the day. Accustomed to self-analysis, she asked herself swiftly—what? It was, without a doubt, something to do with Lutchester's departure. She tried to face the question of her disappointment. Was it possible to feel any real interest in a man who preferred a Government post to the army at such a time, and who had brought his golf clubs out to America? Her imagination for a moment revolved around the problem of his apparently uninteresting and yet, in some respects, contradictory personality. Was it really her fancy or had she, every now and then, detected behind that flamboyant manner traces of something deeper and more serious, something which seemed to indicate a life and aims of which nothing appeared upon the surface? She clasped her knees and sat up in bed, listening to the sound of the running water in the next room. Was there any possible explanation of his opportune appearance on the night before with a dummy pocketbook and a concocted story? The cleverest man on earth could surely never have gauged her position with Fischer and intervened in such a manner at the psychological moment.

Yet he had done it, she reflected, gazing thoughtfully at Fischer's gift. If, indeed, he knew what was passing around him to that extent, how much more knowledge might he not possess? She felt the little silken belt around her waist. At least there was no one who could take Sandy Graham's secret from her until she chose to give it up. Supposing for a moment that Lutchester was also out for the great things, was he fooled by her attitude? If he knew so much, he must know that the secret remained with her. Perhaps, after all, he was only a philanderer in intrigue….

Pamela bathed and dressed, sent for her brother, and, to his horror, insisted upon an American breakfast.

"It's quite time I came back to look after you, Jimmy," she said severely, as she watched him send away his grapefruit and gaze helplessly at his bacon and eggs. "You're going to turn over a new leaf, young man."

"I shan't be sorry," he confessed fervently. "I tell you, Pamela, when you have a

thing like this hanging over you, it's hell—some hell! You just want to drown your thoughts and keep going all the time."

She nodded sagely.

"Well, that's over now, Jimmy," she said, "and I meant you to listen to me. It's more than likely that Mr. Fischer may find out at any moment that the mysterious pocketbook, which came from heaven knows where, is a faked one. He may be horrid about it."

"While we are on that," Van Teyl interrupted, "I couldn't sleep a wink last night for trying to imagine where on earth that fellow Lutchester came in, and what his game was."

"I have a headache this morning, trying to puzzle out the same thing," Pamela told him.

"He seems such an ordinary sort of chap," Van Teyl continued thoughtfully. "Good sportsman, no doubt, and all that sort of thing, but the last fellow in the world to concoct a yarn, and if he did, what was his object?"

"Jimmy," his sister begged, "let's quit. Of course, I know a little more than you do, but the little more that I do know only makes it more confusing. Now, to make it worse, he's gone away."

"What, this morning?"

"Gone away on his Government work," Pamela announced. "I had a note and some roses from him. Don't let's talk about it, Jimmy. I keep on getting new ideas, and it makes my brain whirl. I want to talk about you."

"I'm a rotten lot to talk about," he sighed.

She patted his hand.

"You're nothing of the sort, dear, and you've got to remember now that you're out of the trouble. But listen. Hurry down to the office as early as you can and set about straightening things out, so that if Mr. Fischer tries to make trouble, he won't be able to do it. There's my cheque for eighty-nine thousand dollars I made out last night before I went to bed," she added, passing it over to him. "Just

replace what stocks you're short of and get yourself out of the mess, and don't waste any time about it."

His face glowed as he looked across the table.

"You're the most wonderful sister, Pamela."

"Nonsense!" she interrupted. "Nonsense! I ought not to have left you alone all this time, and, besides, I'm pretty sure he helped you into this trouble for his own ends. Anyway, we are all right now. I shall be in New York for a few days before I go to Washington. When I do go, you must see whether you can get leave and come with me."

"That's bully," he declared. "I'll get leave, right enough. There's never been less doing in Wall Street. But say, Pamela, I don't seem to half understand what's going on. You've given up most of your friends, and you spend months away there in Europe in all sorts of corners. Now you come back and you seem mixed up in regular secret service work. Where do you come in, anyway? What are you going to Washington for?"

She smiled.

"Queer tastes, haven't I, Jimmy?"

"Queer for a girl."

"That's prejudice," she objected, shaking her head. "Nowadays there are few things a woman can't do. To tell you the truth, my new interest in life started three years ago, when Uncle Theodore found out that I was going to Rome for the winter."

"So Uncle Theodore started it, did he?"

She nodded.

"That's the worst of having an uncle in the Administration, isn't it? Well, of course, he gave me letters to every one in Rome, and I found out what he wanted quite easily, and without the inquiries going through the Embassy at all. Sometimes, as you can understand, that's a great advantage. I found it simply fascinating—the work, I mean—and after three or four more commissions—

well, they recognised me at Washington. I have been to most of the capitals in Europe at different times, with small affairs to arrange at each, or information to get. Sometimes it's been just about commercial things. Since the war, though, of course, it's been more exciting than ever. If I were an Englishwoman instead of an American, I could tell them some things in London which they'd find pretty surprising. It's not my affair, though, and I keep what information I do pick up until it works in with something else for our own good. I knew quite well in Berlin, for instance, to speak of something you've heard of, that Henry's Restaurant in London was being used as a centre of espionage by the Germans. That is why I was on the lookout, the day I went there."

"You mean the day that pocketbook was stolen that the whole world seems crazy about?" Van Teyl asked.

She nodded.

"I believe it is perfectly true," she said, "that a young man called Graham has invented an entirely new explosive, the formula for which he brought to Henry's with him that day. It isn't only what happens when the shell explodes, but a sort of putrefaction sets in all round, and they say that everything within a mile dies. There were spies down even watching his experiments. There were spies following him up to London, there were spies in Henry's Restaurant when like a fool he gave the thing away. Fischer was the ringleader of this lot, and he meant having the formula from Graham that night. I don't want to bore you, Jimmy, but I got there first."

"Bore me!" the young man repeated. "Why, it's like a modern Arabian Nights. I can't imagine you in the thick of this sort of thing, Pamela."

"It's very easy to slip into the way of anything you like," she answered. "I knew exactly what they were going to do to Captain Graham, and I got there before them. When they searched him, the formula had gone. Fischer caught my steamer and worried me all the way over. He thought he had us in a corner last night, and then a miracle happened."

"You mean that fellow Lutchester turning up?"

"Yes, I mean that," Pamela admitted.

"Say, didn't that Jap fellow get the pocketbook from your rooms at all, then?" Van Teyl asked. "I couldn't follow it all last night."

"He searched my rooms," Pamela replied, "and failed to find it. Afterwards, when he and I were alone in your sitting-room, heaven knows what would have happened, but for the miraculous arrival of Mr. Lutchester, whom I had left behind in London, come to pay an evening call in the Hotel Plaza, New York!"

Van Teyl shook his head slowly, got up from his seat, lit a cigarette, and came back again.

"Pam," he confessed, "my brain won't stand it. You're not going to tell me that Lutchester's in the game? Why, a simpler sort of fellow I never spoke to."

"I can't make up my own mind about Mr. Lutchester," Pamela sighed. "He helped me in London on the night I sailed—in fact, he was very useful indeed—but why he invented that story about Nikasti, brought a dummy pocketbook into the room and helped us out of all our troubles, unless it was by sheer and brilliant instinct, I cannot imagine."

"Let me get on to this," Van Teyl said. "Even the pocketbook was a fake, then?"

She nodded.

"I shouldn't be likely to leave things I risk my life for about my bedroom," she told him.

"Where is it, then—the real thing?" he asked.

She smiled.

"If you must know, Jimmy," she confided, dropping her voice, "it's in a little compartment of a silk belt around my waist. It will remain there until I get to Washington, or until Mr. Haskall comes to me."

"Haskall, the Government explosives man?"

Pamela nodded.

"Even he won't get it without Government authority."

"Now, tell me, Pamela," Van Teyl went on—"you're a far-seeing girl—I suppose we should get it in the neck from Germany some day or other, if the Germans won? Why don't you hand the formula over to the British, and give them a chance to get ahead?"

"That's a sensible question, Jimmy, and I'll try to answer it," Pamela promised. "Because when once the shells are made and used, the secret will be gone. I think it very likely that it would enable England to win the war; but, you see, I am an American, not English, and I'm all American. I have been in touch with things pretty closely for some time now, and I see trouble ahead for us before very long. I can't exactly tell you where it's coming from, but I feel it. I want America to have something up her sleeve, that's why."

"You're a great girl, Pamela," her brother declared. "I'm off downtown, feeling a different man. And, Pamela, I haven't said much, but God bless you, and as long as I live I'm going as straight as a die. I've had my lesson."

He bent over her a little clumsily and kissed her. Pamela walked to the door with him.

"Be a dear," she called out, "and come back early. And, Jimmy!" …

"Hullo?"'

"Put things right at the office at once," she whispered with emphasis. "Fischer hasn't found out yet. I sent him a message this morning, thanking him for the carnations, and asking him to walk with me in the park after breakfast, I shall keep him away till lunch time, at least."

The young man looked at her, and at Nikasti, who out in the corridor was holding his hat and cane. Then he chuckled.

"And they say that things don't happen in New York!" he murmured, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XVI

An elderly New Yorker, a man of fashion, renowned for his social perceptions, pressed his companion's arm at the entrance to Central Park and pointed to Pamela.

"There goes a typical New York girl," he said, "and the best-looking I've seen for many a long day. You can go all round Europe, Freddie, and not see a girl with a face and figure like that. She had that frank way, too, of looking you in the eyes."

"I know," the other assented. "Gibson's girls all had it. Kind of look which seems to say—'I know you find me nice and I don't mind. I wonder whether you're nice, too.'"

Pamela strolled along the park with Fischer by her side. She wore a tailor-made costume of black and white tweed, and a smart hat, in which yellow seemed the predominating colour. Her shoes, her gloves, the little tie about her throat, were all the last word in the simple elegance of suitability. Fischer walked by her side—a powerful, determined figure in a carefully-pressed blue serge suit and a brown Homburg hat. He wore a rose in his buttonhole, and he carried a cane—both unusual circumstances. After fifty years of strenuous living, Mr. Fischer seemed suddenly to have found a new thing in the world.

"This is a pleasant idea of yours, Miss Van Teyl," he said.

"I haven't disturbed your morning, I hope?" she asked.

"I guess, if you have, it isn't the way you mean," he replied. "You've disturbed a good deal of my time and thoughts lately."

"Well, you've had your own way now," she sighed, looking at him out of the corner of her eyes. "I suppose you always get your own way in the end, don't

you, Mr. Fischer?"

"Generally," he admitted. "I tell you, though, Miss Van Teyl," he went on earnestly, "if you're alluding to last night's affair, I hated the whole business. It was my duty, and the opportunity was there, but with what I have I am satisfied. With reference to that little debt of your brother's—"

"Please don't say a word, Mr. Fischer," she interrupted. "You will find that all put right as soon as you get down to Wall Street. Tell me, what have you done with your prize?"

Mr. Fischer looked very humble.

"Miss Van Teyl," he said, "for certain reasons I am going to tell you the truth. Perhaps it will be the best in the long run. We may even before long be working together. So I start by being honest with you. The pocketbook is by now on its way to Germany."

"To Germany?" she exclaimed. "And after all your promises!"

"Ah, but think, Miss Van Teyl," he pleaded. "I throw aside all subterfuge. In your heart you know well what I am and what I stand for. I deny it no longer. I am a German-American, working for Germany, simply because America does not need my help. If America were at war with any country in the world, my brains, my knowledge, my wealth would be hers. But now it is different. Germany is surrounded by many enemies, and she calls for her sons all over the world to remember the Fatherland. You can sympathise a little with my unfortunate country, Miss Van Teyl, and yet remain a good American. You are not angry with me?"

"I suppose I ought to be, but I am not in the least," she assured him.
"I never had any doubt as to the destination of that packet."

"That," he admitted, "is a relief to me. Let us wipe the matter from our memories, Miss Van Teyl."

"One word," she begged, "and that only of curiosity. Did you examine the contents of the pocketbook?"

He turned his head and looked at her. For a moment he had lost the greater

spontaneity of his new self. He was again the cold, calculating machine.

"No," he answered, "except to take out and destroy what seemed to be a few private memoranda. There was a bill for flowers, a note from a young lady—some rubbish of that sort. The remaining papers were all calculations and figures, chemical formulae."

"Are you a chemist, Mr. Fischer?" she inquired.

"Not in the least," he acknowledged. "I recognised just enough of the formulae on the last page to realise that there were entirely new elements being dealt with."

She nodded.

"I only asked out of curiosity. I agree. Let us put it out of our thoughts. You see, I am generous. We have fought a battle, you and I, and I have lost. Yet we remain friends."

"It is more than your friendship that I want, Miss Van Teyl," he pleaded, his voice shaking a little. "I am years older than you, I know, and, by your standards, I fear unattractive. But you love power, and I have it. I will take you into my schemes. I will show you how those live who stand behind the clouds and wield the thunders."

She looked at him with genuine surprise. It was necessary to readjust some of her impressions of him. Oscar Fischer was, after all, a human being.

"What you say is all very well so far as it goes," she told him. "I admit that a life of scheming and adventure attracts me. I love power. I can think of nothing more wonderful than to feel the machinery of the world—the political world—roar or die away, according to the touch of one's fingers. Oh, yes, we're alike so far as that is concerned! But there is a very vital difference. You are only an American by accident. I am one by descent. For me there doesn't exist any other country. For you Germany comes first."

"But can't you realise," he went on eagerly, "that even this is for the best? America to-day is hypnotised by a maudlin, sentimental affection for England, a country from whom she never received anything but harm. We want to change that. We want to kill for ever the misunderstandings between the two greatest

nations in the world. My creed of life could be yours, too, without a single lapse from your patriotism. Friendship, alliance, brotherhood, between Germany and America. That would be my text."

"Shall I be perfectly frank?" Pamela asked.

"Nothing else is worth while," was the instant answer.

"Well, then," she continued, "I can quite see that Germany has everything to gain from America's friendship, but I cannot see the quid pro quo."

"And yet it is so clear," Fischer insisted. "Your own cloud may not be very large just now, but it is growing, and, before you know it, it will be upon you. Can you not realise why Japan is keeping out of this war? She is conserving her strength. Millions flow into her coffers week by week. In a few years time, Japan, for the first time in her history, will know what it is to possess solid wealth. What does she want it for, do you think? She has no dreams of European aggression, or her soldiers would be fighting there now. China is hers for the taking, a rich prize ready to fall into her mouth at any moment. But the end and aim of all Japanese policy, the secret Mecca of her desires, is to repay with the sword the insults your country has heaped upon her. It is for that, believe me, that her arsenals are working night and day, her soldiers are training, her fleet is in reserve. While you haggle about a few volunteers, Japan is strengthening and perfecting a mighty army for one purpose and one purpose only. Unless you wake up, you will be in the position that Great Britain was in two years ago. Even now, work though you may, you will never wholly make up for lost time. The one chance for you is friendship with Germany."

"Will Germany be in a position to help us after the war?" Pamela asked.

"Never doubt it," Fischer replied vehemently. "Before peace is signed the sea power of England will be broken. Financially she will be ruined. She is a country without economic science, without foresight, without statesmen. The days of her golden opportunities have passed, frittered away. Unless we of our great pity bind up her wounds, England will bleed to death before the war is over."

"That, you must remember," Pamela said practically, "is your point of view."

"I could tell you things—" he began.

"Don't," she begged. "I know what your outlook is now. Be definite. Leaving aside that other matter, what is your proposition to me?"

Fischer walked for a while in silence. They had turned back some time since, and were once more nearing the Plaza.

"You ask me to leave out what is most vital," he said at last. "I have never been married, Miss Van Teyl. I am wealthy. I am promised great honours at the end of this war. When that comes, I shall rest. If you will be my wife, you can choose your home, you can choose your title."

She shook her head.

"But I am not sure that I even like you, Mr. Fischer," she objected. "We have fought in opposite camps, and you have had the bad taste to be victorious. Besides which, you were perfectly brutal to James, and I am not at all sure that I don't resent your bargain with me. As a matter of fact, I am feeling very bitter towards you."

"You should not," he remonstrated earnestly. "Remember that, after all, women are only dabblers in diplomacy. Their very physique prevents them from playing the final game. You have brains, of course, but there are other things—experience, courage, resource. You would be a wonderful helpmate, Miss Van Teyl, even if your individual and unaided efforts have not been entirely successful."

She sighed. Pamela just then was a picture of engaging humility.

"It is so hard for me," she murmured, "I do not want to marry yet. I do not wish to think of it. And so far as you are concerned, Mr. Fischer—well, I am simply furious when I think of your attitude last night. But I love adventures."

"I will promise you all the adventures that can be crammed into your life," he urged.

"But be more definite," she persisted. "Where should we start? You are over here now on some important mission. Tell me more about it?"

"I cannot just yet," he answered. "All that I can promise you is that, if I am successful, it will stop the war just as surely as Captain Graham's new

explosive."

"I thought you were going to make a confidante of me," she complained.

He suddenly gripped her arm. It was the first time he had touched her, and she felt a queer surging of the blood to her head, a sudden and almost uncontrollable repulsion. The touch of his long fingers was like flame; his eyes, behind their sheltering spectacles, glowed in a curious, disconcerting fashion.

"To the woman who was my pledged wife," he said, "I would tell everything. From the woman who gave me her hand and became my ally I would have no secrets. Come, I have a message, more than a message, to the American people. I am taking it to Washington before many hours have passed. If it is your will, it should be you to whom I will deliver it."

Pamela walked on with her head in the air. Fischer was leaning a little towards her. Every now and then his mouth twitched slightly. His eyes seemed to be seeking to reach the back of her brain.

"Please go now," she begged. "I can't think clearly while you are here, and I want to make up my mind. I will send to you when I am ready."

CHAPTER XVII

Pamela sat that afternoon on the balcony of the country club at Baltusrol and approved of her surroundings. Below her stretched a pleasant vista of rolling greensward, dotted here and there with the figures of the golfers. Beyond, the misty blue background of rising hills.

"I can't tell you how peaceful this all seems, Jimmy," she said to her brother, who had brought her out in his automobile. "One doesn't notice the air of strain over on the Continent, because it's the same everywhere, but it gets a little on one's nerves, all the same. I positively love it here."

"It's fine to have you," was the hearty response. "Gee, that fellow coming to the sixteenth hole can play some!"

Pamela directed her attention idly towards the figure which her brother indicated —a man in light tweeds, who played with an easy and graceful swing, and with the air of one to whom the game presented no difficulties whatever. She watched him drive for the seventeenth—a long, raking ball, fully fifty yards further than his opponent's— watched him play a perfect mashie shot to the green and hole out in three.

"A birdie," James Van Teyl murmured. "I say, Pamela!"

She took no notice. Her eyes were still following the figure of the golfer. She watched him drive at the last hole, play a chip shot on to the green, and hit the hole for a three. The frown deepened upon her forehead. She was looking very uncompromising when the two men ascended the steps.

"I didn't know, Mr. Lutchester, that there were any factories down this way," she remarked severely, as he paused before her in surprise.

For a single moment she fancied that she saw a flash of annoyance in his eyes. It was gone so swiftly, however, that she remained uncertain. He held out his hand, laughing.

"Fairly caught out, Miss Van Teyl," he confessed. "You see, I was tempted, and I fell."

His companion, an elderly, clean-shaven man, passed on. Pamela glanced after him.

"Who is your opponent?" she asked.

"Just some one I picked up on the tee," Lutchester explained. "How is our friend Fischer this morning?"

"I walked with him for an hour in the Park," Pamela replied. "He seemed quite cheerful. I have scarcely thanked you yet for returning the pocketbook, have I?"

His face was inscrutable.

"Couldn't keep a thing that didn't belong to me, could I?" he observed.

"You have a marvellous gift for discovering lost property," she murmured.

"For discovering the owners, you mean," he retorted, with a little bow.

"You're some golfer, I see, Mr. Lutchester," Van Teyl interposed.

"I was on my game to-day," Lutchester admitted. "With a little luck at the seventh," he continued earnestly, "I might have tied the amateur record. You see, my ball—but there, I mustn't bore you now. I must look after my opponent and stand him a drink. We shall meet again, I daresay."

Lutchester passed on, and Pamela glanced up at her brother.

"Is he a sphinx or a fool?" she whispered.

"Don't ask me," Van Teyl replied. "Seems to me you were a bit rough on him, anyway. I don't see why the fellow shouldn't have a day's holiday before he gets to work. If I had his swing, it would interfere with my career, I know that, well

enough."

"Did you recognise the man with whom he was playing?" Pamela inquired.

"Can't say that I did. His face seems familiar, too."

"Go and see if you can find out his name," Pamela begged. "It isn't ordinary curiosity. I really want to know."

"That's easy enough," Van Teyl replied, rising from his place. "And I'll order tea at the same time."

Pamela leaned a little further back in her chair. Her eyes seemed to be fixed upon the pleasant prospect of wooded slopes and green, upward-stretching sward. As a matter of fact, she saw only two faces— Fischer's and Lutchester's. Her chief impulse in life for the immediate present seemed to have resolved itself into a fierce, almost a passionate curiosity. It was the riddle of those two brains which she was so anxious to solve. … Fischer, the cold, subtle intriguer, with schemes at the back of his mind which she knew quite well that, even in the moment of his weakness, he intended to keep to himself; and Lutchester, with his almost cynical devotion to pleasure, yet with his unaccountable habit of suggesting a strength and qualities to which he neither laid nor established any claim. Of the two men it was Lutchester who piqued her, with whom she would have found more pleasure in the battle of wits. She found herself alternately furious and puzzled with him, yet her uneasiness concerning him possessed more disquieting, more fascinating possibilities than any of the emotions inspired by the other man.

Van Teyl returned to her presently, a little impressed.

"Thought I knew that chap's face," he observed. "It's Eli Hamblin— Senator Hamblin, you know."

"A friend and confidant of the President," she murmured. "A Westerner, too. I wonder what he's doing here … Jimmy!"

"Hallo, Sis?"

"You've just got to be a dear," Pamela begged. "Go to the caddy master, or professional, or some one, and find out whether Mr. Lutchester met him here by

accident or whether they arrived together."

"You'll turn me into a regular sleuthhound," he laughed. "However, here goes."

He strolled off again, and Pamela found herself forced to become mundane and frivolous whilst she chatted with some newly-arrived acquaintances. It was not until some little time after her brother's return that she found herself alone with him.

"Well?" she asked eagerly.

"They arrived within a few minutes of one another," Van Teyl announced. "Senator Hamblin bought a couple of new balls and made some inquiries about the course, but said nothing about playing. Lutchester, who appears not to have known him, came up later and asked him if he'd like a game. That's all I could find out."

Pamela pointed to a little cloud of dust in the distance.

"And there they go," she observed, "together."

Van Teyl threw himself into a chair and accepted the cup of tea which his sister handed him.

"Well," he inquired, "what do you make of it?"

"There's more in that question than you think, James," Pamela replied. "All the same, I think I shall be able to answer it in a few days."

Another little crowd of acquaintances discovered them, and Pamela was soon surrounded by a fresh group of admirers. They all went out presently to inspect the new tennis courts. Pamela and her brother were beset with invitations.

"You positively must stay down and dine with us, and go home by moonlight," Mrs. Saunders, a lively young matron with a large country house close by, insisted. "Jimmy's neglected me terribly these last few months, and as for you, Pamela, I haven't seen you for a year."

"I'd love to if we can," Pamela assured her, "but Jimmy will have to telephone first."

"Then do be quick about it," Mrs. Saunders begged, "It doesn't matter a bit about clothes. We've twenty people staying in the house now, and half of us won't change, if that makes you more comfortable. Jimmy, if you fail at that telephone I'll never forgive you."

But Van Teyl, who had caught the little motion of his sister's head towards the city, proved equal to the occasion. He returned presently, driving the car.

"Got to go," he announced as he made his farewells. "Can't be helped, Pamela. Frightfully sorry, Mrs. Saunders, we are wanted up in New York."

Pamela sighed.

"I was so afraid of it," she regretted as she waved her adieux. . . . .

An hour or so later the city broke before them in murky waves. Pamela, who had been leaning back in the car, deep in thought, sat up.

"You are a perfect dear, James," she said. "Do you think you could stand having Mr. Fischer to dinner one evening this week?"

"Sure!" he replied, a little curiously. "If you want to keep friends with him for any reason, I don't bear him any ill-will."

"I just want to talk to him," Pamela murmured, "that's all."

CHAPTER XVIII

There was a ripple of interest and a good deal of curiosity that afternoon, in the lounge and entrance hall of the Hotel Plaza, when a tall, grey-moustached gentleman of military bearing descended from the automobile which had brought him from the station, and handed in his name at the desk, inquiring for Mr. Fischer.

"Will you send my name up—the Baron von Schwerin," he directed.

The clerk, who had recognised the newcomer, took him under his personal care.

"Mr. Fischer is up in his rooms, expecting you, Baron," he announced. "If you'll come this way, I'll take you up."

The Baron followed his guide to the lift and along the corridor to the suite of rooms occupied by Mr. Fischer and his young friend, James Van Teyl. Mr. Fischer himself opened the door. The two men clasped hands cordially, and the clerk discreetly withdrew.

"Back with us once more, Fischer," Von Schwerin exclaimed fervently. "You are wonderful. Tell me," he added, looking around, "we are to be alone here?"

"Absolutely," Fischer replied. "The young man I share these apartments with—James Van Teyl—has taken his sister out to Baltusrol. They will not be back until seven o'clock. We are sure of solitude."

"Good!" Von Schwerin exclaimed. "And you have news—I can see it in your face."

Fischer rolled up easy chairs and produced a box of cigars.

"Yes," he assented, with a little glitter in his eyes, "I have news. Things have moved with me. I think that, with the help of an idiotic Englishman, we shall solve the riddle of what our professors have called the consuming explosive. I sent the formula home to Germany, by a trusty hand, only a few hours ago."

"Capital!" Von Schwerin declared. "It was arranged in London, that?"

"Partly in London and partly here," Fischer replied.

Von Schwerin made a grimace.

"If you can find those who are willing to help you here, you are fortunate indeed," he sighed. "My life's work has lain amongst these people. In the days of peace, all seemed favourable to us. Since the war, even those people whom I thought my friends seem to have lost their heads, to have lost their reasoning powers."

"After all," Fischer muttered, "it is race calling to race. But come, we have more direct business on hand. Nikasti is here."

Von Schwerin nodded a little gloomily.

"Washington knows nothing of his coming," he observed. "I attended the Baron Yung's reception last week, informally. I threw out very broad hints, but Yung would not be drawn. Nikasti represents the Secret Service of Japan, unofficially and without responsibility."

"Nevertheless," Fischer pointed out, "what he says will reach the ear of his country, and reach it quickly. You've gone through the papers I sent you?"

"Carefully," Von Schwerin replied. "And the autograph letter?"

"That I have," Fischer announced. "I will fetch Nikasti."

He crossed the room and opened the door leading into the bedchambers.

"Are you there, Kato?" he cried.

"I am coming, sir," was the instant reply.

Nikasti appeared, a few moments later. He was carrying a dress coat on his arm, and he held a clothes brush in his hand. It was obvious that he had studied with nice care the details of his new part.

"You can sit down, Nikasti," Fischer invited. "This is the Baron von Schwerin. He has something to say to you."

Nikasti bowed very low. He declined the chair, however, to which Fischer pointed.

"I am your valet and the valet of Mr. Van Teyl," he murmured. "It is not fitting for me to be seated. I listen."

Von Schwerin drew his chair a little nearer.

"I plunge at once," he said, "into the middle of things. There is always the fear that we may be disturbed."

Nikasti inclined his head.

"It is best," he agreed.

"You are aware," Von Schwerin continued, "that the Imperial Government of Germany has already made formal overtures, through a third party, to the Emperor of Japan with reference to an alteration in our relations?"

"There was talk of this in Tokio," Nikasti observed softly. "Japan, however, is under obligations—treaty obligations. Her honour demands that these should be kept."

"The honour of a country," Baron von Schwerin acknowledged, "is, without doubt, a sacred charge upon her rulers, but above all things in heaven or on earth, the interests of her people must be their first consideration. If a time should come when the two might seem to clash, then it is the task of the statesman to recognise this fact."

Nikasti bowed.

"It is spoken," he confessed, "like a great man."

"Your country," Von Schwerin continued, "is at war with mine because it seemed to her rulers that her interests lay with the Allies rather than with Germany. I will admit that my country was at fault. We did not recognise to its full extent the value of friendship with Japan. We did not bid high enough for your favours. Asia concerned us very little. We looked upon the destruction of our interests there in the same spirit as that with which we contemplated the loss of our colonies. All that might happen would be temporary. Our influence in Asia, our colonies, will remain with us or perish, according to the result of the war in Europe. But our statesmen overlooked one thing."

"Our factories," Nikasti murmured.

"Precisely! We have had our agents all over the world for years. Some are good, a few are easily deceived. There is no country in the world where apparently so much liberty is granted to foreigners as in Japan. There is no country where the capacity for manufacture and output has been so grossly underestimated by our agents, as yours."

Nikasti smiled.

"I had something to do with that," he announced. "It was Karl Neumann, was it not, on whom you relied? I supplied him with much information."

Von Schwerin's face clouded for a moment.

"You mean that you fooled him, I suppose," he said. "Well, it is all part of the game. That is over now. We want your exports to Russia stopped."

"Ah!" Nikasti murmured reflectively. "Stopped!"

"We ask no favours," Von Schwerin continued. "The issue of the war is written across the face of the skies for those who care to read."

Nikasti looked downwards at the dress coat which he was carrying. Then he glanced up at Von Schwerin.

"Perhaps our eyes have been dazzled," he said. "Will you not interpret?"

"The end of the war will be a peace of exhaustion," Von Schwerin explained. "Our loftier dreams of conquest we must abandon. Germany has played her part,

but Austria, alas! has failed. Peace will leave us all very much where we were. Very well, then, I ask you, what has Japan gained? You answer China? I deny it. Yet even if it were true, it will take you five hundred years to make a great country of China. Suppose for a moment you had been on the other side. What about Australia?… New Zealand?"

"Are those things under present consideration?" Nikasti queried.

"Why not?" Von Schwerin replied. "Listen. Close your exports to Russia within the next thirty days. Build up for yourselves a stock of ammunition, add to your fleet, and prepare. Within a year of the cessation of war, there is no reason why your national dream should not be realised. Your fleet may sail for San Francisco. The German fleet shall make a simultaneous attack upon the eastern coast of Massachusetts and New York."

"The German fleet," Nikasti repeated. "And England?"

Von Schwerin's eyes flashed for a moment.

"If the English fleet is still in being," he declared, "it will be a crippled and defeated fleet, but, for the sake of your point of view, I will assume that it exists. Even then there will be nothing to prevent the German fleet from steaming in what waters it pleases. If our shells fall upon New York on the day when your warships are sighted off the Californian coast, do you suppose that America could resist? With her seaboard, her fleet is contemptible. For her wealth, her army is a farce. She has neglected for a great many years to pay her national insurance. She is the one country in the world who can be bled for the price of empires."

Fischer, who had been smoking furiously, spat out the end of a fresh cigar.

"It will be a just retribution," he interposed, with smothered fierceness. "Under the guise of neutrality, America has been responsible for the lives of hundreds of thousands of my countrymen. That we never can, we never shall, forget. The wealth which makes these people fat is blood-money, and Germany will take her vengeance."

"For whom do you speak?" Nikasti inquired.

Von Schwerin rose from his place.

"For the greatest of all."

"Do I take anything but words to Tokio?" the Japanese asked softly.

Fischer unfolded a pocketbook and drew from it a parchment envelope.

"You take this letter," he said, "which I brought over myself from Berlin, signed and written not more than three weeks ago. I ask you to believe in no vague promises. I bring you the pledged faith of the greatest ruler on earth. What do you say, Nikasti? Will you accept our mission? Will you go back to Tokio and see the Emperor?"

Nikasti bowed.

"I will go back," he promised. "I will sail as soon as I can make arrangements. But I cannot tell you what the issue may be. We Japanese are not a self-seeking nation. Above and higher than all things are our ideals and our honour. I cannot tell what answer our Sovereign may give to this."

"These are the days when the truest patriotism demands the most sublime sacrifices," Von Schwerin declared. "Above all the ethics of individuals comes the supreme necessity of self-preservation."

The Japanese smiled slightly.

"Ah!" he said, "there speaks the philosophy of your country, Baron, the paean of materialism."

"The destinies of nations," Baron von Schwerin exclaimed, "are above the man-made laws of a sentimental religion! One needs, nowadays, more than to survive. It is necessary to flourish."

Nikasti stood suddenly to attention.

"It is Mr. Van Teyl who returns," he warned them.

He glided from the room, shaking out a little the dress coat which he had been carrying. The two men looked after him. Fischer threw his cigar savagely away and lit another.

"Curse these orientals!" he muttered. "They listen and listen, and one never knows. Van Teyl won't be here for hours. That was just an excuse to get away."

But there was a smile of triumph on Von Schwerin's lips.

"I know them better than you do, Fischer," he declared. "Nikasti is our man!"

CHAPTER XIX

High up in one of the topmost chambers of the Hotel Plaza, Nikasti, after his conference with Von Schwerin and Fischer, sought solitude. He opened the high windows, out of which he could scarcely see, dragged up a chest of drawers and perched himself, Oriental fashion, on the top, his long yellow fingers intertwined around his knees, his soft brown eyes gazing over the wooded slopes of the Park. He was away from the clamour of tongues, from the poisoned clouds of sophistry, even from the disturbance of his own thoughts, incited by specious arguments to some form of reciprocity. Here he sat in the clouds and searched for the true things. His eyes seemed to be travelling over the battlefields of Europe. He saw the swaying fortunes of mighty armies, he looked into council chambers, he seemed to feel the pulses of the great world force which kept going this most amazing Juggernaut. He saw the furnaces of Japan, blazing by night and day; saw the forms of hundreds of thousands of his fellow creatures bent to their task; saw the streams of ships leaving his ports, laden down with stores; saw the great guns speeding across Siberia, the endless trains of ammunition, the rifles, food for the famine-stricken giants who beat upon the air with empty fists. He saw the gold come streaming back. He saw it poured into the banks, the pockets of the merchants, the homes of his people. He saw brightening days throughout the land. He saw the slow but splendid strength of the nation rejoicing in its new possibilities. And beyond that, what? Wealth was the great means towards the great end, but if the great end were once lost sight of, there was no more hideous poison than that stream of enervating prosperity. He remembered his own diatribes concerning the decadence of England; how he had pointed to the gold poison, to the easy living of the poor, the blatant luxury of the rich. He had pointed to the soft limbs, the cities which had become pools of sensuality, to the daily life which, calling for no effort, had seen the passing of the spirit and the triumph of the gross. And what about his own people? Mankind was the same the world over. The gold which was bringing strength and life to the nation might very soon exude the same poisonous fumes, might

very soon be laying its thrall upon a people to whom living had become an easier thing. However it might be for other, the Western nations, for his own he firmly believed that war alone, with its thousand privations, its call to the chivalry of his people, was the one great safeguard. China! The days had gone by when the taking of China could inspire. It was to greater things they must look. Australia. New Zealand! Had any Western race the right to flaunt her Empire's flag in Asiatic seas? And America! Once again he felt the slow rising of wrath as he recalled the insults of past years … the adventurous sons of his country treated like savages and negroes by that uncultured, strong-limbed race of coarse-fibered, unimaginative materialists. There was a call, indeed, to the soul of his country to avenge, to make safe, the homes and lives of her colonists. Across the seas he looked into the council chambers of the wise men of his race. He saw the men whose word would tell. He watched their faces turned towards him, waiting; heard the beginning of the conflict of thoughts and minds—blind fidelity to the cause which they had espoused, or a rougher, more splendid, more selfish stroke for the greatness of Japan and Japan only. "If we break our faith we lose our honour," one murmured. "There is no honour save the care of my people," he heard one of his greatest countrymen reply.

So he sat and thought, revolved in his mind arguments, morals, philosophy. It was the problem which had confronted the great Emperor, his own ancestor, who had lived for three months on the floor of the Temple, asking but one question of the Silent Powers: "Through what gate shall I lead my nation to greatness?"

The senses of the man who crouched in his curious attitude, with his eyes still piercing the heavens, were mobile and extraordinary things. No disturbing sounds had reached him from outside. His isolation seemed complete and impregnable. Yet, without turning his head, he was perfectly conscious of the slow opening of the door. His whole frame stiffened. He was conscious for one bitter second of a lapse from the careful guarding of his ways. That second passed, however, and left him prepared even for danger, his brain and muscles alike tense. He turned his head. The expression of slow surprise, which even parted his lips and narrowed his eyes, was only half assumed.

"What do you wish?" he asked.

Lutchester did not for a moment reply. He had closed the door behind him carefully, and was looking around the room now with evident interest. Its bareness of furniture and decoration were noteworthy, but on the top of the ugly

chest of drawers was a great bowl of roses, a queer little ivory figure set in an arched frame of copper—a figure almost sacerdotal, with its face turned towards the east—and a little shower of rose leaves, which could scarcely have fallen there by accident, at the foot of the pedestal. Lutchester inclined his head gravely, as he looked towards it, a gesture entirely reverential, almost an obeisance. Nikasti's eyes were clouded with curiosity. He slipped down to the ground.

"I have travelled in your country," Lutchester said gravely, as though in explanation. "I have visited your temples. I may say that I have prayed there."

"And now?" Nikasti asked.

"I am for my country what you are for yours," Lutchester proceeded. "You see, I know when it is best to speak the truth. I am in New York because you are in New York, and if you leave on Saturday for Japan it may happen—of this I am not sure—but I say that it may happen that I shall accompany you."

"I shall be much honoured," Nikasti murmured.

"You came here," Lutchester continued, "to meet an emissary from Berlin. Your country, which could listen to no official word from any one of her official enemies, can yet, through you, learn what is in their minds. You have seen to-day Fischer and the Baron von Schwerin. Fischer has probably presented to you the letter which he has brought from Berlin. Von Schwerin has expounded further the proposition and the price which form part of his offer."

Nikasti's face was imperturbable, but there was trouble in his eyes.

"You have found your way to much knowledge,", he muttered.

"I must find my way to more. I must know what Germany offers you. I must know what is at the back of your mind when you repeat this offer in Tokio."

"You can make, then, the unwilling speak?" Nikasti demanded.

"Even that is amongst the possibilities," Lutchester affirmed. "Strange things have been done for the cause which such as you and I revere."

Nikasti showed his white teeth for a moment in a smile meant to be

contemptuous.

"It is a great riddle, this, which we toss from one to the other," he observed. "I am the simple valet of two gentlemen living in the hotel. You have listened, perhaps, to fairy tales, or dreamed them yourself, sir."

"It is no fairy tale," Lutchester rejoined, "that you are Prince Nikasti, the third son of the great Marquis Ato, that you and I met more than once in London when you were living there some years ago; that you travelled through our country, and drew up so scathing an indictment of our domestic and industrial position that, but for their clumsy diplomacy, your country would probably have made overtures to Germany. Ever since those days I have wondered about you. I have wondered whether you are with your country in her friendship towards England."

"I have no friends but my country's friends," Nikasti declared, "no enemies save her enemies. But to-day those things of which you have spoken do not concern me. I am the Japanese valet of Mr. Fischer and Mr. Van Teyl."

Lutchester, as though by accident, came a step further into the room. Nikasti's eyes never left his face. Perhaps at that moment each knew the other's purpose, though their tongues clung to the other things.

"Will you talk to me, Japan?" Lutchester asked calmly. "You have listened to Germany. I am England."

"If you have anything to say," Nikasti replied, "Baron Yung is at Washington."

"You and I know well," Lutchester continued, "that ambassadors are but the figureheads in the world's history. Speak to me of the things which concern our nations, Nikasti. Tell me of the letter you bear to the Emperor. You have nothing to lose. Sit down and talk to me, man to man. You have heard Germany. Hear England. Tell me of the promises made to you within the last hour, and I will show you how they can never be kept. Let us talk of your country's future. You and I can tell one another much."

"A valet knows nothing," Nikasti murmured.

Lutchester came a step nearer. Nikasti, in retreating, was now almost in a corner

of the room.

"Listen," Lutchester went on, "for many years I have suspected that you are an enemy of my country. That is the reason why, when our Intelligence Department learnt of your mission, I chose to come myself to meet you. And now we meet, Nikasti, face to face, and all that you are willing to do for your country, I am willing to do for mine, and unless you sit down and talk this matter out with me as man to man, you will not leave New York."

The arm of the Japanese stole with the most perfect naturalness inside his coat, and Lutchester knew then that the die was cast. The line of blue steel flashed out too late. The hand which gripped the strangely-shaped little knife was held as though in a vice, and Lutchester's other arm was suddenly thrown around the neck of his assailant, his fingers pressed against his windpipe.

"Drop the knife," he ordered.

It fell clattering on to the hard floor. Nikasti, however, twisted himself almost free, took a flying leap sideways, and seized his adversary's leg. In another moment he came down upon the floor with a crash. Lutchester's grip upon him, a little crueller now, was like a band of steel.

"There are many ways of playing this game. It is you who have chosen this one," he said. "It's no use, Nikasti. I know as much of your own science as you do. You're my man now until I choose to let you free, and before I do that I am going to read the letter which you are taking to Japan."

Nikasti's eyes were red with fury, but every movement was torture. Lutchester held him easily with one hand, felt over him with the other, drew the letter from his vest, and, shaking it free from its envelope, held it out and read it. When he had finished, he replaced it in the envelope and pushed it back into the other's breast pocket.

"Now," he directed, "you can get up."

Nikasti scrambled to his feet. There were livid marks under his eyes. For a moment he had lost all his vitality, he was like a beaten creature.

"You would never have done this," he muttered, "ten years ago, I grow old."

"So that is the letter which you are taking to your Emperor!" Lutchester said. "You think it worth while! You can really see the German fleet steaming past the British Isles, out into the Atlantic, and bombarding New York!"

Nikasti made no reply. Lutchester looked at him for a moment thoughtfully. There was a light once more in the beaten man's eyes—a queer, secretive gleam. Lutchester stooped down and picked up the knife from the floor.

"Nikasti," he enjoined, "listen to me, for your country's sake. The promise contained in that letter is barely worth the paper it is written on, so long as the British fleet remains what it is. But, apart from that, I tell you here, of my own profound conviction—and I will prove it to you before many days are past—Germany does not intend to keep this promise."

Nikasti made no reply. His face was expressionless.

"Germany has but one idea," Lutchester continued. "She means to play you and America off against one another. I have found out her offer to you. All I can say is, if you take it seriously you are not the man I think you. Now I will tell you what I am going to do. I am going to find out her offer to America. I will bring that to you, and you shall see the two side by side. Then you shall know how much you can rely upon a country whose diplomacy is bred and born of lies, who cheats at every move of the game, who makes you a deliberate offer here which she never has the least intention of keeping. Have you anything to say to me, Nikasti?"

Nikasti raised his eyes for one moment.

"I have nothing to say," he replied. "I am the valet of Mr. Fischer and Mr. Van Teyl. These things are not of my concern."

Lutchester shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever you may be," he concluded, "and however much you may resent all that has happened, I know that you will wait. I might go direct to Washington, but I prefer to come to you, if it remains possible. Before you leave this country we will meet again, and, when you have heard me, you will tear that letter which you are treasuring next your heart into small pieces."

Lutchester turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. Nikasti crouched in his place without movement. The ache in his heart seemed to be shining out of his face. He turned slowly towards the little figure of black ivory, his head drooped lower—he was filled with a great shame.

CHAPTER XX

Fischer raised his eyebrows in mild surprise to find Nikasti waiting for him in the sitting room that evening, with his overcoat and evening hat. He closed the door of the bedroom from which he had issued carefully behind him.

"You don't need to go on with this business now that we have had our little talk," he remonstrated.

"I cannot leave until the twentieth," Nikasti replied. "I think it best that I remain here. Your cocktail, sir."

Fischer accepted the glass with a good-humoured little laugh.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you know what you want to do, but it seems to me unnecessary. Say, is anything wrong with you? You seem shaken, somehow."

"I am quite well," Nikasti declared gravely. "I am very well indeed."

Fischer stared at him searchingly from behind his spectacles.

"You don't look it," he observed. "If you'll take my advice, you'll get away from here and rest somewhere quietly for a few days. Why don't you try one of the summer hotels on Long Island?"

Nikasti shook his head.

"Until I sail," he decided, "I stay here. It is better so."

"You know best, of course," Fischer replied. "Where's Mr. Van Teyl?"

"He has gone out with his sister, sir—the young lady in the next suite," Nikasti announced.

Fischer sighed for a moment. Then he finished his cocktail, drew on his gloves, and turned towards the door.

"Well, good night," he said. "Perhaps you are wise to stay here. Remember always what it is that you carry about with you."

"I shall remember," Nikasti promised.

Fischer entered his automobile and drove to a fashionable restaurant in the neighbourhood of Fifth Avenue. Arrived here, he made his way to a room on the first floor, into which he was ushered by one of the head waiters. Von Schwerin was already there, talking with a little company of men.

"Ah, our friend Fischer!" the latter exclaimed. "That makes our number complete."

A waiter handed around cocktails. Fischer smiled as he raised his glass to his lips.

"It is something, at least," he confided, "to be back in a country where one can speak freely. I raise my arm. Von Schwerin and gentlemen—'To the Fatherland!'"

They all drank fervently and with a little guttural murmur. Von Schwerin set down his empty glass. He was looking a little glum.

"In many ways, my dear Fischer," he said, "one sympathises with that speech of yours; but the truth is best, and it is to talk truths that we have met this evening. We are gaining no ground here. I am not sure that we are not losing."

There was a moment's disturbed and agitated silence.

"It is bad to hear," one little man acknowledged, with a sigh, "but who can doubt it? There is a fever which has caught hold of this country, which blazes in the towns and smoulders in the country places, and that is the fever of money-making. Men are blinded with the passion of it. They tell me that even Otto Schmidt in Milwaukee has turned his great factories into ammunition works."

Von Schwerin's eyes flashed.

"Let him be careful," he muttered, "that one morning those are not blackened

walls upon which he looks! We go to dinner now, gentlemen, and, until we are alone afterwards, not one word concerning the great things."

The partition doors leading into the dining room were thrown back and the little company of men sat down to dine. There were fourteen of them, and their names were known throughout the world. There was a steel millionaire, half-a-dozen Wall Street magnates, a clothing manufacturer, whose house in Fifth Avenue was reputed to have cost two millions. There was not one of them who was not a patriot—to Germany. They ate and drank through the courses of an abnormally long dinner with the businesslike thoroughness of their race. When at last the coffee and liqueurs had been served, the waiters by prearrangement disappeared, and with a little flourish Von Schwerin locked the door. Once more he raised his glass.

"To the Kaiser and the Fatherland!" he cried in a voice thick with emotion.

For a moment a little flash of something almost like spirituality lightened the gathering. They were at least men with a purpose, and an unselfish purpose.

"Oscar Fischer," Von Schwerin said, "my friends, all of you, you know how strenuous my labours have been during the last year. You know that three times the English Ambassador has almost demanded my recall, and three times the matter has hung in the balance. I have watched events in Washington, not through my own but through a thousand eyes. My fingers are on the pulse of the country, so what I say to you needs nothing in the way of substantiation. The truth is best. Notwithstanding all my efforts, and the efforts of every one of you, the great momentum of public feeling, from California to Massachusetts, has turned slowly towards the cause of our enemies. Washington is hopelessly against us. The huge supplies which leave these shores day by day for England and France will continue. Fresh plants are being laid down for the manufacture of weapons and ammunition to be used against our country. The hand of diplomacy is powerless. We can struggle no longer. Even those who favour our cause are drunk with the joy of the golden harvest they are reaping. This country has spoken once and for all, and its voice is for our most hated enemy."

There were a variety of guttural and sympathetic ejaculations. A dozen earnest faces turned towards Von Schwerin.

"Diplomacy," Von Schwerin continued, "has failed. We come to the next step.

There have been isolated acts of self-sacrifice, splendid in themselves but systemless. Only the day before yesterday a great factory at Detroit was burned to the ground, and I can assure you, gentlemen, I who know, that a thousand bales of cloth, destined for France, lie in a charred, heap amongst the ruins. That fire was no accident."

There was a brief silence. Fischer nodded approvingly. Von Schwerin filled his glass.

"This," he went on, "was the individual act of a brave and faithful patriot. The time has come for us, too, to remember that we are at war. I have striven for you with the weapons of diplomacy and I have failed. I ask you now to face the situation with me—to make use of the only means left to us."

No one hesitated. Possibly ruin stared them in the face, but not one flinched. Their heads drew closer together. They discussed the ways and means of the new campaign.

"We must add largely to our numbers," Von Schwerin said, "and we had better have a fund. So far as regards money, I take it for granted—"

There was a little chorus of fierce whispers. Five million dollars were subscribed by men who were willing, if necessary, to find fifty.

"It is enough," their leader assured them. "Much of our labours will be amongst those to whom money is no object. Only remember, all of you, this. We shall be a society without a written word, with no roll of membership, without documents or institution, for complicity in the things which follow will mean ruin. You are willing to face that?"

Again that strange, passionate instinct of unanimity prevailed. To all appearance it was a gathering of commonplace, commercialised and bourgeois, easy-living men, but the touch of the spirit was there. Fischer leaned a little forward.

"In two months' time," he said, "every factory in America which is earning its blood money shall be in danger. There will be a reign of terror. Each State will operate independently and secretly."

"Our friend Fischer," Von Schwerin told them, "has promised to stay over here for the present to organise this undertaking. I, alas! am bound to remain always a

little aloof, but the time may come, and very soon, too, when I shall be a free lance. On that day I shall throw my lot in with yours, to the last drop of my blood and the last hour of my liberty. Until then, trust Oscar Fischer. He has done great deeds already. He will show you the way to more."

Fischer took off his spectacles and wiped them.

"Our first proceeding," he said, "sounds paradoxical. It must be that we cease to exist. There can be no longer any meetings amongst us who stand in this country for Germany. Gatherings of this sort are finished. We meet, one or two of us, perhaps, by accident, in the clubs and in the streets, in our houses and perhaps in the restaurants, but the bond which unites us, and which no human power could ever sever because it is of the spirit, that bond from to-night is intangible. Wait, all of you, for a message. The task given to each shall not be too great."

Mr. Max H. Bookam, a little black-bearded man who had started life tailoring in a garret, and was now a multi-millionaire, raised his glass.

"No task shall seem too great," he muttered. "No risk shall make us afraid. Even the exile shall take up his burden."

CHAPTER XXI

Mr. Fischer's business later on that night led him into unsavoury parts. He left his car at the corner of Fourteenth Street, and, after a moment's reflection, as though to refresh his memory, he made his way slowly eastwards. He wore an unusually shabby overcoat, and a felt hat drawn over his eyes, both of which garments he had concealed in the automobile. Even then, however, his appearance made him an object of some comment. A little gang of toughs first jostled him and then turned and followed in his footsteps. A man came out of the shadows, and they broke away with an oath.

"That cop'll get his head broke some day," Fischer heard one of them mutter, with appropriate adjectives.

There were others who looked curiously at him. One man's hand he felt running over his pockets as he pushed past him. A couple of women came screaming down the street and seized him by the arms. He shook himself free, and listened without a word to their torrent of abuse. The lights here seemed to burn more dimly. Even the flares from the drinking dens seemed secretive, and the shadowy places impenetrable. It was before a saloon that at last he paused, listened for a moment to the sound of a cracked piano inside, and entered. The place was packed, and, fortunately for him, a scrap of some interest between two villainous-looking Italians in a distant corner was occupying the attention of many of the patrons. A man with white, staring face was banging at a crazy piano without a movement of his body, his whole energies apparently directed towards drowning the tumult of oaths and hideous execrations which came from the two combatants. A drunken Irishman, rolling about on the floor, kicked at him savagely as he passed. An undersized little creature, with the face of an old man but the figure of a boy, marked him from a distant corner and crept stealthily towards his side. Fischer reached the counter at last and stood there for a moment, waiting. Two huge, rough-looking negroes, in soiled linen clothes, were dispensing the drinks. As one of them passed, Fischer struck the counter

with his forefinger, six or seven times, observing a particular rhythm. The negro started, turned his heavily-lidded, repulsive eyes upon Fischer, and nodded slightly. He handed out the drink he had in his hand, and leaned over the counter.

"Want the boss?" he demanded.

Fischer assented. The negro lifted the flap of the counter and opened a trapdoor, leading apparently into a cellar beneath.

"Step right down," he muttered. "Don't let the boys catch on. Get out of that, Tim," he added thickly to the dwarflike figure, whose slender fingers were suddenly nearing Fischer's neck.

The creature seemed to melt away. Fischer dived and descended a dozen steps or so into another bare looking apartment, the door of which was half open. There were three men seated at the solitary deal table, which was almost the only article of furniture to be seen. One, sombrely dressed in legal black, with a pale face and fiercely inquiring eyes, half rose to his feet as the newcomer entered. Another's hand went to his hip pocket. The man who was sitting between the two, however—a great red-headed Irishman—rose to his feet and pushed them back to their places.

"There's no cause for alarm, now, boys," he declared. "This is a friend of mine. I won't make you acquainted, because we're all better friends strangers down in these parts. Hop it off, you two. Sit down here, Mr. Stranger."

The two men stole away. The Irishman poured out a glassful of neat whisky and passed it to his visitor.

"Clients of mine," he explained. "Tim Crooks is in politics. Got your message, boss. What's the figure?"

"Two thousand!"

The Irishman whistled and looked thoughtfully down at the table.

"Isn't it enough?" Fischer asked.

"Enough?" was the hoarse reply. "Why, there isn't one of my toughs that wouldn't go rat-hunting for a quarter of that. If it's any one in these parts, twelve

hours is all I want."

"It isn't!"

The Irishman's face fell.

"Some swell, I suppose? Fifth Avenue way and the swagger parts, eh?"

Fischer assented silently. His host poured himself out some whisky and drank it as though it were water.

"You see, boss," he pointed out, "it's no use sending greenhorns out on a job like that, because they only squeak if they're pinched, and pinched they're sure to be; and all my regulars are what we call in sanctuary."

"You mean they are hiding already?"

"That's some truth," was the grim admission. "The cops ain't going to trouble to come after 'em, so long as they keep here, but they'd nab 'em fast enough if they showed their noses beyond the end of Fourteenth. Still, I'd like to oblige you, guv'nor. I don't know who you are, and don't want, but my boys speak fine of you. You know Ed Swindles?"

"Not by name," Fischer confessed.

"He did that little job up at Detroit," the Irishman went on, dropping his voice a little. "I tell you he's a genius at handling a bomb, is Ed. Blew that old factory into brick-ends, he did. He's in the saloon upstairs—got his girl with him. They've been doing a round of the dancing saloons."

"That's all right, but what about this job?" Fischer inquired, a little impatiently.

The Irishman glanced behind him. Then he dropped his voice a little.

"Look here, guv'nor," he said, "I've some idea, if it pans out. You've heard of the Heste case?"

"You mean the girl who was murdered?"

"Yes! Well, the chap that did it is within a few feet of where we're sitting."

Fischer took off his spectacles and rubbed them. In the dim light his face looked more grim and powerful than ever.

"Isn't that a little dangerous?" he observed. "The police mean having him."

"You're dead right," the Irishman replied. "They've got to have him, and he knows it. They'd keep their hands off any one in these parts if they could, but this bloke's different. He done it too thick, and he's got the public squealing. Now if we could get him out for long enough, he's the man for your job. Come right along, boss."

He rose heavily to his feet, crossed the room, and threw open the door of what was little more than a cupboard at the further end. The place was in darkness, but a human form sprang suddenly upright. His white face and glaring eyes were the only visible objects in a shroud of darkness.

"That's all right, kid," the Irishman said soothingly. "No cops yet.
This is a gentleman on business. Wait till I fix a light."

He stepped back, and brought a candle from the table at which he had been seated. Fischer helped him light it, and by degrees the interior of the little apartment was illuminated. Its contents were almost negligible—there was simply a foul piece of rug in the corner, and a broken chair. With his back to the wall crouched a slim, apparently young man, with a perfectly bloodless face and black eyes under which were blue lines. His clothes were torn and covered with dust, as though he had dragged himself about the floor, and one of his hands was bleeding.

"The gentleman's on business, Jake," his host repeated.

"Give me some whisky," the young man mumbled.

The Irishman shaded his eyes.

"Holy Moses! why, you've finished that bottle!" he exclaimed.

"It's like water," the fugitive replied in a hot whisper, "I drink and I feel nothing; I taste nothing—I forget nothing! Give me something stronger."

He tossed off without hesitation the tumbler half full of whisky which his

guardian fetched him. Then he came out.

"I'm sick of this," he declared. "I'll sit at your table. It's no use talking to me of jobs," he went on. "I couldn't get out of here. I made for the docks, but they headed me off. They know where I am. They'll have me sooner or later."

"Yes, they'll have you right enough," the Irishman assented; "but if there was any chance in the world, this gent could give it to you. He's got a job he wants done up amongst the swells in Fifth Avenue, and there's money enough in it to buy Anna herself, if you want her. Anna's our real toff down here," he explained, turning to Fischer, "and all the boys are crazy about her."

Jake shook his head, unimpressed. He fixed his eyes upon Fischer, moistened his lips a little, and spoke in a sort of croaky whisper.

"Money's no use to me," he said, "nor women either—I'm through with them. You know what I done? I killed my girl. That's what I'm going to the chair for. But if I could get out of this, I'd do your job. I'm kind of hating people. I can't get my girl's face out of my mind. Perhaps if I did your job I'd have another one to think about."

"Pleasant company, ain't he?" the Irishman grunted. "He's the real goods."

Fischer stared at the young man as though fascinated. He seemed beyond and outside human comprehension. Their host was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his feet on another chair. The braces hung from his shoulders upon the floor, his collarless shirt had fallen a little open. His face, with its little tuft of red side whiskers and unshaven chin, was reminiscent of the forests.

"If you want this job fixed, Mr. Stranger," he said, "I don't know as Jake here couldn't take it on. It'd have to be done like this. Jake's a real toney chauffeur—drive anything. If you had your automobile at a spot I could tell you of one evening, just at dusk, I might get him that far, in a set of chauffeur's clothes. Once on the box of your auto, he'd be out of this and could give 'em the slip for a bit. It's the only way I can think of, to get him near the game."

"The arrangement would suit me," Fischer admitted.

Jake suddenly showed a gleaming set of unexpectedly white teeth. His eyes stared more than ever.

"I'm game! I'm on to this," he cried fiercely. "You can have all there is coming to me, Sullivan, if I get nabbed, but I'm going to take my risk. I hate this hole! It's a rat's den."

"Then get you back to your cupboard, Jake," the Irishman enjoined.
"I've got to talk business to the gent."

The young man rose to his feet. He took the bottle of whisky under his arm. His face was still ashen, but his tone was steady. He gripped Fischer by the arm.

"I will do your job," he promised. "I will do it thoroughly."

He slouched across the floor, entered his cupboard, and disappeared. Fischer was suddenly aware of the moisture upon his forehead. There was something animallike, absolutely inhuman, about this creature with whom he had made his murderous bargain.

"I have no money here, of course," he reminded his companion.

"Don't know as I blame you, guv'nor," the other observed with a grin. "I saw my toughs lay out a guy only the other day for flashing a smaller wad than you'd carry. You know the rules, and I guess I'll ring up the bank to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock. Does that go?"

"You'll find the deposit there," Fischer promised. "You'd better let me know when he's ready to take the job on."

The Irishman walked to the foot of the steps with his visitor.

"Give Joe the double knock on the trapdoor," he directed, "and get out of the saloon as quick as you can. There's a Dago about there keeps our hands full. Got anything with you?"

Fischer nodded. His hand stole out of his overcoat pocket.

"Better give them one if they look like trouble," his host advised. "They've plenty of spunk, but I can tell you they make tracks for their holes if they hear one of those things bark."

"They shall hear it fast enough, if they try to hustle me," Fischer observed grimly.

"You've some pluck," the Irishman declared, as he watched his departing guest ascend the steps. "Sure, this is no place for cowards, anyway. And good night and good luck to you! Jake will do your job slick, if any one could."

Fischer beat his little tattoo upon the trapdoor, crawled through it and underneath the flap in the counter, out into the saloon. He paused for a moment to look around, on his way to the door. The fight was apparently over, for every one was standing at the counter, drinking with a swarthy-faced man whose cheeks were stained with blood. From a distant corner came the sound of groans. The air seemed heavier than ever with foul tobacco smoke. The man at the piano still thrashed out his unmelodious chords. Some women in a corner were pretending to dance. One or two of them looked curiously at Fischer, but he passed out, unchallenged. Even the air of the slum outside seemed pure and fresh after the heated den he had left. He reached the corner of the street in safety and stepped quickly into his car. He threw both windows wide open and murmured an order to the chauffeur. Then he leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment. He was a man not overburdened with imagination, but it seemed to him just then that he would never be able altogether to forget the face of that ghastly, dehumanised creature, crouching like some terrified wild animal in his fetid refuge.

CHAPTER XXII

Mrs. Theodore Hastings was forty-eight years old, which her friends said was the reason why her mansion on Fifth Avenue was furnished and lit with the delicate sombreness of an old Italian palace. There was about it none of the garishness, the almost resplendent brilliancy associated with the abodes of many of our neighbours. Although her masseuse confidently assured her that she looked twenty-eight, Mrs. Hastings preferred not to put the matter to the test. She received her carefully selected dinner guests in a great library with cedarwood walls, furnished with almost Victorian sobriety, and illuminated by myriads of hidden lights. Pamela, being a relative, received the special consideration of an affectionately bestowed embrace.

"Pamela, my child, wasn't it splendid I heard that you were in New York!" she exclaimed. "Quite by accident, too. I think you treat your relatives shamefully."

Her niece laughed.

"Well, anyhow, you're the first of them I've seen at all, and directly Jim told me he was coming to you, I made him ring up in case you had room for me."

"Jimmy was a dear," Mrs. Hastings declared, "and, of course, there couldn't be a time when there wouldn't be room for you. Even now, at the last moment, though, I haven't quite made up my mind where to put you. Choose, dear. Will you have a Western bishop or a rather dull Englishman?"

"What is the name of the Englishman?" Pamela asked, with sudden intuition.

"Lutchester, dear. Quite a nice name, but I know nothing about him. He brought letters to your uncle. Rather a queer time for Englishmen to be travelling about, we thought, but still, there he is. Seems to have found some people he knows—and I declare he is coming towards you!"

"I met him in London," Pamela whispered, "and I never could get on with bishops."

The dinner table was large, and arranged with that wonderful simplicity which Mrs. Hastings had adopted as the keynote of her New York parties. She had taken, in fact, simplicity under her wing and made a new thing of it. There were more flowers than silver, and cut glass than heavy plate. There seemed to be an almost ostentatious desire to conceal the fact that Mr. Hastings had robbed the American public of a good many million dollars.

"Of course," Pamela declared, as they took their places, and she nodded a greeting to some friends around the table, "fate is throwing us together in the most unaccountable manner."

"I accept its vagaries with resignation," Lutchester replied. "Besides, it is quite time we met again. You promised to show me New York, and I haven't seen you for days."

"I don't even remember the promise," Pamela laughed, "but in any case I have changed my mind. I am not sure that you are the nice, simple-minded person you profess to be. I begin to have doubts about you."

"Interest grows with mystery," Lutchester remarked complacently. "Let us hope that I am promoted in your mind."

"Well, I am not at all sure. Of course, I am not an Englishman, so it is of no particular interest to me, but if you really came over here on important affairs, I am not sure that I approve of your playing golf the day after your arrival."

"That, perhaps, was thoughtless," he admitted, "but one gets so short of exercise on board ship."

"Of course," Pamela observed tentatively, "I'd forgive you even now if you'd only be a little more frank with me."

"I am prepared to be candour itself," he assured her.

"Tell me," she begged, "the whole extent of your mission in America?"

He glanced around.

"If we were alone," he replied, "I might court indiscretion so far as to tell you."

"Then we will leave the answer to that question until after dinner," she said.

She talked to her left-hand neighbour for a few moments, and Lutchester followed suit. They turned to one another again, however, at the first opportunity.

"I have conceived," she told him, "a great admiration for Mr. Oscar Fischer."

"A very able man," Lutchester agreed.

"He is not only that," Pamela continued, "but he is a man with large principles and great ideas."

"Principles!" Lutchester murmured.

"Of course, you don't like him," Pamela went on, "and I don't wonder at it. He is thoroughly German, isn't he?"

"Almost prejudiced, I'm afraid," Lutchester assented.

"Don't be silly," Pamela protested. "Why, he's German by birth, and although you English people are much too pig-headed to see any good in an enemy, I think you must admit that the way they all hang together— Germans, I mean, all over the world—is perfectly wonderful."

"There have been a few remarks of the same sort," Lutchester reminded her, "about the inhabitants of the British Empire—Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, for instance."

"As a matter of fact," Pamela admitted generously, "I consider that your Colonials understand the word patriotism better than the ordinary Englishman. With them, as with the Germans, it is almost a passionate impulse. Your hearts may be in the right places, but you always give one the impression of finding the whole thing rather a bore."

"Well, so it is," Lutchester insisted. "Who wants to give up a very agreeable profession and enter upon a career of bloodshed, abandon all one's habits, and

lose most of one's friends? No, we are honest about that, at any rate! Germany may be enjoying this war. We aren't."

"What was your profession?" Pamela inquired.

"Diplomacy," Lutchester confided. "I intended to become an ambassador."

"Do you think you have the requisite gifts?"

"What are they?"

"Secrecy, subtlety, caution, and highly-developed intelligence," she replied. "How's that?"

"All those gifts," he assured her, "I possess."

She fanned herself for a moment and looked at him.

"We are not a modest race ourselves," she said, "but I think you can give us a lead. By the bye, were you playing golf with Senator Hamblin by accident the other afternoon?"

"You mean the old Johnny down at Baltusrol?" he asked coolly. "I picked him up wandering about by the professionals' shed."

"Did you talk politics with him?"

"We gassed a bit about the war," Lutchester admitted cheerfully.

Pamela laughed. She leaned a little forward. The buzz of conversation now was insistent all around them.

"Of you two," she whispered, "I prefer Fischer."

Lutchester considered the matter for some time.

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," he said presently. "I shouldn't have thought him exactly your type."

"He may not be," Pamela confessed, "but at least he has the courage to speak what is in his mind."

Lutchester smiled.

"So Fischer has taken you into his confidence, has he?" he murmured. "Well, now, that seems queer to me. I should have thought your interests would have lain the other way."

"As an individual?"

"As an American."

"I am not wholly convinced of that."

"Come," he protested, "what is the use of a friend from whom you are separated by an unnegotiable space?"

"What unnegotiable space?"

"The Atlantic."

"And why is the Atlantic unnegotiable?"

"Because of a little affair called the British fleet," Lutchester pointed out.

"There is also," she reminded him drily, "a German fleet, and they haven't met yet."

"Ah! I had almost forgotten there was such a thing," he murmured.
"Where do they keep it?"

"You know. You aren't nearly so stupid as you pretend to be," she said, a little impatiently. "I should like you so much better if you would be frank with me."

"What about those qualifications for my ambassadorial career?" he reminded her —"Secrecy, subtlety, caution."

"The master of these," she whispered, rising to her feet in response to her hostess's signal, "knows when to abandon them—"

Lutchester changed his place to a vacant chair by James Van Teyl's side.

"I was going to ask you, Mr. Van Teyl," he inquired, "whether your Japanese

servant was altogether a success? I think I shall have to get a temporary servant while I am over here."

"Nikasti was entirely Fischer's affair," Van Teyl replied, "and I can't say much about him as I have given up my share of the apartments at the Plaza. The fellow's all right, I dare say, but we hadn't the slightest use for a valet. The man on the floor's good enough for any one."

"By the bye," Lutchester inquired, "is Fischer still in New York?"

"No, he's in Washington," Van Teyl replied. "I believe he's expected back to-morrow…. Say, can I ask you a question?"

Lutchester almost imperceptibly drew his chair a little closer.

"Of course you can," he assented.

"What I want to know," Van Teyl continued confidentially, "is how you get that long run on your cleek shots? I saw you play the sixteenth hole, and it looked to me as though the ball were never going to stop."

Lutchester smiled.

"I have made a special study of that shot," he confided. "Yes, I can tell you how it's done, but it needs a lot of practice. It's done in turning over the wrists sharply just at the moment of impact. You get everything there is to be got into the stroke that way, and you keep the ball low, too."

"Gee, I must try that!" Van Teyl observed, making spasmodic movements with his wrists. "When could we have a day down at Baltusrol?"

"It will have to be next week, I'm afraid, if you don't mind," Lutchester replied. "I've a good many appointments in New York, and I may have to go to Washington myself. By the bye, I thought our host lived there."

"So he does," Van Teyl assented. "Nowadays, though, it seems to have become the fashion for politicians to own a house up in New York and do some entertaining here. They're after the financial interest, I suppose."

"Is your uncle a keen politician?"

"Keen as mustard," Van Teyl answered. "So's my aunt. She'd give her soul to have the old man nominated for the Presidency."

"Any chance of it?"

"Not an earthly! He'll come a mucker, though, some day, trying. He'd take any outside chance. For a clever man he's the vainest thing I know."

Lutchester smiled enigmatically as he followed the example of the others and rose to his feet.

"Even in America, then," he observed, "your great men have their weaknesses."

CHAPTER XXIII

Fischer, exactly one week after his nocturnal visit to Fourteenth Street, hurried out of the train at the Pennsylvania Station, almost tore the newspapers from the news stand, glanced through them one by one and threw them back. The attendant, open-mouthed, ventured upon a mild protest. Fischer threw him a dollar bill, caught up his handbag, and made for the entrance. He was the first passenger from the Washington Limited to reach the street and spring into a taxi.

"The Plaza Hotel," he ordered. "Get along."

They arrived at the Plaza in less than ten minutes. Mr. Fischer tipped the driver lavishly, suffered the hall porter to take his bag, returned his greeting mechanically, and walked with swift haste to the tape machine. He held up the strips with shaking fingers, dropped them again, hurried to the lift, and entered his rooms. Nikasti was in the sitting-room, arranging some flowers. Fischer did not even stop to reply to his reverential greeting.

"Where's Mr. Van Teyl?" he demanded.

"Mr. Van Teyl has gone away, sir," was the calm reply. "He left here the day before yesterday. There is a letter."

Fischer took no notice. He was already gripping the telephone receiver.

"982, Wall," he said—"an urgent call."

He stood waiting, his face an epitome of breathless suspense. Soon a voice answered him.

"That the office of Neville, Brooks and Van Teyl?" he demanded. "Yes! Put me through to Mr. Van Teyl. Urgent!"

Another few seconds of waiting, then once more he bent over the instrument.

"That you, Van Teyl?… Yes, Fischer speaking. Oh, never mind about that! Listen. What price are Anglo-French?… No, say about what?… Ninety-five?… Sell me a hundred thousand…. What's that?… What?… Of course it's a big deal! Never mind that. I'm good enough, aren't I? There'll be no rise that'll wipe out half a million dollars. I've got that lying in cash at Guggenheimer's. If you need the money, I'll bring it you in half an hour. Get out into the market and sell. Damn you, what's it matter about news! Right! Sorry, Jim. See you later."

Fischer put down the telephone and wiped his forehead. Notwithstanding the fatigue in his face, there was a glint of triumph there. He laid his hand upon Nikasti's shoulder.

"My friend," he said, "there's big proof coming of what I said to you the other day. You'll find that letter you carry will mean a different thing now. There's news in the air."

"There has been a great battle, perhaps?" Nikasti asked slowly.

"All that is to be known you will hear before evening," Fischer replied. "Tell some one to send me some coffee. I have come through from Washington. I am tired."

He sank a little abruptly into an easy-chair, took off his spectacles, and leaned his head back upon the cushions. In the sunlight his face was almost ghastly. A queer sense of weakness had suddenly assailed him. His mind flitted back through a vista of sleepless nights, of strenuous days, of passions held in leash, excitement ground down.

"I am tired," he said. "Telephone down to the office, Nikasti, for a doctor."

Nikasti obeyed, and his summons was promptly answered. The doctor who arrived was pleasantly but ominously grave. In the middle of his examination the telephone rang. Fischer, without ceremony, moved to the receiver. It was Van Teyl speaking.

"I've sold your hundred thousand Anglo-French," he announced. "It's done the whole market in, though—knocked the bottom out of it. They've fallen a point and a half. Shall I begin to buy back for you? You'll make a bit."

"Not a share," Fischer answered fiercely. "Wait!"

"Have you any news you're keeping up your sleeve?" Van Teyl persisted.

"If I have, it's my own affair," was the curt reply, "and I don't tell news over the telephone, anyway. Watch the market, and go on selling where you can."

"I shall do as you order," Van Teyl replied, "but you're all against the general tone here. By the bye, you got my letter?"

"I haven't opened it yet," Fischer snapped. "What's the matter?"

"Pamela and I have taken a little flat in Fifty-eighth Street. Seems a little abrupt, but she didn't want to be alone, and she hates hotels. We felt sure you'd understand."

"Yes, I understand," Fischer said. "Good-by! I'm busy."

The doctor completed his examination. When he had finished he mentioned his fee.

"You work too hard, and you live in an atmosphere of too great strain. The natural consequences are already beginning to show themselves. If I give you medicine, it will only encourage you to keep on wasting yourself, but you can have medicine if you like."

"Send me something to take for the next fortnight," Fischer replied.
"After that, I'll take my chance."

The doctor wrote a prescription and took his leave. Fischer leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. His mind travelled back through these latter days of his over-strenuous life. In such minutes of relaxation, few of which he permitted himself, he realised with bitter completeness the catastrophe which had overtaken him—him, Oscar Fischer, of all men on earth. Into his life of grim purposes, of lofty and yet narrow ambitions, of almost superhuman tenacity, had crept the one weakening strain whose presence in other men he had always scoffed at and derived. There was a new and enervating glamour over the days, a new and hatefully powerful rival for all his thoughts and dreams. Ten years ago, he reflected sadly, this might have made a different man of him, might have unlocked the gates into another, more peaceful and beautiful world, visions of

which had sometimes vaguely disturbed him in his cold and selfish climb. Now it could only mean suffering. This was the first stroke. It was the assertion of humanity which was responsible for his present weakness. How far might it not drag him down?

There should be a fight, at any rate, he told himself, as an hour or two later he made his way downtown. He paid several calls in the vicinity of Wall Street, and finished up in Van Teyl's office. That young man greeted him with a certain relief.

"You know the tone of the market's still against you, Fischer," he warned him once more.

Fischer threw himself into the client's easy-chair. The furniture in the office seemed less distinct than usual. He was conscious of a certain haziness of outline in everything. Van Teyl's face, even, was shrouded in a little mist. Then he suddenly found himself fighting fiercely, fighting for his consciousness, fighting against a wave of giddiness, a deadly sinking of the heart, a strange slackening of all his nerve power. The young stockbroker rose hastily to his feet.

"Anything wrong, old fellow?" he asked anxiously.

"A glass of water," Fischer begged.

He was conscious of drinking it, vaguely conscious that he was winning. Soon the office had regained its ordinary appearance, his pulse was beating more regularly. He had once more the feeling of living—of living, though in a minor key.

"A touch of liver," he murmured. "What did you say about the markets?"

"You look pretty rotten," Van Teyl remarked sympathetically. "Shall I send out for some brandy?"

"Not for me," Fischer scoffed. "I don't need it. What price are Anglo-French?"

"Ninety-four. You've only done them in a point, after all, and that's nominal. I daresay I could get ten thousand back at that."

"Let them alone," was the calm reply. "I'll sell another fifty thousand at ninety-four."

"Look here," Van Teyl said, swinging round in his chair, "I like the business and I know you can finance it, but are you sure that you realise what you are doing? Every one believes Anglo-French have touched their bottom. They've only to go back to where they were—say five points—and you'd lose half a million."

Fischer smiled a little wearily.

"That small sum in arithmetic," he remonstrated, "had already passed through my brain. Send in your selling order, Jim, and come out to lunch with me. I've come straight through from Washington—only got in this morning."

Van Teyl called in his clerk and gave a few orders. Then he took up his hat and left the office with his client.

"From Washington, eh?" he remarked curiously, as they passed into the crowded streets. "So that accounts—"

He broke off abruptly. His companion's warning fingers had tightened upon his arm.

"Quite right!" Van Teyl confessed. "There's gossip enough about now, and they seem to have tumbled to it that you're our client. The office has been besieged this morning. Sorry, Ned, I'm busy," he went on, to a man who tried to catch his arm. "See you later, Fred. I'll be in after lunch, Mr. Borrodaile. No, nothing fresh that I know of."

Fischer smiled grimly.

"Got you into a kind of hornets' nest, eh?" he observed.

"It's been like this all the morning," Van Teyl told him. "They believe I know something. Even the newspaper men are tumbling to it. We'll lunch up at the club. Maybe we'll get a little peace there."

They stepped into the hall of a great building, and took one of the interminable row of lifts. A few minutes later they were seated at a side table in a dining room on the top floor of one of the huge modern skyscrapers. Below them stretched a

silent panorama of the city; beyond, a picturesque view of the river. A fresh breeze blew in through the opened window. They were above the noise, even, of the street cars.

"Order me a small bottle of champagne, James," Fischer begged, "and some steak."

Van Teyl stared at his companion and laughed as he took up the wine list.

"Well, that's the first time, Fischer, I've known you to touch a drop of anything before the evening! I'll have a whisky and soda with you. Thank God we're away from that inquisitive crowd for a few minutes! Are you going to give me an idea of what's moving?"

Fischer watched the wine being poured into his glass.

"Not until this evening," he said. "I want you to bring your sister and come and dine at the new roof-garden."

"I don't know whether Pamela has any engagement," Van Teyl began, a little dubiously.

"Please go and see," Fischer begged earnestly. "The telephones are just outside. Tell your sister that I particularly wish her to accept my invitation. Tell her that there will be news."

Van Teyl went out to the telephone. Fischer sipped his champagne and crumbled up his bread, his eyes fixed a little dreamily on the grey river. He was already conscious of the glow of the wine in his veins. The sensation was half pleasurable, in a sense distasteful to him. He resented this artificial humanity. He had the feeling of a man who has stooped to be doped by a quack doctor. And he was a little afraid.

His young companion returned triumphant.

"Had a little trouble with Pamela," he observed, as he resumed his place at the table. "She was thinking of the opera with a girl friend she picked up this morning. However, the idea of news, I think, clinched it. We'll be at the Oriental at eight o'clock, eh?"

Fischer looked up from the fascinating patchwork below. Already there was anticipation in his face.

"I am very glad," he said. "There will certainly be news."

CHAPTER XXIV

"Now indeed I feel that I am in New York," Pamela declared, as she broke off one of the blossoms of the great cluster of deep red roses by her side, and gazed downward over her shoulder at the far-flung carpet of lights. "One sees little bits of America in every country of the world, but never this."

Fischer, unusually grave and funereal-looking in his dinner clothes and black tie, followed her gesture with thoughtful eyes. Everything that was ugly in the stretching arms of the city seemed softened, shrouded and bejewelled. Even the sounds, the rattle and roar of the overhead railways, the clanging of the electric car bells, the shrieking of the sirens upon the river, seemed somehow to have lost their harsh note, to have become the human cry of the great live city, awaking and stretching itself for the night.

"I agree with you," he said. "You dine at the Ritz-Carlton and you might be in Paris. You dine here, and one knows that you are in America."

"Yet even here we have become increasingly luxurious," Pamela remarked, looking around. "The glass and linen upon the tables are quite French; those shaded lights are exquisite. That little band, too, was playing at the Ritz three years ago. I am sure that the maitre d'hotel who brought us to our table was once at the Cafe de Paris."

"Money would draw all those things from Europe even to the Sahara," Fischer observed, "so long as there were plenty of it. But millions could not buy our dining table in the clouds."

"A little effort of the imagination, fortunately," Pamela laughed, looking upwards. "There are stars, but no clouds."

"I guess one of them is going to slip down to the next table before long," Van

Teyl observed, with a little movement of his head.

They all three turned around and looked at the wonderful bank of pink roses within a few feet of them.

"One of the opera women, I daresay," the young man continued. "They are rather fond of this place."

Pamela leaned forward. Fischer was watching the streets below; Only a short distance away was a huge newspaper building, flaring with lights. The pavements fringing it were thronged with a little stationary crowd. A row of motor-bicycles was in waiting. A night edition of the paper was almost due.

"Mr. Fischer," she asked, "what about that news?"

He withdrew his eyes from the street. Almost unconsciously he straightened himself a little in his place. There was pride in his tone. Behind his spectacles his eyes flashed.

"I would have told it you before," he said, "but you would not have believed it. Soon—in a very few moments—the news will be known. You will see it break away in waves from that building down there, so I will bear with your incredulity. The German and British fleets have met, and the victory has remained with us."

"With us?" Pamela repeated.

"With Germany," Fischer corrected himself hastily.

"Is this true?" James Van Teyl almost shouted. "Fischer, are you sure of what you're saying? Why, it's incredible!"

"It is true," was the proud reply. "The German Navy has been a long time proving itself. It has done so now. To-day every German citizen is the proudest creature breathing. He knew before that his armies were invincible. He knows now that his fleet is destined to make his country the mistress of the seas. England's day is over. Her ships were badly handled and foolishly flung into battle. She has lost many of her finest units. Her Navy is to-day a crippled and maimed force. The German fleet is out in the North Sea, waiting for an enemy who has disappeared."

"It is inconceivable," Pamela gasped.

"I do not ask you to believe my word," Fischer exclaimed. "Look!"

As though the flood gates had been suddenly opened, the stream of patient waiters broke away from the newspaper building below. Like little fireflies, the motor-bicycles were tearing down the different thoroughfares. Boys like ants, with their burden of news sheets, were running in every direction. Motor-trucks had started on their furious race. Even the distant echoes of their cries came faintly up. Fischer called a messenger and sent him for a paper.

"I do not know what report you will see," he said, "but from whatever source it comes it will confirm my story. The news is too great and sweeping to be contradicted or ignored."

"If it's true," Van Teyl muttered, "you've made a fortune in my office to-day. It looks like it, too. There was something wrong with Anglo-French beside your selling for the last hour this afternoon. I couldn't get buyers to listen for a moment."

"Yes, I shall have made a great deal of money," Fischer admitted, "money which I shall value because it comes magnificently, but I hope that this victory may help me to win other things."

He looked fixedly at Pamela, and she moved uneasily in her chair. Almost unconsciously the man himself seemed somehow associated with his cause, to be assuming a larger and more tolerant place in her thoughts. Perhaps there was some measure of greatness about him after all. The strain of waiting for the papers became almost intolerable. At last the boy reappeared. The great black headlines were stretched out before her. She felt the envelopment of Fischer's triumph. The words were there in solid type, and the paper itself was one of the most reliable.

GREAT NAVAL BATTLE IN THE NORTH SEA.

BRITISH ADMIRALTY ADMITS SERIOUS LOSSES.

"QUEEN MARY," "INDEFATIGABLE," AND MANY FINE SHIPS LOST.

Pamela looked up from the sheet.

"It is too wonderful," she whispered, with a note of awe in her tone. "I don't think that any one ever expected this. We all believed in the British Navy."

"There is nothing," Fischer declared, "that England can do which Germany cannot do better."

"And America best of all," Pamela said.

Fischer bowed.

"That is one comparison which will never now be made," he declared, "for from to-night Germany and America will draw nearer together. The bubble of British naval omnipotence is pricked."

"Meanwhile," Van Teyl observed, putting his paper away, "we are neglecting our dinner. Nothing like a good dose of sensationalism for giving us an appetite."

Fischer was watching his glass being filled with champagne. He seized it by the stem. His eyes for a moment travelled upwards.

"I am an American citizen," he said, with a strange fervour in his tone, "but for the moment I am called back. And so I lift my glass and I drink—I alone, without invitation to you others—to those brave souls who have made of the North Sea a holy battle-ground."

He drained his glass and set it down empty. Pamela watched him as though fascinated. For a single moment she was conscious of a queer sensation of personal pity for some shadowy and absent friend, of something almost like a lump in her throat, a strange instinct of antagonism towards the man by her side so enveloped in beatific satisfaction—then she frowned when she realised that she had been thinking of Lutchester, that her first impulse had been one of sympathy for him. The moment passed. The service of dinner was pressed more insistently upon them. James Van Teyl, who had been leaning back in his chair, talking to one of the maitres d'hotel, dismissed him with a little nod and entrusted them with a confidence.

"Say, do you know who's coming to the next table?" he exclaimed. "Sonia!"

They were all interested.

"You won't mind?" Fischer asked diffidently.

"In a restaurant, how absurd!" Pamela laughed. "Why, I'm dying to see her. I wonder how it is that some of these greatest singers in the world lead such extraordinary lives that people can never know anything of them."

"Society is tolerant enough nowadays," her brother observed, "but Sonia won't give them even a decent chance to wink at her eccentricities. She crossed, you know, on the Prince Doronda's yacht, for fear they wouldn't let her land."

"Here she comes," Pamela whispered.

There was a moment's spellbound silence. Two maitres d'hotel were hurrying in front. A pathway from the lift had been cleared as though for a royal personage. Sonia, in white from head to foot, a dream of white lace and chinchilla, with a Russian crown of pearls in her glossy black hair, and a rope of pearls around her neck, came like a waxen figure, with scarlet lips and flashing eyes, towards her table. And behind her—Lutchester! Pamela felt her fingers gripping the tablecloth. Her first impulse, curiously enough, was one of wild fury with herself for that single instant's pity. Her face grew cold and hard. She felt herself sitting a little more upright. Her eyes remained fixed upon the newcomers.

Lutchester's behaviour was admirable. His glance swept their little table without even a shadow of interest. He ignored with passive unconcern the mistake of Van Teyl's attempted greeting. He looked through Fischer as though he had been a ghost. He stood by Sonia's side while she seated herself, and listened with courteous pleasure to her excited admiration of the flowers and the wonderful vista. Then he took his own place. In his right hand he was carrying an evening paper with its flaming headlines.

"That," Fischer pronounced, struggling to keep the joy from his tone, "is very British and very magnificent!"

* * * * *

Pamela had imperfect recollections of the rest of the evening. She remembered that she was more than usually gay throughout dinner-time, but that she was the first to jump at the idea of a hurried departure and a visit to a cabaret. Every now

and then she caught a glimpse of Sonia's face, saw the challenging light in her brilliant eyes, heard little scraps of her conversation. The Frenchwoman spoke always in her own language, with a rather shrill voice, which made Lutchester's replies sound graver and quieter than usual. More than once Pamela's eyes rested upon the broad lines of his back. He sat all the time like a rock, courteous, at times obviously amusing, but underneath it all she fancied that she saw some signs of the disturbance from which she herself was suffering. She rose to her feet at last with a little sigh of relief. It was an ordeal through which she had passed.

Once in the lift, her brother and Fischer discussed Lutchester's indiscretion volubly.

"I suppose," Van Teyl declared, "that there isn't a man in New York who wouldn't have jumped at the chance of dining alone with Sonia, but for an Englishman, on a night like this," he went on, glancing at the paper, "say, he must have some nerve!"

"Or else," Fischer remarked, "a wonderful indifference. So far as I have studied the Anglo-Saxon temperament, I should be inclined to vote for the indifference. That is why I think Germany will win the war. Every man in that country prays for his country's success, not only in words, but with his soul. I have not found the same spirit in England."

"The English people," Pamela interposed, "have a genius for concealment which amounts to stupidity."

"I have a theory," Fischer said, "that to be phlegmatic after a certain pitch is a sign of low vitality. However, we shall see. Certainly, if England is to be saved from her present trouble, it will not be the Lutchesters of the world who will do it, nor, it seems, her Navy."

They found their way to a large cabaret, where Pamela listened to an indifferent performance a little wearily. The news of what was termed a naval disaster to Great Britain was flashed upon the screen, and, generally speaking, the audience was stunned. Fischer behaved throughout the evening with tact and discretion. He made few references to the matter, and was careful not to indulge in any undue exhilaration. Once, when Van Teyl had left the box, however, to speak to some friends, he turned earnestly to Pamela.

"Will it please you soon," he begged, "to resume our conversation of the other day? However you may look at it, things have changed, have they not? An invincible British Navy has been one of the fundamental principles of beliefs in American politics. Now that it is destroyed, the outlook is different. I could go myself to the proper quarter in Washington, or Von Schwerin is here to be my spokesman. I have a fancy, though, to work with you. You know why."

She moved uneasily in her place.

"I have no idea," she objected, "what it is that you have to propose. Besides, I am only just a woman who has been entrusted with a few diplomatic errands."

"You are the niece of Senator Hastings," Fischer reminded her, "and Hastings is the man through whom I should like my proposal to go to the President. It is an honest offer which I have to make, and although it cannot pass through official channels, it is official in the highest sense of the word, because it comes to me from the one man who is in a position to make himself responsible for it."

Her brother came back to the box before Pamela could reply, but, as they parted that night, she gave Fischer her hand.

"Come and see our new quarters," she invited. "I shall be at home any time to-morrow afternoon."

It was one of the moments of Fischer's life. He bowed low over her fingers.

"I accept, with great pleasure," he murmured.

CHAPTER XXV

Sonia had the air of one steeped in an almost ecstatic content. On her return from the roof garden she had exchanged her wonderful gown for a white silk negligee, and her headdress of pearls for a quaint little cap. She was stretched upon a sofa drawn before the wide-flung French windows of her little sitting-room at the Ritz-Carlton, a salon decorated in pink and white, and filled almost to overflowing with the roses which she loved. By her side, in an easy chair which she had pressed him to draw up to her couch, sat Lutchester.

"This," she murmured, "is one of the evenings which I adore. I have no work, no engagements—just one friend with whom to talk. My fine clothes have done. I am myself," she added, stretching out her arms. "I have my cigarettes, my iced sherbet, and the lights and murmur of the city there below to soothe me. And you to talk with me, my friend. What are you thinking of me—that I am a little animal who loves comfort too much, eh?"

Lutchester smiled.

"We all love comfort," he replied. "Some of us are franker than others about it."

She made a little grimace.

"Comfort! It is my own word, but what a word! It is luxury I worship—luxury—and a friend. Is that, perhaps, another word too slight, eh?"

He met the provocative gleam of her eyes with a smile of amusement.

"You are just the same child, Sonia," he remarked. "Neither climate nor country, nor the few passing years, can change you."

"It is you who have grown older and sterner," she pouted. "It is you who have

lost the gift of living to-day as though to-morrow were not. There was a time, was there not, John, when you did not care to sit always so far away?"

She laid her hand—ringless, over-manicured, but delicately white—— upon his. He smoothed it gently.

"You see, Sonia," he sighed, "troubles have come that harden the hearts even of the gayest of us."

She frowned.

"You are not going to remind me—" she began.

"If I reminded you of anything, Sonia," he interrupted, "I would remind you that you are a Frenchwoman."

She stretched out her hand restlessly and took one of the Russian cigarettes from a bowl by her side.

"You are not, by any chance, going to talk seriously, dear John?"

"I am," he assured her, "very seriously."

"Oh, la, la!" she laughed. "You, my dear, gay companion, you who have shaken the bells all your life, you are going to talk seriously! And to-night, when we meet again after so long. Ah, well, why should I be surprised?" she went on, with a pout.

"You have changed. When one looks into your face, one sees the difference. But to me, of all people in the world! Why talk seriously to me! I am just Sonia, the gipsy nightingale. I know nothing of serious things."

"You carry one very serious secret in your heart," he told her gravely, "one little pain which must sometimes stab you. You are a Frenchwoman, and yet—"

Lutchester paused for a moment. Sonia, too, seemed suddenly to have awakened into a state of tense and vivid emotion. The cigarette burned away between her fingers. Her great eyes were fixed upon Lutchester. There was something almost like fear in their questioning depths.

"Finish! Finish!" she insisted. "Continue!"

"And yet," he went on, "your very dear friend, the friend for whose sake you are here in America, is your country's enemy."

She raised herself a little upon the couch.

"That is not true," she declared furiously. "Maurice loves France. His heart aches for the misery that has come upon her. It is your country only which he hates. If France had but possessed the courage to stand by herself, to resist when England forced her friendship upon her, none of this tragedy would ever have happened. Maurice has told me so himself. France could have peace today, peace at her own price."

"There is no peace which would leave France with a soul, save the peace which follows victory," Lutchester replied sternly.

She crushed her cigarette nervously in her fingers, threw it away, and lit another.

"I will not talk of these things with you," she cried. "It was not for this that you sought me out, eh? Tell me at once? Were these the thoughts you had in your mind when you sent your little note?—when you chose to show yourself once more in my life?"

For the first time of his own accord, he drew his chair a little nearer to hers. He took her hand. She gave him both unresistingly.

"Listen, dear Sonia," he said, "it is true that I am a changed man. I am older than when we met last, and there are the other things. You remember the Chateau d'Albert?"

"Of course!" she murmured. "And the young Duc d'Albert's wonderful house party. We all motored there from Paris. You and I were together! You have forgotten that, eh?"

"I lay in that orchard for two days," he went on grimly, "with a hole in my side and one leg pretty nearly done for. I saw things I can never forget, in those days, Sonia. D'Albert himself was killed. It was in that first mad rush. Of the Chateau there remains but four blackened walls."

"*Pauvre enfant*!" she murmured. "But you are well and strong again now, is it not so? You will not fight again, eh? You were never a soldier, dear friend."

"Just now," he confided, "I have other work to do. It is that other work which has brought me to America."

She drew him a little closer to her. Her eyes questioned him.

"There is, perhaps, now," she asked, "a woman in your life?"

"There is," he admitted.

She made a grimace.

"But how clumsy to tell me, even though I asked," she exclaimed. "What is she like? … But no, I do not wish to hear of her! If she is all the world to you, why did you send me that little note? Why are you here?"

"Because we were once dear friends, Sonia," he said, "because I wish to save you from great trouble."

She shrank from him a little fearfully.

"What do you mean?"

"Sonia," he continued, with a note of sternness in his tone, "during the last two years you have gone back and forth between New York and Paris, six times. I do not think that you can make that journey again."

She was standing now, with one hand gripping the edge of the table.

"John! … John! … What do you mean?" she demanded, and this time her own voice was hard.

"I mean," he said, "that when you leave here for Paris you will be watched day and night. The moment you set foot upon French soil you will be arrested and searched. If anything is found upon you, such as a message from your friend in Washington—well, you know what it would mean. Can't you see, you foolish child, the risk you have been running? Would you care to be branded as a spy?—you, a daughter of France?"

She struck at him. Her lace sleeves had fallen back, and her white arm, with its little clenched fist, flashed through the twilight, aimlessly yet passionately.

"You dare to call me a spy! You, John?" she shrieked. "But it is horrible."

"It is the work of a spy," he told her gravely, "to bring a letter from any person in a friendly capital and deliver it to an enemy. That is what you have done, Sonia, many times since the beginning of the war, so far without detection. It is because you are Sonia that I have come to save you from doing it again."

She groped her way back to the couch. She threw herself upon it with her back towards him, her head buried in her hands.

"The letters are only between friends," she faltered. "They have nothing to do with the war."

"You may have believed that," Lutchester replied gently, "but it is not true. You have been made the bearer of confidential communications from the Austrian Embassy here to certain people in Paris whom we will not name. I have pledged my word, Sonia, that this shall cease."

She sprang to her feet. All the feline joy of her languorous ease seemed to have departed. She was quivering and nervous. She stood over her writing-table.

"A telegraph blank!" she exclaimed. "Quick! I will not see Maurice again. Oh, how I have suffered! This shall end it. See, I have written 'Good-by!' He will understand. If he comes, I will not see him. Ring the bell quickly. There—it is finished!"

A page-boy appeared, and she handed him the telegram. Then she turned a little pathetically to Lutchester.

"Maurice was foolish—very often foolish," she went on unsteadily, "but he has loved me, and a woman loves love so much. Now I shall be lonely. And yet, there is a great weight gone from my mind. Always I wondered about those letters. You will be my friend, John? You will not leave me all alone?"

He patted her hand.

"Dear Sonia," he whispered, "solitude is not the worst thing one has to bear,

these days. Try and remember, won't you, that all the men who might have loved you are fighting for your country, one way or another."

"It is all so sad," she faltered, "and you—you are so stern and changed."

"It is with me only as it is with the whole world," he told her.
"To-night, though, you have relieved me of one anxiety."

Her eyes once more were for a moment frightened.

"There was danger for poor little me?"

He nodded.

"It is past," he assured her.

"And it is you who have saved me," she murmured. "Ah, Mr. John," she added, as she walked with him to the door, "if ever there comes to me a lover, not for the days only but *pour la vie*, I hope that he may be an Englishman like you, whom all the world trusts."

He laughed and raised her fingers to his lips.

"Over-faithful, you called us once," he reminded her.

"But that was when I was a child," she said, "and in days like these we are children no longer."

CHAPTER XXVI

Lutchester left Sonia and the Ritz-Carlton a few minutes before midnight, to find a great yellow moon overhead, which seemed to have risen somewhere at the back of Central Park. The broad thoroughfare up which he turned seemed to have developed a new and unfamiliar beauty. The electric lamps shone with a pale and almost unnatural glow. The flashing lights of the automobiles passing up and down were almost whimsically unnecessary. Lutchester walked slowly up Fifth Avenue in the direction of his hotel.

Something—the beauty of the night, perhaps, or some faint aftermath of sentimentality born of Sonia's emotion—tempted him during those few moments to relax. He threw aside his mask and breathed the freer for it. Once more he was a human being, treading the streets of a real city, his feet very much upon the earth, his heart full of the simplest things. All the scheming of the last few days was forgotten, the great issues, the fine yet devious way to be steered amidst the rocks which beset him; even the depression of the calamitous news from the North Sea passed away. He was a very simple human being, and he was in love. It was all so unpractical, so illusionary, and yet so real. Events, actual happenings—he thrust all thoughts of these away from his mind. What she might be thinking of him at the moment he ignored. He was content to let his thoughts rest upon her, to walk through the moonlit street, his brain and heart revelling in that subtle facility of the imagination which brought her so easily to his presence. It was such a vividly real Pamela, too, who spoke and walked and moved by his side. His memory failed him nowhere, followed faithfully the kaleidoscopic changes in her face and tone, showed him even that long, grateful, searching glance when their eyes had met in Von Teyl's sitting-room. There had been times when she had shown clearly enough that she was anxious to understand, anxious to believe in him. He clung to the memory of these; pushed into the background that faint impression he had had of her at the roof-garden, serene and proud, yet with a faint look of something like pain in her startled

eyes.

A large limousine passed him slowly, crawling up Fifth Avenue. Lutchester, with all his gifts of observation dormant, took no notice of its occupant, who leaned forward, raised the speaking-tube to his lips, and talked for a moment to his chauffeur. The car glided round a side street and came to a standstill against the curb. Its solitary passenger stepped quietly out and entered a restaurant. The chauffeur backed the car a little, slipped from his place, and followed Lutchester.

By chance the little throng of people here became thicker for a few moments and then ceased. Lutchester drew a little sigh of relief as he saw before him almost an empty pavement. Then, just as he was relapsing once more into thought, some part of his subconscious instinct suddenly leaped into warning life. Without any actual perception of what it might mean, he felt the thrill of imminent danger, connected it with that soft footfall behind him, and swung round in time to seize a deadly uplifted hand which seemed to end in a shimmer of dull steel. His assailant flung himself upon Lutchester with the lithe ferocity of a cat, clinging to his body, twisting and turning his arm to wrest it free. It was a matter of seconds only before his intended victim, with a fierce backward twist, broke the man's wrist and, wrenching himself free from the knees which clung around him, flung him forcibly against the railings which bordered the pavement. Lutchester paused for a moment to recover his breath and looked around. A man from the other side of the street was running towards them, but no one else seemed to have noticed the struggle which had begun and finished in less than thirty seconds. The man, who was half-way across the thoroughfare, suddenly stopped short. He shouted a warning to Lutchester, who swung around. His late assailant, who had been lying motionless, had raised himself slightly, with a revolver clenched in his left hand. Lutchester's spring on one side saved his life, for the bullet passed so close to his cheek that he felt the rush and heat of the air. The man in the center of the road was busy shouting an alarm vociferously, and other people on both sides of the thoroughfare were running up. Lutchester's eyes now never left the dark, doubled-up figure upon the pavement. His whole body was tense. He was prepared at the slightest movement to spring in upon his would-be murderer. The man's eyes seemed to be burning in his white face. He called out to Lutchester hoarsely.

"Don't move or I shall shoot!"

He looked up and down the street. One of the nearest of the hastening figures

was a policeman. He turned the revolver against his own temple and pulled the trigger….

Lutchester and a policeman walked slowly back along Fifth Avenue. Behind them, a little crowd was still gathered around the spot from which the body of the dead man had already been removed in an ambulance.

"I really remember nothing," Lutchester told his companion, "until I heard the footsteps behind me, and, turning round, saw the knife. This is simply an impression of mine—that he might have descended from the car which passed me and stopped just round the corner of that street."

"He's a chauffeur, right enough," the inspector remarked. "It don't seem to have been a chance job, either. Looks as though he meant doing you in. Got any enemies?"

"None that I know of," Lutchester answered cautiously. "Why, the car's there still," he added, as they reached the corner.

"And no chauffeur," the other muttered.

The officer searched the car and drew out a license from the flap pocket. The commissionaire from the restaurant approached them.

"Say, what are you doing with that car?" he demanded.

"Better fetch the gentleman to whom it belongs," the inspector directed.

"What's up, anyway?" the man persisted.

"You do as you're told," was the sharp reply.

The commissionaire disappeared. The officer studied the license which he had just opened.

"What's the name?" Lutchester inquired.

The man hesitated for a moment, then passed it over.

"Oscar H. Fischer," he said. "Happen to know the name?"

Lutchester's face was immovable. He passed the license back again. They both turned round. Mr. Fischer had issued from the restaurant.

"What's wrong?" he asked hastily. "The commissionaire says you want me, Mr. Officer?"

The inspector produced his pocketbook.

"Just want to ask you a few questions about your chauffeur, sir."

Fischer glanced at the driver's seat of the car, as though aware of the man's disappearance for the first time.

"What's become of the fellow?" he inquired.

"Shot himself," the inspector replied, "after a deliberate attempt to murder this gentleman."

Mr. Fischer's composure was admirable. There was a touch of gravity mingled with his bewilderment. Nevertheless, he avoided meeting Lutchester's eyes.

"You horrify me!" he exclaimed. "Why, the fellow's only been driving for me for a few hours."

"That so?" the officer remarked, with a grunt. "Get any references with him?"

"As a matter of fact, I did not," Fischer admitted frankly. "I discharged my chauffeur yesterday, at a moment's notice, and this man happened to call just as I was wanting the car out this afternoon. He promised to bring me references to-morrow from Mr. Gould and others. I engaged him on that understanding. He told me that his name was Kay— Robert Kay. That is all that I know about him, except that he was an excellent driver. I am exceedingly sorry Mr. Lutchester," he went on, turning towards him, "that this should have happened."

"So you two know one another, eh?" the officer observed.

"Oh, yes, we know one another!" Lutchester admitted drily.

"I shall have to ask you both for your names and addresses," the official continued. "I think I won't ask you any more questions at present. Seems to me

headquarters had better take this on."

"I shall be quite at your service," Lutchester promised.

The man made a few more notes, saluted, and took his leave. Fischer and Lutchester remained for a moment upon the pavement.

"It is a dangerous custom," Lutchester remarked, "to take a servant without a reference."

"It will be a warning to me for the remainder of my life," Fischer declared.

"I, too, have learnt something," Lutchester concluded, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXVII

Fischer, as he waited for Pamela the following afternoon in the sitting-room of her flat on Fifty-eighth Street, felt that although the practical future of his life might be decided in other places, it was here that its real climax would be reached. Pamela herself was to pronounce sentence upon him. He was feeling scarcely at his best. An examination in the courthouse, which he had imagined would last only a few minutes, had been protracted throughout the afternoon. The district attorney had asked him a great many questions, some rather awkward ones, and the inquiry itself had been almost grudgingly adjourned for a few hours. And here, in Pamela's sitting-room, the first things which caught his eye were the headlines of one of the afternoon papers:

WESTERN MILLIONAIRE ENGAGES THE GIRL HESTE'S MURDERER AS CHAUFFEUR!

ATTEMPTED MURDER AND SUICIDE IN FIFTH AVENUE LAST NIGHT.

Fischer pushed the newspaper impatiently away, and, in the act of doing so, the door was opened and Pamela entered. She came towards him with outstretched hand.

"I see you are looking at the account of your misdeeds," she said, as she seated herself behind a tea tray. "Will you tell me why a cautious man like you engages, without reference, a chauffeur who turns out to be a murderer?"

Fischer frowned irritably.

"For four hours," he complained, "several lawyers and a most inquisitive police captain have been asking me the same question in a hundred different ways. I engaged the man because I needed a chauffeur badly. He was to have brought his references this morning. I was only trusting him for a matter of a few hours."

"And during those few hours," she observed, "he seems to have developed a violent antipathy to Mr. Lutchester."

"I do not understand the affair at all," Mr. Fischer declared, "and, if I may say so, I am a little weary of it. I came here to discuss another matter altogether."

She leaned back in her place.

"What have you come to discuss, Mr. Fischer?"

"That depends so much upon you," he replied. "If you give me any encouragement, I can put before you a great proposition. If your prejudices, however, remain as I think they always have been, on the side of England, why then I can do nothing."

"If I counted for anything," Pamela said, "I mean to say if it mattered to any one what my attitude was, I would start by admitting that my sympathies are somewhat on the side of the Allies. On the other hand, my sympathies amount to nothing at all compared with my interest in the welfare of the United States. I am perfectly selfish in that respect."

"Then you have an open mind to hear what I have to say," Fischer remarked. "I am glad of it. You encourage me to proceed."

"That is all very well," Pamela said, stirring her tea, "but I cannot help asking once more why you come to me at all? What have I to do with any proposition you may have to make?"

"Just this," he explained. "I have a serious and authentic proposition to make to the American Government. I cannot make it officially— although it comes from the highest of all sources—for the most obvious reasons. It may seem better worth listening to to-day, perhaps, than a week ago, so far as you are concerned. That is because you believed in British invincibility upon the sea. I never did."

"Go on, please," Pamela begged. "I am still waiting to realise my position in all this."

"I should like," Fischer declared, "my proposition to reach the President through Senator Hastings, and Senator Hastings is your uncle."

"I see," Pamela murmured.

"My offer itself is a very simple one," Fischer continued. "Your secret service is so bad that you probably know nothing of what is happening. Ours, on the other hand, is still marvellously good, and what I am going to tell you is surely the truth. Japan is accumulating great wealth. She is saving her ships and men for one purpose, and one purpose only. Europe could not bribe her highly enough to take a more active part in this war. Her price was one which could not be paid. She demanded a free hand with the United States."

"This," Pamela admitted, "is quite interesting, but it is entirely in the realms of conjecture, is it not?"

"Not wholly," Fischer insisted. "At the proper time I should be prepared to bring you evidence that tentative proposals were made by Japan to both England and France, asking what would be their attitude, should she provide them with half a million men and undertake transport, if at the conclusion of the war she desired a settlement with the United States. The answer from France and England was the same—that they could not countenance an inimical attitude towards the States."

"You are bound to admit, then," Pamela remarked, "that England played the game here."

"The bribe was not big enough," Fischer replied drily. "England would sell her soul, but not for a mess of pottage. To proceed, however, Japan has practically kept out of the war. She is enjoying a prosperity never known before, and for every million pounds' worth of munitions she exports to Russia, she puts calmly on one side twenty-five per cent, to accumulate for her own use. At the conclusion of the war she will be in a position she has never occupied before, and while the rest of the world is still gasping, she will proceed to carry out what has been the dream of her life—the invasion of your Western States."

"I admit that this is plausible," Pamela confessed, "but you are only pointing out a very obvious danger, for which I imagine that we are already fairly well prepared."

"Believe me," Fischer said earnestly, "you are not. It is this fact which makes the whole situation so vital to you. Later on in our negotiations, I will show you proof of your danger. Meanwhile, let me proceed to the offer which I am empowered to make, which comes direct from the one person in Germany whose

word is unshakable."

Pamela changed her position a little, as though to escape from the sunlight which was finding its way underneath the broad blinds. Her eyes were fixed upon her visitor. She listened intently to every word he had to say. Despite some vague feeling of mistrust, which she acknowledged to herself might well have been prejudiced, she found the situation interesting, even stimulating. Her few excursions into the world of high politics had never brought her into such a position as this. She felt both flattered and interested—attracted, too, in some nameless way, by the man's personality, his persistence, his daring, his whole-heartedness. The situation was instinct with interest to her.

"But why make it to me?" she murmured.

"You are to be my delegate," he answered. "Take the substance of what I say to you, to your uncle. Try, for your country's sake, to interest him in it. The offer which I make shall save you a vast amount of sacrifice. It shall save your dislocating the industries of the country and sowing the seeds of a disturbing and yet inadequate militarism. I offer you, in short, a German alliance against Japan."

"The value of that offer," Pamela remarked thoughtfully, "would depend rather upon the issue of the present war, wouldn't it?"

Fischer's face darkened. His tone was almost irritable.

"That is already preordained," he said firmly. "You see, I will be quite frank with you. Germany has lost her chance of sweeping and complete victory. The result of the war will be a return to the status-quo-ante. Yet, believe me, Germany will be strong enough to settle some of the debts she owes, and the debt to Japan is one of these."

"Still, there is the practical question of getting men and ships over from Germany to America," Pamela persisted.

"It is already solved," was the swift reply. "At the proper time I will show you and prove how it can be done. At present, not one word can pass my lips. It is one of the secrets on which the future of Germany depends."

"And the price?" Pamela asked.

"That America adopts our view as to the high seas traffic," Fischer replied. "This would mean the stopping of all supplies, munitions and ammunition from America to England. We offer you an alliance. We ask only for your real and actual neutrality for the remainder of the war. We offer a great and substantial advantage, a safeguard for your country's future, in return for what? Simply that America will pursue the course of honour and integrity to all nations."

"America," Pamela declared, "has never failed in this."

Fischer shrugged his shoulders.

"There is more than one point of view," he reminded her. "Will you take my message with you to Washington to-morrow?"

"Yes," Pamela promised, "I will do that. The rest, of course, remains with others. I do not myself go so far, even," she added, "as to declare myself in sympathy with you."

"And yet," he insisted, with swift violence, "it is your sympathy which I desire more than anything in the world—your sympathy, your help, your companionship; a little—a very little at first—of your love."

"I am afraid that I am not a very satisfactory person from that point of view," Pamela confessed. "I have a great sympathy with every man who is really out for the great things, but so far as you are concerned, Mr. Fischer, or any one else," she went on, after a moment's hesitation, "I have no personal feeling."

"That shall come," he declared.

"Then please wait a little time before you talk to me again like this," she said, rising and holding out her hand. "At present there is no sign of it."

"There is so much that I could offer you," he pleaded, gripping the hand which she had given him in farewell, "so much that I could do for your country. Believe me, I am not talking idly."

"I do believe that," she admitted. "You are a very clever man, Mr. Fischer, and I think that you represent all that you claim. Perhaps, if we really do negotiate—"

"But you must!" he interrupted impatiently. "You must listen to me for every

reason—politically for your country's sake, personally because I shall offer you and give you happiness and a position you could never find elsewhere."

For a moment her eyes seemed to be looking through him, as though some vision of things outside the room were troubling her. Her finger had already touched the bell and a servant was standing upon the threshold.

"We shall meet in Washington," Mr. Fischer concluded, with an air of a prophet, as he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was within half an hour of closing time that same afternoon when Lutchester walked into James Van Teyl's office. The young man greeted him with some surprise.

"Will you do some business for me?" Lutchester asked, without any preliminaries.

"Sure!"

"How many Anglo-French will you buy for me? I can obtain credit by cable to-morrow through any bank for twenty or thirty thousand pounds."

"You want to buy Anglo-French?" Van Teyl repeated softly.

His visitor nodded.

"Any news?"

Lutchester hesitated, and Van Teyl continued with an apologetic gesture.

"I beg your pardon. That's not my job, anyway, to ask questions. I'll buy you twenty-five thousand, if you like. Guess they can't drop much lower."

Lutchester sat down.

"Thank you," he said, "I will wait."

A little ripple of excitement went through the office as Van Teyl started his negotiations. It seemed to Lutchester that several telephones and half a dozen perspiring young men were called into his service. In the end Van Teyl made out a note and handed it to him.

"I could have done better for you yesterday," he observed. "The market is strengthening all the time. There are probably some rumours."

A boy went by along the pavement outside waving a handful of papers.
His cry floated in through the open window:

REPORTED LOSS OF MANY MORE GERMAN BATTLESHIPS. BRITISH CLAIM VICTORY.

Van Teyl grinned.

"You got here just in time," he murmured, "but I suppose you knew all about this."

"I have known since three o'clock," Lutchester replied, "that all the reports of a German victory were false. You will find, when the truth is known, that the German losses were greater than the British."

"Then if that's so," Van Teyl remarked, "I've got one client who'll lose a hatful which you ought to make. Coming up town?"

"I should like, if I may?" Lutchester said, "to be permitted to pay my respects to your sister."

"Why, that's fine!" Van Teyl exclaimed unconvincingly. "We'll take the subway up."

They left the office and plunged into the indescribable horrors of their journey. When they stepped out into the sunlit street in another atmosphere, Van Teyl laid his hand upon his companion's arm in friendly fashion.

"Say, Lutchester," he began, "I don't know that you are going to find Pamela exactly all that she might be in the way of amiability and so on. I know these things are done on the other side, but here it's considered trying your friends pretty high to take a lady of Sonia's reputation where you are likely to meet your friends. No offence, eh?"

"Certainly not," Lutchester replied. "I was sorry, of course, to see you last night. On the other hand, Sonia is an old friend, and my dinner with her had an object. I think I could explain it to your sister."

"I don't know that I should try," Van Teyl advised. "For all her cosmopolitanism, Pamela has some quaint ideas. However, I thought I'd warn you, in case she's a bit awkward."

Pamela, however, had no idea of being awkward. She welcomed Lutchester with a very sweet smile, and gave him the tips of her fingers.

"I was wondering whether we should see you again before we went," she said. "We are leaving for Washington to-morrow."

"By the three o'clock train, I hope?" he ventured.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Why, are you going, too?"

"I hope so."

"I should have thought most of the munition works," she observed, "were further north."

"They are," he acknowledged, "but I have business in Washington. By the bye, will you both come out and dine with me to-night?"

Van Teyl glanced at his sister. She shook her head.

"I am so sorry," she said, "but we are engaged. Perhaps we shall see something of you in Washington."

"I have no doubt you will," Lutchester replied "All the same," he added, "it would give me very great pleasure to entertain you at dinner this evening."

"Why particularly this evening?" she asked.

He looked at her with a queer directness, and Pamela felt certain very excellent resolutions crumbling. She suffered her brother to leave the room without a word.

"Because," he explained, "I think you will find a different atmosphere everywhere. There will be news in the evening papers."

"News?" she repeated eagerly. "You know I am always interested in that."

"The reports of a German naval victory were not only exaggerated," Lutchester said calmly; "they were untrue. Our own official announcement was clumsy and tactless, but you will find it amplified and explained to-night."

Pamela listened with an interest which bordered upon excitement.

"You are sure?" she exclaimed.

"Absolutely," he replied. "My notification is official."

"So you think if we dined with you, the atmosphere to-night would be different?" she observed, with a sudden attempt at the recondite.

Lutchester looked into her eyes without flinching. Pamela, to her annoyance, was worsted in the momentary duel.

"We cannot always choose our atmosphere," he reminded her.

"Mademoiselle Sonia is perhaps connected with the regulation of the munition supplies from America?"

"Mademoiselle Sonia," Lutchester asserted, "is an old friend of mine. Apart from that, it was my business to talk to her."

"Your business?"

Lutchester assented with perfect gravity.

"Within a day or two," he said, "now, if you made a point of it, I could explain a great deal."

Pamela threw herself into a chair almost irritably.

"You have the cult of being mysterious, Mr. Lutchester," she declared. "To be quite frank with you, you seem to be the queerest mixture of any man I ever knew."

"It is the fault of circumstances," he regretted, "if I am sometimes compelled to present myself to you in an unfavourable light. Those circumstances are passing.

You will soon begin to value me at my true worth."

"We had half promised," Pamela murmured, "to go out with Mr. Fischer this evening."

"The more reason for my intervention," Lutchester observed. "Fischer is not a fit person for you to associate with."

She laughed curiously.

"People who saw you at the roof-garden last night might say that you were scarcely a judge," Pamela retorted.

"People who did not know the circumstances might have considered me guilty of an indiscretion," Lutchester admitted, "but they would have been entirely wrong. On the other hand, your friend Fischer is a would-be murderer, a liar, and is at the present moment engaged in intrigues which are a most immoral compound of duplicity and cunning."

"I shall begin to think," Pamela murmured, "that you don't like Mr. Fischer!"

"I detest him heartily," Lutchester confessed.

"I find him singularly interesting," Pamela announced, sitting up in her chair.

"I dare say you do," Lutchester replied. "Women are always bad judges of our sex. All the same, you are not going to marry him."

"How do you know he wants to marry me?" Pamela demanded.

"Instinct!"

"And what do you mean by saying that I am not going to marry him?"

"Because," Lutchester announced, "you are going to marry some one else."

Pamela rose to her feet. There was a little spot of colour in her cheeks.

"Am I indeed!" she exclaimed. "And whom, pray?"

"That I will tell you at Washington," Lutchester promised.

"You know his name, then?"

"I know him intimately," was the cool reply. "What about our dinner to-night?"

"We are going to dine with Mr. Fischer," Pamela decided.

"I really don't think so," Lutchester objected. "For one thing, Mr. Fischer will probably have to attend the police court again later on."

"What about?"

"For having hired a famous murderer to try and get rid of me." Lutchester explained suavely.

"Do you really believe that?" Pamela scoffed. "Why should he want to get rid of you? What harm can you do him?"

"I am trying to find out," Lutchester replied grimly. "Still, since you ask the question, the pocketbook which is on its way to Germany, and which I picked up when Nikasti was taken ill—"

"Oh, yes, I know about that!" Pamela interrupted. "That is the one thing that always sets me thinking about you. What did you do it for? How did you know what it meant to me?"

"Divination, I imagine," Lutchester answered, "or perhaps I was thinking what it might mean to Mr. Fischer."

She looked at him and her face was a study in mixed expressions. Her forehead was a little knitted, her eyes almost strained in their desire to read him; her lips were petulant.

"Dear me, what a puzzle you are!" she exclaimed. "All the same, I am going to wait for Mr. Fischer. It doesn't matter whether one dines or sups. I suppose he will get away from the police court sometime or other."

"But anyway," he protested, "you've heard all that Mr. Fischer has to say. Now I, on the other hand, haven't shown you my hand yet."

"Heard all that Mr. Fischer has to say?" she repeated.

"Certainly! Wasn't he here for several hours with you this afternoon? Didn't he promise you an alliance with Germany against Japan, if you could persuade certain people at Washington to change their tone and attitude towards the export of munitions?"

"This," she declared, trying to keep a certain agitation from her tone, "is mere bluff."

Lutchester was suddenly very serious indeed.

"Listen," he said, "I can prove to you, if you will, that it is not bluff. I can prove to you that I really know something of what I am talking about."

"There is nothing I should like better," she declared.

"To begin with then," Lutchester said, "the pocketbook which Nikasti is supposed to have stolen from your room, the pocketbook of young Sandy Graham, which Mr. Fischer has sent to Germany, does not contain the formula of the new explosive, or any other formula that amounts to anything."

"Just how do you know that?" she demanded.

"To continue," Lutchester said, playing with a little ornament upon the mantelpiece, "you have an appointment—within half an hour, I believe—with Mr. Paul Haskall, who is a specialist in explosives, having an official position with the American Government."

She had ceased to struggle any longer with her surprise. She looked at him fixedly but remained silent.

"It is your belief," he proceeded, "that you are going to hand over to him the formula of which we were speaking."

"It is no belief," she replied. "It is certainty. I took it myself from Graham's pocket."

Lutchester nodded.

"Good! Have you opened it?"

"I have," she declared. "It is without doubt, the formula."

"On the other hand, I am here to assure you that it is not," Lutchester replied.

Her hand was tearing at the cushion by her side. She moistened her lips. There was something about Lutchester hatefully convincing.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "Is this a trick. You won't get it!
No one but Mr. Haskall will get that formula from me!"

Lutchester smiled.

"It will only puzzle him when he gets it! To tell you the truth, the formula is rubbish."

"I don't believe you," she said firmly. "If you think you are going to interfere with my handing it over to him, you are mistaken."

"I have no wish to do anything of the sort," Lutchester assured her. "Make a bargain with me. Mr. Haskall will be here soon. Unfasten the little package you are carrying somewhere about your person, hand him the envelope and watch his face. If he tells you that what you have offered him is a coherent and possible formula for an explosive, then you can look upon me for ever afterwards as the poor, foolish person you sometimes seem to consider me. If, on the other hand, he tells you that it is rubbish, I shall expect you at the Ritz-Carlton at half-past eight."

There was a ring at the bell. She rose to her feet.

"I accept," she declared. "That is Mr. Haskall. And, by the bye, Mr. Lutchester, don't order too elaborate a dinner, for I am very much afraid you will have to eat it all yourself. Now, au revoir," she added, as the door was opened in obedience to her summons and a servant stood prepared to show him out. "If we don't turn up to-night, you will know the reason."

"I am very hopeful," Lutchester replied, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXIX

At five-and-twenty minutes past eight that evening Lutchester, who was waiting in the entrance hall of the Ritz-Carlton, became just a little restless. At half-past, his absorption in an evening paper, over the top of which he looked at every newcomer, was almost farcical. At five-and-twenty to nine Pamela arrived. He advanced down the lounge to meet her. Her face was inscrutable, her smile conventional. Yet she had come! He looked over his shoulder towards the men's coat room.

"Your brother?"

"I sent Jim to his club," she said. "I want to have a confidential talk with you, Mr. Lutchester."

"I am very flattered," he told her, with real earnestness.

She vanished for a few moments in the cloakroom, and reappeared, a radiant vision in deep blue silk. Her hair was gathered in a coil at the top of her head, and surmounted with an ornament of pearls.

"You are looking at my headdress," she remarked, as they walked into the room. "It is the style you admire, is it not?"

He murmured something vague, but he knew that he was forgiven. They were ushered to their places by a portly maitre d'hotel, and she approved of his table. It was set almost in an alcove, and was partially hidden from the other diners.

"Is this seclusion vanity or flattery?"

"As a matter of fact, it is rather a popular table," he told her. "We have an excellent view of the room, and yet one can talk here without being disturbed."

"To talk to you is exactly what I wish to do," she said, as they took their places. "We commence, if you please, with a question. Mr. Fischer thought that he had that formula and he hasn't. I could have sworn that it was in my possession—and it isn't. Where is it?"

"I took it to the War Office before I left England," he told her simply. "They will have the first few tons of the stuff ready next month."

"You!" she cried, "But where did you get it?"

"I happened to be first, that's all," he explained. "You see, I had the advantage of a little inside information. I could have exposed the whole affair if I had thought it wise. I preferred, however, to let matters take their course. Young Graham deserved all he got there, and I made sure of being the first to go through his papers. I'm afraid I must confess that I left a bogus formula for you."

"I had begun to suspect this," Pamela confessed. "You don't mind being put into the witness box, do you?" she added, as she pushed aside the menu with a little sigh of satisfaction. "How wonderfully you order an American dinner!"

"I am so glad I have chosen what you like," he said, "and as to being in the witness box—well, I am going to place myself in the confessional, and that is very much the same thing, isn't it?"

"To begin at the beginning, then—about that destroyer?"

"My mission over here was really important," he admitted. "I couldn't catch the *Lapland*, so the Admiralty sent me over."

"And your golf with Senator Hamblin? It wasn't altogether by accident you met him down at Baltusrol, was it?"

"It was not," he confessed, "I had reason to suspect that certain proposals from Berlin were to be put forward to the President either through his or Senator Hastings' mediation. There were certain facts in connection with them, which I desired to be the first to lay before the authorities."

She looked around the room and recognised some of her friends. For some reason or other she felt remarkably light-hearted.

"For a poor vanquished woman," she observed, turning back to Lutchester, "I feel extraordinarily gay to-night. Tell me some more."

He bowed.

"Mademoiselle Sonia," he proceeded, "has been a friend of mine since she sang in the cafes of Buda Pesth. I dined with her, however, because it had come to my knowledge that she was behaving in a very foolish manner."

Pamela nodded understandingly.

"She was the friend of Count Maurice Ziduski, wasn't she?"

"She is no longer," Lutchester replied. "She sailed for France this morning without seeing him. She has remembered that she is a Frenchwoman."

"It was you who reminded her!"

"Love so easily makes people forgetful," he said, "and I think that Sonia was very fond of Maurice Ziduski. She is a thoughtless, passionate woman, easily swayed through her affections, and she had no idea of the evil she was doing."

"So that disposes of Sonia," Pamela reflected.

"Sonia was only an interlude," Lutchester declared. "She really doesn't come into this affair at all. The one person who does come into it, whom you and I must speak of, is Fischer."

"A most interesting man," Pamela sighed. "I really think his wife would have a most exciting life."

"She would!" Lutchester agreed. "She'd probably be allowed to visit him once every fourteen days in care of a warder."

"Spite!" Pamela exclaimed, with a suspicious little quiver at the corner of her lips.

Lutchester shook his head.

"Fischer is too near the end of his rope for me to feel spiteful," he said, "though I

am quite prepared to grant that he may be capable of considerable mischief yet. A man who has the sublime effrontery to attempt to come to an agreement with two countries, each behind the other's back, is a little more than Machiavellian, isn't he?"

"Is that true of Mr. Fischer?"

"Absolutely," Lutchester assured her. "He is over here for the purpose of somehow or other making it known informally in Washington that Germany would be willing to pledge herself to an alliance with America against Japan, after the war, if America will alter her views as to the export of munitions to the Allies."

"Well, that's a reasonable proposition, isn't it, from his point of view?" Pamela remarked. "It may not be a very agreeable one from yours, but it is certainly one which he has a right to make."

"Entirely," Lutchester agreed, "but where he goes wrong is that his primary object in coming here was to meet Hie chief of the Japanese Secret Service, to whom he has made a proposition of precisely similar character."

Pamela set down her glass.

"You are not in earnest!"

"Absolutely."

"Nikasti?"

"Precisely! He came all the way from Japan to confer with Fischer. Probably, if we knew the whole truth, those rooms at the Plaza Hotel, and the social partnership of your brother and Fischer, were arranged for no other reason than to provide a safe personality for Nikasti in this country, and a safe place for him to talk things over with Fischer."

"Mr. Fischer was paying nearly the whole of the expenses of the Plaza suite," Pamela observed thoughtfully.

"Naturally," Lutchester replied. "Your brother's name was a good, safe name to get behind. But to conclude with our friend Nikasti. He is supposed to leave New

York next Saturday, and to carry to the Emperor of Japan an autograph letter from a nameless person, promising him, if Japan will cease the export of munitions to Russia, the aid of Germany in her impending campaign against America."

"An autograph letter, did you say?" Pamela almost gasped.

"An autograph letter," Lutchester repeated firmly. "Now don't you agree with me that Fischer's game is just a little too daring?"

"It is preposterous!" she cried.

"I have a theory," Lutchester continued, "that Fischer was never intended to use more than one of these letters. It was intended that he should study the situation here, approach one side, and, if unsuccessful, try the other. Fischer, however, conceived a more magnificent idea. He seems to be trying both at the same time. It is the sublime egotism of the Teutonic mind."

"It is monstrous!" Pamela exclaimed indignantly.

"It is almost as monstrous," Lutchester agreed, "as his daring to raise his eyes to you, although, so far as you are concerned, I believe that he is as honest as the man knows how to be."

"And why," she asked, "do you credit him with so much good faith?"

"Because," Lutchester replied, "if he had not been actuated by personal motives, he would never have sought you out as an intermediary. There are other sources open to him, by means of which he could make equally sure of reaching the President's ear. His idea was to impress you. It was foolish but natural."

Pamela was deep in thought. There was an angry spot of colour burning in her cheek.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Lutchester," she persisted, "that this afternoon, say, when with every appearance of earnestness he was begging me to put these propositions before my uncle, he had really made precisely similar overtures to Japan?"

"I give you my word that this is the truth," Lutchester assured her solemnly.

She looked at him with something almost like wonder in her eyes.

"But you?" she exclaimed. "How do you know this? How can you be sure of it?"

"I have seen the autograph letter which Nikasti has in his possession," he announced.

"You mean that Mr. Fischer showed it to you?" she exclaimed incredulously.

Lutchester hesitated.

"There are methods," he said, "which those who fight in the dark places for their country are forced sometimes to make use of. I have seen the letter. I have half convinced those who represent Japan in this matter of Fischer's duplicity. With your help I am hoping wholly to do so."

Pamela leaned for a moment back in her chair.

"Really," she declared, "I am beginning to have the feeling that I am living almost too rapidly. Let us have a breathing spell. I wonder what all these other people are talking about."

"Probably," he suggested, with a little glance around, "about themselves. We will follow their example. Will you marry me, please, Miss Van Teyl?"

"We haven't even come to the ice yet," she sighed, "and you pass from high politics to flagrant personalities. Are you a sensationalist, Mr. Lutchester?"

"Not in the least," he protested. "I simply asked you an extremely important question quite calmly."

"It isn't a question that should be asked calmly," she objected.

"I have immense self-control," he told her, "but if you'd like me to abandon it—"

"For heaven's sake, no!" she interrupted. "Tell me more about Mr. Fischer."

"You won't forget to answer my little question later on, will you?" he begged. "To proceed, then. I spent some little time this afternoon with your chief of the

police here, and I fancy that the person you speak of is becoming a little too blatant even for a broad-minded country like this. He belongs to an informal company of wealthy sympathisers with Germany, who propose to start a campaign of destruction at all the factories manufacturing munitions for the Allies. They have put aside—I believe it is several million dollars, for purposes of bribery. They don't seem to realise, as my friend pointed out to me this afternoon, that the days for this sort of thing in New York have passed. Some of them will be in prison before they know where they are."

"Exactly why did you come to America?" she asked, a little abruptly.

"To meet Nikasti and to look after Fischer."

"Well, you seem to have done that pretty effectually!"

"Also," he went on calmly, "to keep an eye upon you."

"Professionally?"

"You ask me to give away too many secrets," he whispered, leaning towards her.

She made a little grimace.

"Tell me some more about your little adventure in Fifth Avenue?" she begged.

He smiled grimly.

"You wouldn't believe me," he reminded her, "but it really was one of Fischer's little jokes. It very nearly came off, too. As a matter of fact," he went on, "Fischer isn't really clever. He is too obstinate, too convinced in his own mind that things must go the way he wants them to, that Fate is the servant of his will. It's a sort of national trait, you know, very much like the way we English bury our heads in the sand when we hear unpleasant truths. The last thing Fischer wants is advertisement, and yet he goes to some of his Fourteenth Street friends and unearths a popular desperado to get rid of me. The fellow happens most unexpectedly to fail, and now Fischer has to face a good many awkward questions and a good deal of notoriety. No, I don't think Fischer is really clever."

Pamela sighed.

"In that case, I suppose I shall have to say 'No' to him," she decided. "After waiting all this time, I couldn't bear to be married to a fool."

"You won't be," he assured her cheerfully.

"More British arrogance," she murmured. "Now see what's going to happen to us!"

A tall, elderly man, with smooth white hair plastered over his forehead, very precisely dressed, and with a gait so careful as to be almost mincing, was approaching their table. Pamela held out her hands.

"My dear uncle!" she exclaimed. "And I thought that you and aunt never dined at restaurants!"

Mr. Hastings stood with his fingers resting lightly upon the table. He glanced at Lutchester without apparent recognition.

"You remember Mr. Lutchester?" Pamela murmured.

Mr. Hastings' manner lacked the true American cordiality, but he hastened to extend his hand.

"Of course!" he declared. "I was not fortunate enough, however, to see much of you the other evening, Mr. Lutchester. We have several mutual friends whom I should be glad to hear about."

"I shall pay my respects to Mrs. Hastings, if I may, very shortly," Lutchester promised.

"Are you with friends here, uncle?" Pamela inquired.

"We are the guests of Mr. Oscar Fischer," the Senator announced.

Pamela raised her eyebrows.

"So you know Mr. Fischer, uncle?"

"Naturally," Mr. Hastings replied, with some dignity. "Oscar Fischer is one of the most important men in the State which I represent. He is a man of great wealth

and industry and immense influence."

Pamela made a little grimace. Her uncle noticed it and frowned.

"He has just been telling us of his voyage with you, Pamela. Perhaps, if Mr. Lutchester can spare you," he went on, with a little bow across the table, "you will come and take your coffee with us. Your aunt is leaving for Washington, probably to-morrow, and wishes to arrange for you to travel with her. Mr. Lutchester may also, perhaps, give us the pleasure of his company for a few minutes," he added, after a slight but obvious pause.

"Thank you," Pamela answered quickly, "I am Mr. Lutchester's guest this evening. If you are still here, I shall love to come and speak to aunt for a moment later on. If not, I will ring up to-morrow morning."

The bland, almost episcopal serenity of Senator Hastings' face was somewhat disturbed. It was obvious that the situation displeased him.

"I think, Pamela," he said, "that you had better come and speak to your aunt before you leave."

His bow to Lutchester was the bow of a politician to an adversary. He made his way back in leisurely fashion to the table from which he had come, exchanging a few words with many acquaintances. Pamela watched him with a twinkle in her eyes.

"I am becoming so unpopular," she murmured. "I can read in my uncle's tone that my aunt and he disapprove of our dining together here. And as for Mr. Fischer. I'm afraid he'll break off our prospective alliance."

Lutchester smiled.

"Prospective is the only word to use," he observed. "By the bye, are you particularly fond of your uncle?"

"Not riotously," she admitted. "He has been kind to me once or twice, but he's rather a starchy old person."

"In that case," Lutchester decided, "we won't interfere."

CHAPTER XXX

Fischer had by no means the appearance of a discomfited man that evening, when some time later Pamela and Lutchester approached the little group of which he seemed, somehow, to have become the central figure. It was a small party, but, in its way, a distinguished one. Pamela's aunt was a member of an historic American family, and a woman of great social position, not only in New York but in Washington itself. Of the remaining guests, one was a financial magnate of world-wide fame, and the other, Senator Joyce, a politician of such eminence that his name was freely mentioned as a possible future president. Mrs. Hastings greeted Pamela and her escort without enthusiasm.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "how extraordinary to find you here!"

"Is it?" Pamela observed indifferently. "You know Mr. Lutchester, don't you, aunt?"

Mrs. Hastings remembered her late dinner guest, but her recognition was icy and barely polite. She turned away at once and resumed her conversation with Fischer. Lutchester was not introduced to either of the other members of the party. He laid his hand on the back of an empty chair and turned it round for Pamela, but she stopped him with a word of thanks. Something had gone from her own naturally pleasant tone. She held her hand higher, even, than her aunt's, as she turned a little insistently towards her.

"So sorry, aunt," she announced, "but we are going now. Good night!"

Mrs. Hastings disapproved.

"We have seen nothing of you yet, Pamela," she said stiffly. "You had better stay with us and we will drop you on our way home."

Pamela shook her head.

"I am coming with you to-morrow, you know," she reminded her aunt. "To-night I am Mr. Lutchester's guest and he will see me home."

Mrs. Hastings drew her niece a little closer to her.

"Is this part of your European manners, Pamela?" she whispered, "that you dine alone in a restaurant with an acquaintance? Let me tell you frankly that I dislike the idea most heartily. My chaperonage is always at your service, and any girl of your age in America would be delighted to avail herself of it."

"It is very kind of you, aunt," Pamela replied, "but in a general way I finished with chaperons long ago."

"Where is Jimmy?" Mrs. Hastings inquired.

"He was coming with us to-night," Pamela explained, "but I asked him particularly to stay away. I have seen so little of Mr. Lutchester since he arrived, and I want to talk to him."

The financial magnate awoke from a comatose inertia and suddenly gripped Lutchester by the hand.

"Lutchester," he repeated to himself. "I thought I knew your face. Stayed with your uncle down at Monte Carlo once. You came there for a week."

Lutchester acknowledged his recollection of the fact and the two men exchanged a few commonplace remarks. Mrs. Hastings took the opportunity to try and induce Pamela to converse with Fischer.

"We have all been so interested to-night," she said, "in hearing what Mr. Fischer has to say about the situation on the other side."

Pamela was primed for combat.

"Has Mr. Fischer been telling you fairy tales?" she laughed.

"Fairy tales?" her aunt repeated severely. "I don't understand."

Fischer's steel grey eyes flashed behind his spectacles.

"I'm afraid that Miss Van Teyl's prejudices," he observed bitterly, "are very firmly fixed."

"Then she is no true American," Mrs. Hastings pronounced didactically.

"Oh, I can assure you that I am not prejudiced," Pamela declared, "only, you see, I, too, have just arrived from the other side, and I have been able to use my own eyes and judgment. If there is any prejudice in the matter, why should it not come from Mr. Fischer? He has the very good excuse of his German birth."

"Mr. Fischer is an American citizen," Mrs. Hastings reminded her niece, "and personally, I think that the American of German birth is one of the most loyal and long-suffering persons I know. I cannot say as much for the English people who are living over here. And as to fairy stories—"

Pamela intervened, turning towards Fischer with a little laugh.

"Oh, he can't even deny those! What about the great German victory in the North Sea, Mr. Fischer? Do you happen to have seen the latest telegrams?"

"Our first reports were perhaps a little too glowing," Mr. Fischer acknowledged. "That, under the circumstances, is, I think, only natural. But the facts remain that the invincible English and the untried German fleets have met, to the advantage of the German."

Pamela shook her head.

"I cannot even allow that," she objected. "The advantage, if there was any, rested on the other side. But I just want you to remember what we were told in that first wonderful outpouring of fabricated news—that the naval supremacy of England was gone for ever, that the freedom of the seas was assured, that German merchant vessels were steaming home from all directions! No, Mr. Fischer! Between ourselves, I think that your cause needs a few fairy stories, and I look upon you as one of the greatest experts in the world when it comes to concocting them."

Fischer, who had risen to his feet half way through Pamela's speech, was obviously a little taken aback by her direct attack. Mrs. Hastings took no pains to

conceal her annoyance.

"For a young girl of your age, Pamela," she said sternly, "I consider that you express your opinions far too freely. Your attitude, too, is unjustifiable."

"Ah, well, you see, I am a little prejudiced against Mr. Fischer," Pamela laughed, turning towards him. "He happened to defeat one of my pet schemes."

"But I am ready to further your dearest one," he reminded her, dropping his voice, and leading her a little on one side. "What about our alliance?"

"You scarcely need my aid," she observed, with a shrug of the shoulders.

He remonstrated vigorously. There was a revived hopefulness in his tone. Perhaps, after all, here was the secret of her displeasure with him.

"You wonder, perhaps, to see me with your uncle. I give you my word that it is a dinner of courtesy only. I give you my word that I have not opened my lips on political matters. I have been waiting for your answer."

"I have lost faith in you," she told him calmly. "I am not even certain that you possess the authority you spoke of."

"If that is all," he replied eagerly, "you shall see it with your own eyes. You are staying with your uncle and aunt in Washington, are you not? I shall call upon you immediately I arrive, and bring it with me."

She nodded.

"Well, that remains a challenge, then, Mr. Fischer. And now, if you are quite ready," she added, turning to Lutchester…. "Good-by, everybody!"

"Aren't your ears burning?" Pamela asked, after Lutchester had handed her into a taxicab and taken his place by her side. "I can absolutely feel them talking about us."

"I seem to be most regrettably unpopular," Lutchester remarked.

"Even now I am puzzled about that," Pamela confessed, "but you see my aunt considers herself the arbitress of what is right or wrong in social matters, and she

is exceedingly narrow-minded. In her eyes it is no doubt a greater misdemeanour for me to have dined at the Ritz-Carlton alone with you, than if I had conspired against the Government."

"And this, I thought, was the land of freedom for your sex!"

"Ah, but my aunt is rather an exception," Pamela reminded him. "The one thing I cannot understand, however, is that she should have allowed herself to be seen dining with Mr. Oscar Fischer at the Ritz-Carlton. I should have thought that would have been almost as heinous to her as my own little slip from grace."

"Is your aunt by way of being interested in politics?" Lutchester inquired.

"Not in a general way," Pamela replied, "but she is intensely ambitious, and she'd give her soul if Uncle Theodore could get a nomination for the Presidency."

"Perhaps she is taking up the German-American cause, then," Lutchester suggested. "It is a possible platform, at any rate."

"I foresee a new party," Pamela murmured thoughtfully. "Now I come to think of it, Mr. Elsworthy, the fat old gentleman who knew your uncle, is very pro-German."

He leaned towards her.

"We have had enough politics," he insisted. "There is the other thing. Couldn't I have my answer?"

She let him take her fingers. In the cool darkness through which they were rushing her face seemed white, her head was a little averted. He tried to draw her to him, but she was unyielding.

"Please not," she begged. "I like you—and I'm glad I like you," she added, "but I don't feel certain about anything. Couldn't we be just friends a little longer?"

"It must be as you say, but I am horribly in love with you," he confessed. "That may sound rather a bald way of saying so, but it's the truth, Pamela, dear."

His clasp upon her fingers was tightened. She turned towards him. Her expression was serious but delightful.

"Well, let me tell you this much, at least," she confided. "I have never before in my life been so glad to hear any one say so…. And here we are at home, and there's Jimmy on the doorstep. What is it, Jimmy," she asked, waving her hand.

He came down towards her in a state of great excitement.

"Say, we've had to open up the office again!" he exclaimed. "The telegrams are rolling in now. That so-called German naval victory was a fake. The Britishers came out right on top. You know you stand to net at least half a million, Mr. Lutchester? The worst of it is I have another client who's going to lose it."

Pamela shook her head at Lutchester.

"The possibility of increased responsibilities," he whispered. "A married man needs something to fall back upon."

CHAPTER XXXI

The offices of Messrs. Neville, Brooks, and Van Teyl were the scene of something like pandemonium. Van Teyl himself, bathed in perspiration, rushed into his room for the twentieth time. He almost flung the newspaper man who was waiting for him through the door.

"No, we don't know a darned thing," he declared. "We've no special information. The only reason we're up to our neck in Anglo-French is because we've two big clients dealing."

"It's just a few personal notes about those clients we'd like to handle."

"Oh, get out as quick as you can!" Van Teyl snapped. "This isn't a bucket shop or a pool room. The names of our clients concerns ourselves only."

"What do you think Anglo-French are going to do, Mr. Van Teyl?"

"I can't tell," was the prompt answer, "but I can tell what's going to happen if you don't clear out."

The newspaper man took a hurried leave. Van Teyl seized the telephone receiver, only to put it down with a little shout of relief as the door opened and Lutchester entered.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Why, I've been ringing you up for an hour and a half."

"Sorry," Lutchester replied, "I was down at the barber's the first time you got through, and then I had some cables to send off."

"Look here," Van Teyl continued, gripping him by the shoulder, "is six hundred

and forty thousand dollars, or thereabouts, profit enough for you on your Anglo-French?"

"It sounds adequate," Lutchester confessed, laying his hat and cane carefully upon the table and drawing up an easy-chair. "How much is Mr. Fischer going to lose?"

"God knows! If you allow me to sell at the present moment, you'll ease the market, and he'll lose about what you make."

"And if I decide to hold my Anglo-French?"

"You'll have to provide us with about a couple of million dollars," Van Teyl replied, "and I should think you would pretty well break Fischer for a time. Frankly, he's an important client, and we don't want him broken, even temporarily."

"What do you want me to do, then?"

"Give us authority to sell," Van Teyl begged. "Can't you hear them yapping about in the office outside? They're round me all the time like a pack of hounds. Honestly, if I don't sell some Anglo-French before lunch-time to-day, they look like wrecking the office."

Lutchester knocked the end of a cigarette thoughtfully against the side of his chair.

"All right," he decided, "I don't want you to suffer any inconvenience. Besides, I am going to Washington this afternoon. You can keep on selling as long as the market's steady. Directly it sags, hold off. If necessary, even buy a few more. You understand me? Don't sell a single block under to-day's price. Keep the market at that figure. It's an easy job, because next week Anglo-French will go up again."

Van Teyl was moved to a rare flash of admiration.

"You're a cool hand, Lutchester," he declared, "considering you're not a business man."

"Fischer's the man who'll need to keep cool," Lutchester remarked, lighting his

cigarette. "What about a little lunch?"

The stockbroker scarcely heard him. He had struck a bell, and the office seemed suddenly filled with clerks. Van Teyl's words were incoherent—a string of strange directions, punctuated by slang which was, so far as Lutchester was concerned, unintelligible. The whole place seemed to wake into a clamour of telephone bells, shouts, the clanging and opening of the lift gates, and the hurried tramp of footsteps in the corridors outside. Lutchester rose to his feet. He was looking very comfortable and matter-of-fact in his grey tweed suit and soft felt hat.

"Perhaps," he observed pleasantly, "I am out of place here. Drop me a line and let me know how things are going to the Hotel Capitol at Washington."

"That's all right," Van Teyl promised. "I'll get you on the long-distance 'phone. I was coming myself with Pamela for a few days, but this little deal of yours has set things buzzing…. Say, who's that?"

The door opened, and Fischer paused upon the threshold. Certainly, of all the people concerned, the two speculators themselves seemed the least moved by the excitement they were causing. Fischer was dressed with his usual spick-and-span neatness, and his appearance betrayed no sign of flurry or excitement. He nodded grimly to Lutchester.

"My congratulations," he said. "You seem to have rigged the Press here to some purpose."

Lutchester raised his eyebrows.

"I don't even know a newspaper man in New York," he declared.

The newcomer gave vent to a little gesture of derision.

"Then you've some very clever friends! You'd better make the most of their offices. The German version of the naval battle will be confirmed and amplified within twenty-four hours, and then your Anglo-French will touch mud."

"If that is your idea," Lutchester remarked suavely, "why buy now? Why not wait till next week? Come," he went on, "I will have a little flutter with you, if you like, Fischer. I will bet you five thousand dollars, and Van Teyl here shall

hold the stakes, that a week hence to-day Anglo-French stand higher than they do at this moment."

Fischer hesitated. Then he turned away.

"I am not a sportsman, Mr. Lutchester," he said.

Lutchester brushed away a little dust from his coat sleeve.

"No," he murmured, "I agree with you. Good morning!"

Lutchester walked out into the sun-baked streets, and with his absence Fischer abandoned his almost unnatural calm. He strode up and down the room, fuming with rage. At every fresh click of the tape machine, he snatched at the printed slip eagerly and threw it away with an oath. No one took any notice of him. Van Teyl rushed in and out, telephones clanged, perspiring clerks dashed in with copies of contracts to add to the small pile upon the desk. There came a quiet moment presently. Van Teyl wiped the perspiration from his forehead and drank a tumblerful of water.

"Fischer," he asked, "what made you go into this so big? You must have known there was always the risk of your wireless report beating it up a little too tall."

"It wasn't our report at all that I went by," Fischer confessed gloomily. "It was the English Admiralty announcement that did it. Can you conceive," he went on, striking the table with his fist, "any nation at war, with a grain of common sense or an ounce of self-respect, issuing a statement like that?—an apology for a defeat which, damn it all, never happened! Say the thing was a drawn battle, which is about what it really was. It didn't suit the Germans to fight it to a finish. They'd everything to lose and little to gain. So in effect they left the Britishers there and passed back behind their own minefield. So far as regards reports, that was victory enough for any one except those muddle-headed civilians at Whitehall. They deceived the world with that infernal bulletin, and incidentally me. It was on that statement I gave you my orders, not on ours."

"It's a damned unfortunate business!" Van Teyl sighed. "You're only half way out yet, and it's cost you nearly three hundred thousand."

A dull spot of purple colour burned in Fischer's cheeks. His upper lip was drawn in, his appearance for a moment was repulsive.

"It isn't the money I mind," he muttered. "It's Lutchester."

Van Teyl was discreetly silent. Fischer seemed to read his thoughts. He leaned across the table.

"A wonderful fellow, your friend Lutchester," he sneered. "An Admirable Crichton of finance and diplomacy and love-making, eh? But the end isn't just yet. I promise you one thing, James Van Teyl. He isn't going to marry your sister."

"I'd a damned sight sooner she married him than you!" Van Teyl blazed out.

Fischer was taken aback. He had held for so long the upper hand with this young man that for the moment he had forgotten that circumstances were changed between them. Van Teyl rose to his feet. The bonds of the last few months had snapped. He spoke like a free man.

"Look here, Fischer," he said, "you've had me practically in your power for the best part of a year, but now I'm through with you. I'm out of your debt, no thanks to you, and I'm going to keep out. I am working on your business as hard as though you were my own brother, and I'll go on doing it. I'll get you out of this mess as well as I can, and after that you can take your damned business where you please."

"So that's it, is it?" Fischer scoffed. "A rich brother-in-law coming along, eh? … No, don't do that," stepping quickly backwards as Van Teyl's fist shot out.

"Then keep my sister's name out of this conversation," Van Teyl insisted. "If you are wise, you'll clear out altogether. They're at it again."

Fischer, however, glanced at the clock and remained. At the next lull, he hung down the tape and turned to his companion.

"Say, there's no use quarrelling, James," he declared. "I'm going to leave you to it now. Guess I said a little more than I meant to, but I tell you I hate that fellow Lutchester. I hate him just as though I were the typical German and he were the typical Britisher, and there was nothing but a sea of hate between us. Shake hands, Jim."

Van Teyl obeyed without enthusiasm. Fischer drew a chair to the table and wrote

out a cheque, which he passed across.

"I'll drop into the bank and let them know about this," he said. "You can make up accounts and let me hear how the balance stands. I'll wipe it out by return, whatever it is."

Fischer passed out of the offices a few minutes later, followed by many curious eyes, and stepped into his automobile. A young man who had brushed against him pushed a note into his hand. Fischer opened it as his car swung slowly through the traffic:—

Guards at all Connecticut factories doubled. O'Hagan caught last night in precincts of small arms factory. Was taken alive, disobeying orders. Be careful.

Fischer tore the note into small pieces. His face was grimmer than ever as he leaned back amongst the cushions. There were evil things awaiting him outside Wall Street.

CHAPTER XXXII

Lutchester breathed the air of Washington and felt almost homesick. The stateliness of the city, its sedate and quiescent air after the turmoil of New York, impressed him profoundly. Everywhere its diplomatic associations made themselves felt. Congress was in session, and the faces of the men whom he met continually in the hotels and restaurants seemed to him some index of the world power which flung its far-reaching arms from beneath the Capitol dome.

One afternoon a few days after his arrival he called at the Hastings' house, a great Colonial mansion within a stone's throw of his own headquarters. The mention of his name, however, seemed to chill all the hospitality out of the smiling face of the southern butler who answered his ring. Miss Van Teyl was out, and from the man's manner it was obvious that Miss Van Teyl would continue to be out for a very long time. Lutchester retraced his steps to the British Embassy, where he had spent most of the morning, and made his way to the sitting-room of one of the secretaries. The Honourable Philip Downing, who was eagerly waiting for a cable recalling him to take up a promised commission, welcomed him heartily.

"Things are slack here to-day, old fellow. Let's go out to the Country Club and have a few sets of tennis or a game of golf, whichever you prefer," he suggested. "I've done my little lot till the evening."

"Show on to-night, isn't there?" Lutchester inquired.

"Just a reception. You're going to put in an appearance?"

"I fancy so. Have you got your list of guests handy?"

The young man dived into a drawer and produced a few typewritten sheets.

"Alphabetical list of acceptances, with here and there a few personal notes," he pointed out, with an air of self-satisfaction. "I go through this list with the chief while he's changing for dinner."

Lutchester ran his forefinger down the list.

"Senator Theodore and Mrs. Hastings," he quoted. "By the bye, they have a niece staying with them."

"Want a card for her?" the Honourable Philip inquired with a grin.

"I should like it sent off this moment," Lutchester replied.

The young man took a square, gilt-edged card from a drawer by his side, filled it out at Lutchester's dictation, rang the bell, and dispatched it by special messenger.

"I've got my little buzzer outside," he observed. "We'll make tracks for the club, if you're ready."

The two men played several sets of tennis and afterwards lounged in two wicker chairs, underneath a gigantic plane tree in a corner of the lawn. The place was crowded, and Philip Downing was an excellent showman.

"Washington," he explained, "has never been so divided into opposite camps, and this is almost the only common meeting ground. Every one has to come here, of course. The German Staff play tennis and the Austrians all go in for polo. Here comes Ziduski. He's most fearfully popular with the ladies here—does us a lot of harm, they say. He's a great sticker for etiquette. He used to nod and call me Phil. Now you watch. He'll bow from his waist, as though he had corsets on. As a matter of fact, he's a good sportsman."

Count Ziduski's bow was stiff enough but his intention was obvious. He stopped before the two men, exchanged a somewhat stilted greeting with Philip Downing, and turned to Lutchester.

"I believe," he said, "that I have the honour of addressing Mr. Lutchester?"

Lutchester rose to his feet.

"That is my name," he admitted.

"We have met in Rome, I think, and in Paris," the Count reminded him. "If I might beg for the favour of a few moments' conversation with you."

The two men strolled away together. The Count plunged at once into the middle of things.

"It is you, sir, I believe, whom I have to thank for the abrupt departure of Mademoiselle Sonia from New York?"

"Quite true," Lutchester admitted.

"Under different circumstances," the Count proceeded, "I might regard such interference in my affairs in a different manner. Here, of course, that is impossible. I speak to you out of regard for the lady in question. You appear in some mysterious manner to have discovered the fact that she was in the habit of bringing entirely unimportant and non-political messages from dear friends in France."

"Mademoiselle Sonia," Lutchester said calmly, "had for a brief space of time forgotten herself. She was engaged in carrying out espionage work on your behalf. I believe I may say that she will do so no more."

The Count was a man of medium height, thin, with complexion absolutely colourless, and deep-set, tired eyes. At this moment, however, he seemed endowed with the spirit of a new virility. The cane which he grasped might have been a dagger. His smooth tones nursed a threat.

"Mr. Lutchester," he declared, "if harm should come to her through your information, I swear to God that you shall pay!"

Lutchester's manner was mild and unprovocative.

"Count," he replied, "we make no war upon women. Sonia has repented, and the knowledge which I have of her misdeeds will be shared by no one. She has gone back to her country to work for the Red Cross there. So far as I am concerned, that is the end."

The two men walked a few steps further in unbroken silence. Then the

Count raised his hat.

"Mr. Lutchester," he said, "yours is the reply of an honourable enemy. I might have trusted you, but Sonia is half of my life. I offer you my thanks."

He strolled away, and Lutchester rejoined his young friend.

"The lion and the lamb seem to have parted safely!" the latter exclaimed. "Now sit by my side and I will show you interesting things. Those four irreproachable young men over there in tennis flannels are all from the German Embassy. The two elder ones behind are Austrians. All those women are the wives of Senators who sympathise with Germany. Their husbands look like it, don't they? To-day they have an addition to their ranks—the thin, elderly man there, whose clothes were evidently made in London. That's Senator Hastings. He is a personal friend of the President. Jove, what a beautiful girl with Mrs. Hastings!"

"That," Lutchester told him, "is the young lady to whom you have just sent a card of invitation for to-night."

"Then here's hoping that she comes," Philip Downing observed, finishing his glass of mint julep. "Is she a pal of yours?"

"Yes, I know her," Lutchester admitted.

"Let's go and butt in, then," Downing suggested. "I love breaking up these little gatherings. You'll see them all stiffen when we come near. I hope they haven't got hold of Hastings, though."

The two men rose to their feet and crossed the lawn. Fischer, who had suddenly appeared in the background, whispered something in Mrs. Hastings' ear. She swung around to Pamela, a second too late. Pamela, with a word of excuse to the young man with whom she was talking, stepped away from the circle and held out her hand to Lutchester.

"So you have really come to Washington!" she exclaimed.

"As a rescuer," Lutchester replied. "I feel that I have a mission. We cannot afford to lose your sympathies. May I introduce Philip Downing?"

Pamela shook hands with the young man and took her place between them.

"I've been envying you your seat under the tree," she said. "Couldn't we go there for a few moments?"

Mrs. Hastings detached herself and approached them. She received Philip Downing's bow cordially, and she was almost civil to Lutchester.

"I can't have my niece taken away," she protested. "We are just going in to tea, Pamela."

Pamela shook her head.

"I am going to sit under that tree with Mr. Lutchester and Mr. Downing," she declared. "Tea doesn't attract me in the least, and that tree does."

Mrs. Hastings accepted defeat with a somewhat cynical gracefulness. She closed her lorgnette with a little snap.

"You leave us all desolated, my dear Pamela," she said. "You remind me of what your poor dear father used to say—'Almost any one could live with Pamela if she always had her own way.'"

Pamela laughed as she strolled across the lawn.

"Aren't one's relatives trying!" she murmured.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Philip Downing very soon justified the profession to which he belonged by strolling off with some excuse about paying his respects to some acquaintances. Pamela and Lutchester immediately dropped the somewhat frivolous tone of their conversation.

"You know that things are moving with our friend Fischer?" she began.

"I gathered so," Lutchester assented.

"His scheme is growing into shape," she went on. "You know what wonderful people his friends are for organising. Well, they are going to start a society all through the States and nominate for its president—Uncle Theodore."

"Will they have any show at all?" Lutchester asked curiously.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Who can tell? The German-Americans are very powerful indeed all through the West, and then the pacifists will join them. You see, I believe that although the soul of the country is with the Allies, England is the most tactless country in the world. She is always giving little pinpricks to the Government over here, either about maritime law or one thing or another. Then all those articles in the papers about America being too proud to fight, the sneering tone of some, even, of the leading reviews, did a lot of harm. Uncle Theodore is going to stand for what they call the true neutrality. That is to say, no munitions, no help for either side."

"Well, I don't know anything about American politics," Lutchester confessed, "but I shouldn't think he'd have an earthly chance."

"Money is immensely powerful," she went on reflectively, "and many of the

great money interests of the country are controlled by German-Americans. Mr. Fischer has almost thrown me over politically, but Uncle Theodore is crazy about the idea of a German pledge to protect America against Japan. That is going to be the great argument which he will keep up his sleeve until after the nomination."

"Fischer's trump card," Lutchester observed. "He hasn't shown you a certain autograph letter yet, I suppose?"

She shook her head.

"He may have shown it to Uncle Theodore. I'm afraid he doesn't mean to approach me again. He seems to have completely changed his attitude towards me since the night he saw us at the Ritz-Carlton dining together. He was going to show me the letter the first day after his arrival in Washington. Instead of that, he has been in the house for hours at a time without making the slightest attempt to see me."

"Faithless fellow!" Lutchester murmured. "Nothing like an Englishman, after all, for absolute fidelity."

"Do you really think so?" Pamela inquired anxiously. "Do you think I should be safe in trusting my heart and future to an Englishman?"

"To one particular Englishman, yes!" was the firm reply. "I was rather hoping you might have made up your mind."

"Too many things to think about," she laughed. "How long are you going to stay in Washington?"

"A few hours or days or weeks—until I have finished the work that brought me here."

"And what exactly is that?"

"You ask me lightly," he replied, "but, if you are willing, I have decided to take you into my confidence. Our friend Nikasti will be here to-morrow. He was to have sailed for Japan yesterday, but he has postponed his voyage for a few days. Do you know much about the Japanese, Miss Pamela?"

"Very little," she acknowledged.

"Well, I will tell you one thing. They are not very good at forgiving. There was only one way I could deal with Nikasti in New York, and it was a brutal way. I have seen him twice since. He wouldn't look me in the eyes. I know what that means. He hates me. In a sense I don't believe he would allow that to interfere in any way with his mission. In another sense it would. The Allies, above all things, have need of Japan. We want Japan and America to be friends. We don't want Germany butting in between the two. Baron Yung is a very clever man, but he is even more impenetrable than his countrymen generally are. Our people here admit that they find it difficult to progress with him very far. They believe that secretly he is in sympathy with Nikasti's reports— but you don't know about those, I suppose?"

"I don't think I do," she admitted.

"Nikasti was sent to England some years ago to report upon us as a country. Japan at that time was meditating an alliance with one of the great European Powers. Obviously it must be Germany or England. Nikasti travelled all through England, studied our social life, measured our weaknesses; did the same through Germany, returned to Japan, and gave his vote in favour of Germany. I have even seen a copy of his report. He laid great stress upon the absolute devotion to sport of our young men, and the entire absence of any patriotic sentiment or any means of national defence. Well, as you know, for various reasons his counsels were over-ridden, and Japan chose the British alliance. That was entirely the fault of imperfect German diplomacy. At a time like this, though, I cannot help thinking that some elements of his former distrust still remain in Nikasti's mind, and I have an idea that Baron Yung is, to a certain extent, a sympathiser. I've got to get at the bottom of this before I leave the States. If I need your help, will you give it me?"

"If I can," she promised.

They saw Mrs. Hastings' figure on the terrace, waving, and Pamela rose reluctantly to her feet.

"I don't suppose," Lutchester continued, as they strolled across the lawn, "that you have very much influence with your uncle, or that he would listen very much to anything that you have to say, but if he is really in earnest about this

thing, he is going to play a terribly dangerous game. As things are at present, he has a very pleasant and responsible position as the supporter and friend of very able men. With regard to this new movement, he may find the whole ground crumble away beneath his feet. Fischer is playing the game of a madman. It isn't only political defeat that might come to him, but disgrace—even dishonour."

"You frighten me," Pamela confessed gravely.

Lutchester sighed.

"Your uncle," he went on, "is one of those thoroughly conceited, egotistical men who will probably listen to no one. You see, I have found out a little about him already. But they tell me that her social position means a great deal to your aunt. Neither her birth nor her friends could save her if Fischer drags your uncle to his chariot wheels."

"Do you think, perhaps, that you underestimate Mr. Fischer's position over here?" she asked thoughtfully.

"I don't think I do," he replied, "but here is something which you have scarcely appreciated. Fischer has had the effrontery to link himself up with a little crowd of Germans all through the States, who are making organised attempts to destroy the factories where ammunitions are being made for the Allies. That sort of thing, you know, would bring any one, however, distantly connected with it, to Sing Sing…. One moment," he added quickly, as Mrs. Hastings stepped forward to meet them; "the reception at the British Embassy to-night?"

"The others are going," she said. "My aunt didn't feel she was sufficiently—"

"We sent you a card round especially this afternoon," Lutchester interrupted. "You'll come?"

"How nice of you! Of course I will," she promised.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"Small affair, this," Downing observed, as he piloted Lutchester through the stately reception rooms of the Embassy. "You see, we are all living a sort of touchy life here, nowadays. We try to be civil to any of the German or Austrian lot when we meet, but of course they don't come to our functions. And every now and then some of those plaguey neutrals get the needle and they don't come, so we never know quite where we are, Guadopolis has been avoiding us lately, and I hear he was seen out at the Lakewood Country Club with Count Reszka, the Rumanian Minister, a few days ago. Gave the Chief quite a little flurry, that did."

"There's an idea over in London," Lutchester remarked, "that a good deal of the war is being shaped in Washington nowadays."

"That is the Chief's notion," Downing assented. "I know he's pining to talk to you, so we'll go and do the dutiful."

Lutchester was welcomed as an old friend by both the Ambassador and his wife. The former drew him to a divan from which he could watch the entrance to the rooms, and sat by his side.

"I am glad they sent you out, Lutchester," he said earnestly. "If ever a country needed watching by a man with intelligence and experience, this one does to-day."

"Do you happen to know that fellow Oscar Fischer?" Lutchester asked.

"I do, and I consider him one of the most dangerous people in the States for us," the Ambassador declared. "He has a great following, huge wealth, and, although he is not a man of culture, he doesn't go about his job in that bull-headed way that most of them do."

"He's trying things on with Japan," Lutchester observed. "I think I shall manage to checkmate him there all right. But there's another scheme afloat that I don't follow so closely. You know Senator Hastings, I suppose?"

The Ambassador nodded.

"Senator Theodore Hastings," he repeated thoughtfully. "Yes, he's rather a dark horse. He is supposed to be the President's bosom friend, but I hear whispers that he'd give his soul for a nomination, adopt any cause or fight any one's battle."

"That's my own idea of him," Lutchester replied, "and I think you will find him in the field with a pretty definite platform before long."

"You think he's mixed up with Fischer?" the Ambassador inquired.

"I'm sure he is," Lutchester assented. "Not only that, but they have something up their sleeve. I think I can guess what it is, but I'm not sure. How have things seemed to you here lately?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't liked the look of them," the Ambassador confided. "There's something afoot, and I can't be sure what it is. Look at the crowd to-night. Of course, all the Americans are here, but the diplomatic attendance has never been so thin. The Rumanian Minister and his wife, the Italian, the Spanish, and the Swedish representatives are all absent. I have just heard, too, that Baron von Schwerin is giving a dinner-party."

Lutchester looked thoughtfully at the little stream of people. The Ambassador left him for a few moments to welcome some late comers. He returned presently and resumed his seat by Lutchester's side.

"Of course," he continued, lowering his voice, "all formal communications between us and the enemy Embassies have ceased, but it has come to be an understood thing, to avoid embarrassments to our mutual friends, that we do not hold functions on the same day. I heard that Von Schwerin was giving this dinner-party, so I sent round this morning to inquire. The reply was that it was entirely a private one. One of our youngsters brought us in a list of the guests a short time ago. I see Hastings is one of them, and Fischer, and Rumania and Greece will be represented. Now Hastings was to have been here, and as a rule the neutrals are very punctilious."

"I suppose the way that naval affair was represented didn't do us any good," Lutchester observed.

"It did us harm, without a doubt," was the lugubrious admission. "Still, fortunately, these people over here are clever enough to understand our idiosyncrasies. I honestly think we'd rather whine about a defeat than glory in a victory."

"Diplomatically, too," Lutchester remarked thoughtfully, "I should have said that things seemed all right here. The President comes in for a great deal of abuse in some countries. Personally, I think he has been wonderful."

The Ambassador nodded.

"You and I both know, Lutchester," he said, "that the last thing we want is to find America dragged into this war. Such a happening would be nothing more nor less than a catastrophe in itself, to say nothing of the internal dissensions here. On the other hand, as things are now, Washington is becoming a perfect arena for diplomatic chicanery, and I have just an instinct—I can't define it in any way—which leads me to believe that some fresh trouble has started within the last twenty-four hours."

Lady Ridlingshawe motioned to her husband with her fan, and he rose at once to his feet.

"I must leave you to look after yourself for a time, Lutchester," he concluded. "You'll find plenty of people here you know. Don't go until you've seen me again."

Lutchester wandered off in search of Pamela. He found her with Mrs. Hastings, surrounded by a little crowd of acquaintances. Pamela waved her fan, and they made way for him.

"Mr. Lutchester, I have been looking everywhere for you!" she exclaimed. "What a secretive person you are! Why couldn't you tell me that Lady Ridlingshawe was your cousin? I want you to take me to her, please, I met her sister out in Nice."

She laid her fingers upon his arm, and they passed out of the little circle.

"All bluff, of course," she murmured. "Find the quietest place you can. I want to talk to you."

They wandered out on to a balcony where some of the younger people were taking ices. She leaned over the wooden rail.

"Listen," she said, "I adore this atmosphere, and I am perfectly certain there is something going on—something exciting, I mean. You know that the Baron von Schwerin has a dinner-party?"

"I know that," he assented.

"Uncle Theodore is going with Mr. Fischer. He was invited at the last moment, and I understand that his presence was specially requested."

Lutchester stood for a short time in an absorbed and sombre silence. In the deep blue twilight his face seemed to have fallen into sterner lines. Without a doubt he was disturbed. Pamela looked at him anxiously.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Nothing definite, only for the last few hours I have felt that things here are reaching a crisis. There is something going on around us, something which seems to fill Fischer and his friends with confidence, something which I don't quite understand, and which it is my business to understand. That is really what is worrying me."

She nodded sympathetically and glanced around for a moment.

"Let me tell you something," she whispered. "This evening my uncle came into my room just before dinner. There is a little safe built in the wall for jewellery. He begged for the loan of it. His library safe, he said, was out of order. I couldn't see what he put in, but when he had closed the door he stood looking at it for a moment curiously. I made some jesting remark about its being a treasure chest, but he answered me seriously. 'You are going to sleep to-night, Pamela,' he said, 'within a few yards of a dozen or so of written words which will change the world's history.'"

Lutchester was listening intently. There was a prolonged pause.

"Well?" he asked, at last.

She glanced at the little Yale key which hung from her bracelet.

"Nothing! I was just wondering how I should be able to sleep through the night without opening the safe."

"But surely your uncle didn't give you the key!"

She shook her head.

"I don't suppose he knows I have such a thing," she replied. "He has a master-key himself to all the safes, which he used. This is one the housekeeper gave me as soon as I arrived."

Lutchester looked out into the darkness.

"Tell me," he inquired, "is that your house—the next one to this?"

"That's the old Hastings' house," she assented. "They are all family mansions along here."

"It looks an easy place to burgle," he remarked.

She laughed quietly.

"I should think it would be," she admitted. "There are any quantity of downstair windows. We don't have burglaries in Washington, though —certainly not this side of the city."

A little bevy of young people had found their way into the gardens. Lutchester waited until they had passed out of earshot before he spoke again.

"I have reason to believe," he continued, "that in the course of their negotiations Fischer has deposited with your uncle a certain autograph letter, of which we have already spoken, making definite proposals to America if she will change her attitude on the neutrality question."

"The written words," Pamela murmured.

Lutchester's hand suddenly closed upon her wrist. She was surprised to find his fingers so cold, yet marvellously tenacious.

"You are going to lose that key and I am going to find it," he said, quietly. "I am sorry—but you must."

"I am going to do nothing of the sort," Pamela objected.

His fingers remained like a cold vice upon her wrist. She made no effort to draw it away.

"Listen," he said; "do you believe that the Hastings-cum-Fischer party is going to be the best thing that could happen for America?"

"I certainly do not," she admitted.

"Then do as I beg. Let me take that key from your bracelet. You shall have no other responsibility."

"And what are you going to do with it?"

"You must leave that to me," he answered. "I will tell you as much as I can. I stopped Nikasti sailing for Japan, but I made a mortal enemy of him at the same time. He has come to Washington to consult with his Ambassador. They are together tonight. It is my mission to convince them of Germany's duplicity."

"I see…. And you think that these written words—?"

"Give the key to me," he begged, "and ask no questions."

She shook her head.

"I should object most strongly to nocturnal disturbers of my slumbers!"

It seemed to her that his frame had become tenser, his tone harder. The grip of his fingers was still upon her wrist.

"Even your objection," he said, "might not relieve you of the possibility of their advent."

"Don't be silly," she answered, "and, above all, don't try to threaten me. If you

want my help—"

She looked steadfastly across at the looming outline of the Hastings' house.

"I do want your help," he assured her.

"How long should you require the letter for?"

"One hour," he replied.

She led him down some steps on to the smooth lawns which encircled the house. They passed in and out of some gigantic shrubs until at last they came to a paling. She felt along it for a few yards.

"There is a gate there," she told him. "Can you do anything with it?"

It was fastened by an old lock. He lifted it off its hinges, and they both passed through.

"Keep behind the shrubs as much as you can," she whispered. "There is a way into the house from the verandah here."

They reached at last the shadow of the building. She paused.

"Wait here for me," she continued. "I would rather enter the house without being seen, if I can, but it doesn't really matter. I can make some excuse for coming back. Don't move from where you are."

She glided away from him and disappeared. Lutchester waited, standing well back in the shadow of the shrubs. From the Embassy came all the time the sound of music, occasionally even the murmur of voices; from the dark house in front of him, nothing. Suddenly he heard what seemed to be the opening of a window, and then soft footsteps. Pamela appeared round the corner of the building, a white, spectral figure against that background of deep blue darkness. She came on tiptoe, running down the steps and holding her skirts with both hands.

"Not a soul has seen me," she whispered. "Take this quickly."

She thrust an envelope into his hands, and something hard with it.

"That's Uncle Theodore's seal," she explained. "He sealed up the envelope when he put it in there. Now come back quickly to the Embassy. You must please hurry with what you want to do. If I have left when you return, you must come back to exactly this place. That window"—she pointed upwards—"will be wide open. You must throw a pine cone or a pebble through it. I shall be waiting."

"I understand," he assured her.

They retraced their steps. Once more they drew near to the Embassy. The night had grown warmer and more windows had been opened. They reached the verandah. She touched his hand for a moment.

"Well," she said, "I don't know whether I have been wise or not. Try and be back in less than an hour, if you can. I am going in alone."

She left him, and Lutchester, after a few brief words with the Ambassador, hurried away to his task. In twenty minutes he stood before a tall, grey-stone building, a few blocks away, was admitted by a Japanese butler, and conducted, after some hesitation, into a large room at the back of the house. An elderly man, dressed for the evening, with the lapel of his coat covered with orders, was awaiting him.

"I am a stranger to you, Baron," Lutchester began.

"That does not matter," was the grave reply. "Ten minutes ago I had an urgent telephone call from our mutual friend. His Excellency told me that he was sending a special messenger, and begged me to give you a few minutes. I have left a conference of some importance, and I am here."

"A few minutes will be enough," Lutchester promised. "I am engaged by the English Government upon Secret Service work. I came to America, following a man named Fischer. You have heard of him?"

"I have heard of him," the Ambassador acknowledged.

"In New York," Lutchester continued, "he met one of your countrymen, Prince Nikasti, a man, I may add," Lutchester went on, "for whom I have the highest respect and esteem, although quite openly, years ago, he pronounced himself unfavourably disposed towards my country. The object of Fischer's meeting with Prince Nikasti was to convey to him certain definite proposals on behalf of the

German Government. They wish for a rapprochement with your country. They offer certain terms, confirmation of which Fischer brought with him in an autograph letter."

There was a moment's silence. Not a word came from the man who seemed to have learnt the gift of sitting with absolute immovability. Even his eyes did not blink. He sat and waited.

"The proposals made to you are plausible and deserving of consideration," Lutchester proceeded. "Do not think that there exists in my mind, or would exist in the mind of any Englishman knowing of them, any feeling of resentment that these proposals should have been received by you for consideration. Nothing in this world counts to those who follow the arts of diplomacy, save the simple welfare of the people whom he represents. It is therefore the duty of every patriot to examine carefully all proposals made to him likely to militate to the advantage of his own people. You have a letter, offering you certain terms to withdraw from your present alliances. Here is a letter from the same source, in the same handwriting, written to America. Break the seal yourself. It was brought to this country by Fischer, in the same dispatch box as yours, to be handed to some responsible person in the American Government. It was handed to Senator Theodore Hastings. It is to form part of his platform on the day when his nomination as President is announced. It must be back in his safe within three-quarters of an hour. Break the seal and read it."

The Japanese held out his hand, broke the seal of the envelope, and read. His face remained immovable. When he had finished he looked up at his visitor.

"I am permitted to take a copy?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

He touched a bell, spoke down a mouthpiece, and with almost necromantic swiftness two young men were in the room. A camera was dragged out, a little flash of light shot up to the ceiling, and the attaches vanished as quickly as they had come. The Ambassador replaced the document in its envelope, handed a stick of sealing-wax and a candle to Lutchester, who leaned over and resealed the envelope.

"The negative?" he enquired.

"Will be kept under lock and key," the Ambassador promised. "It will pass into the archives of Japanese history. In future we shall know."

Once more he touched a bell. The door was opened. Lutchester found himself escorted into the street. He was back at the Embassy in time to meet a little stream of departing guests. Lady Ridlingshawe patted him on the shoulder with her fan.

"Deserter!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, "Wherever have you been hiding?"

Lutchester made some light reply and passed on. He made his way out into the gardens. The darkness now was a little more sombre, and he had to grope his way to the palings. Soon he stood before the dark outline of the adjoining house. In the window towards which he was making his way a single candle in a silver candlestick was burning. He paused underneath and listened. Then he took a pine cone which he had picked up on his way and threw it through the open window. The candle was withdrawn. A shadowy form leaned out.

"I'm quite alone," she assured him softly. "Can you throw it in?"

He nodded.

"I think so."

His first effort was successful. The seal followed, wrapped up in his handkerchief. A moment or two later he saw Pamela's face at the window.

"Good night!" she whispered. "Quickly, please. There is still some one about downstairs."

The light was extinguished. Lutchester made his way cautiously back, replaced the gate upon its hinges and reached the shelter of the Embassy, denuded now of guests. He found Downing in the smoking-room.

"Can I get a whisky and soda?" Lutchester asked, in response to the latter's vociferous greeting.

"Call it a highball," was the prompt reply, "and you can have as many as you like. Have you earned it?" he added, a little curiously.

"I almost believe that I have," Lutchester assented.

CHAPTER XXXV

Mr. Oscar Fischer and his friend, Senator Theodore Hastings, stood side by side, a week later, in the bar of one of the most fashionable of New York hotels. They were passing away the few minutes before Pamela and her aunt would be ready to join them in the dining room above.

"Very little news, I fancy," Hastings remarked, glancing at the tape which was passing through his companion's fingers.

"Nothing—of any importance," Fischer replied. "Nothing."

The older man glanced searchingly at his companion, the change in whose tone was ominous. Fischer was standing with the tape in his hand, his eyes glued upon a certain paragraph. The Senator took out his eyeglasses and looked over his friend's shoulder.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Eh?"

Fischer was fighting a great battle and fighting it well.

"Something wrong, apparently, with Frank Roughton," he observed; "an old college friend of mine. They made him Governor of——only last year."

Hastings read the item thoughtfully.

Governor Roughton this morning tendered his resignation as Governor of the State of——. We understand that it was at once accepted. Numerous arrests have taken place with reference to the great explosion at the Bembridge powder factory.

"Looks rather fishy, that," Hastings observed thoughtfully.

"I'm sorry for Roughton," Fischer declared. "He was a perfectly straight man, and I am sure he has done his best."

"Great friend of yours?" the other asked curiously.

"We were intimately acquainted," was the brief answer.

The two men finished their cocktails in silence. On their way upstairs the Senator took his companion's arm.

"Fischer," he said, "you'll forgive me if I put a certain matter to you plainly?"

"Naturally!"

"Within the last few days," Hastings proceeded, "there have been seven explosions or fires at various factories throughout the States. It is a somewhat significant circumstance," he added, after a slight pause, "that every one of these misfortunes has occurred at a factory where munitions of some sort for the Allies have been in process of manufacture. Shrewd men have naturally come to the conclusion that there is some organisation at work."

"I should doubt it," Fischer replied. "You must remember that there is always a great risk of disasters in factories where explosives are being handled. It is a new thing to many of the manufacturers here, and it is obvious that they are not making use of all the necessary precautions."

"I see," Hastings observed, reflectively. "So that is how you would explain this epidemic of disasters, eh?"

"Certainly!"

"At the same time, Fischer, to set my mind entirely at rest," Hastings continued, "I should like your assurance that you have nothing whatever to do with any organisation, should there be such a thing, including in its object the destruction of American property."

"I will do more than answer your question in the direct negative," was the firm reply. "I will assure you that no such organisation exists."

"I am relieved to hear it," Hastings confessed. "This resignation of Roughton,

however, seems a strange thing. Most of these fires have occurred in his State…. Ah! there is Senator Joyce waiting for us, and Pamela and Mrs. Hastings."

Mr. Hastings as a host was in his element. His manners and tact, which his enemies declared were far too perfect, were both admirably displayed in the smaller ways of life. He guided the conversation into light yet opportune subjects, and he utterly ignored the fact that Senator Joyce, one of the great politicians of the day, whose support of his nomination was already more than half promised, seemed distrait and a little cold. It was Pamela who quite inadvertently steered the conversation into a dangerous channel.

"What has Governor Roughton been doing, Mr. Fischer?" she asked.

There was a moment's silence. Pamela's question had fallen something like a bombshell amongst the little party. It was their guest who replied.

"The matter is occupying the attention of the country very largely at the moment, Miss Van Teyl," he said. "It is perhaps unfortunate that Governor Roughton seems to have allowed his sympathies to be so clearly known."

"He is a German by birth, is he not?" Pamela inquired.

"Most decidedly not," Fischer asserted. "I was at Harvard with him."

"All the same," Pamela murmured under her breath, "I think that he was born at Stuttgart."

"He is an American citizen," Senator Joyce observed, "and has reached a high position here. We of the Administration may be wrong," he continued, "but we believe, and we think that we have a right to believe, that when any man of conscience and ideals takes the oath, he is free from all previous prejudices. He is an American citizen— nothing more and nothing less."

"Of course, that is magnificent," Pamela declared, "but it isn't common sense, is it, and you haven't answered my original question yet."

"I am not in a position to do so, Miss Van Teyl," Joyce replied. "The trouble probably is that Governor Roughton has been considered incompetent as so many of these disasters have taken place unhindered in his State."

"There was a rumour," Pamela persisted, "that he was under arrest."

"Quite untrue, I am sure," Fischer muttered.

There was a general diversion of the conversation, but the sense of uneasiness remained. Pamela and Mrs. Hastings, at the conclusion of the little banquet, acting upon a hint from their host, made their way to one of the small drawing-rooms for their coffee. Left alone, the three men drew their chairs closer together. Joyce's fine face seemed somehow to have become a little harder and more unsympathetic. He sipped the water, which was his only beverage, and pushed away the cigars in which he generally indulged.

"Mr. Hastings," he pronounced, "I have given the subject of supporting your nomination my deepest consideration. I was at one time, I must confess, favourably disposed towards the idea. I have changed my mind. I have decided to give my support to the present Administration."

Fischer's face was dark with anger. He even allowed an expletive to escape from his lips. Hastings, however, remained master of himself.

"I will not conceal from you, Mr. Joyce," he confessed, "that I am exceedingly disappointed. You have fully considered everything, I presume—our pledge, for instance, to nominate you as my successor?"

"I have considered everything," Joyce replied. "The drawback in my mind, to be frank with you, is that I doubt whether you would receive sufficient support throughout the country. It is my idea," he went on, "although I may be wrong, of course, that the support of the German-Americans who, you must allow me to maintain, are an exceedingly unneutral part of America, will place you in an unpopular position. Should you succeed in getting yourself elected, which I very much doubt, you will be an unpopular President. I would rather wait my time."

"You have changed your views," Fischer muttered.

"To be perfectly frank with you, I have," Joyce acknowledged. "These outrages throughout the States are, to my mind, blatant and criminal. Directly or indirectly, the German-American public is responsible for them—indirectly, by inflammatory speeches, reckless journalism, and point-blank laudation of illegal acts; directly—well, here I can speak only from my own suspicions, so I will remain silent. But my mind is made up. A man in this country, as you know," he

added, "need make only one mistake and his political future is blasted. I am not inclined to risk making that one mistake."

Hastings sighed. He was making a brave effort to conceal a great disappointment.

"One cannot argue with you, Mr. Joyce," he regretted. "You have come to a certain conclusion, and words are not likely to alter it. There is no one I would so dearly have loved to number amongst my supporters, but I see that it is a privilege for which I may not hope…. We will, if you are ready, Fischer, join the ladies."

They rose from the table a few minutes later.

Fischer, who had been eagerly watching his opportunity, drew Senator Joyce on one side for a moment as they passed down the crowded corridor.

"Mr. Joyce," he said, "I have heard your decision to-night with deeper regret than I can express, yet more than ever it has brought home one truth to me. Our position towards you was a wrong one. We offered you a reversion when we should have offered you the thing itself."

Senator Joyce swung around.

"Say, Mr. Fischer, what are you getting at?" he asked bluntly.

"I mean that it is Hastings and I who should have been your supporters, and you who should have been our candidate," Fischer suggested boldly. "What about it? It isn't too late."

"Nothing doing, sir," was the firm reply. "Theodore Hastings may not be exactly my type of man, but I am not out to see him cornered like that, and besides, to tell you the honest truth, Mr. Fischer," he added, pausing at the door, "when I stand for the Presidency, I want to do so not on the nomination of you or your friends, or any underground schemers. I want the support of the real American citizen. I want to be free from, all outside ties and obligations. I want to stand for America, and America only, I not only want to be President, you see, but I want to be the chosen President of the right sort of people…. I am going to ask you to excuse me to the ladies and our host, Mr. Fischer," he concluded, holding out his hand. "I had a note asking me to visit the Attorney General, which I only

received on my way here. I have an idea that it is about this Roughton business."

Fischer returned to the others alone. Hastings was clearly disturbed at his guest's departure. His friend and supporter, however, affected to treat it lightly.

"Joyce is like all these lawyers," he declared. "He is simply waiting to see which way the wind blows. I have come across them many times. They like to wait till parties are evenly balanced, till their support makes all the difference, and clinch their bargain then."

"I should have said," Pamela remarked, "that Mr. Joyce was a man above that sort of thing."

"Every man has his price and his weak spot," her uncle observed didactically. "Joyce's price is the Presidency. His weak spot is popular adulation. I agree with Fischer. He will probably join us later."

Mr. Hastings was summoned to the telephone, a moment or two later. Mrs. Hastings sat down to write a note, and Pamela moved her place over to Fischer's side. His face brightened at her spontaneous movement. She shook her head, however, at the little compliment with which he welcomed her.

"This afternoon," she said softly, "I met Mr. Lutchester."

"Is he back in New York?" Fischer asked, frowning.

Pamela nodded.

"He told me something which I feel inclined to tell you," she continued, glancing into her companion's haggard face with a gleam of sympathy in her eyes. "You'll probably see it in the newspapers to-morrow morning. Governor Roughton's resignation was compulsory. He is under arrest."

"For negligence?"

"For participation," was the grave reply. "Mr. Lutchester has been down to—the city where these things took place. He only got back late this afternoon."

"Lutchester again!" Fischer muttered.

"You see, it's rather in his line," Pamela reminded him. "He is over here to superintend the production of munitions from the factories which are working for the British Government."

"He is over here as a sort of general mischief-maker!" Fischer exclaimed fiercely. "Do I understand that he has been down in——?"

Pamela nodded.

"He went down with one of the heads of the New York police."

She turned away, but Fischer caught at her wrist.

"You know more than this!" he cried hoarsely.

The agony in the man's face and tone touched her. After all, he was fighting for the great things. There was nothing mean about Fischer, nothing selfish about his lying and his crimes.

"I have told you all that I can," she whispered, "but if you hurried, you could catch the *New York* to-night—and I think I should advise you to go."

CHAPTER XXXVI

Fischer, on leaving his unsuccessful dinner party, drove direct to the residence of Mr. Max H. Bookam, in Fifth Avenue. The butler who admitted him looked a little blank at his inquiry.

"Mr. Bookam was expected home yesterday, sir," he announced. "He has not arrived, however."

"Has there been any telegram from him?—any news as to the cause of his non-return?" Fischer persisted.

"I believe that Mr. Kaye, his secretary, has some information, sir," the man admitted. "Perhaps you would like to see him."

Fischer did not hesitate, and was conducted at once to the study in which Mr. Bookam was wont to indulge in various nefarious Stock Exchange adventures. The room was occupied on this occasion by a dejected-looking young man, with pasty face and gold spectacles. The apartment, as Fischer was quick to notice, showed signs of a strange disorder.

"Where's Mr. Bookam?" he asked quickly.

The young man walked to the door, shook it to be sure that it was closed, and came back again. His tone was ominous, almost dramatic.

"In the State Prison at——, sir," he announced.

"What for?" Fischer demanded, breathing a little thickly.

"I have no certain information," the secretary replied, with a noncommittal air. "All I know is that I had a long-distance telephone to burn certain documents,

but before I could do so the room and the house were searched by New York detectives, whose warrant it was useless to resist."

"But what's the charge against Mr. Bookam?"

"It's something to do with the disasters in——," the young man confided. "The Governor of the State, who is Mr. Bookam's cousin, is in the same trouble…. Better sit down a moment, sir. You're looking white."

Mr. Fischer threw himself into an easy-chair. He felt like a man who has built a mighty piece of machinery, has set it swinging through space, and watches now its imminent collapse; watches some tiny but ghastly flaw, pregnant with disaster, growing wider and wider before his eyes.

"What papers did the police take away with them?" he asked.

"There wasn't very much for them," the secretary replied. "There was a list of the names of the proposed organisation which, owing to your very wise intervention, was never formed. There was a list of factories throughout the United States in which munitions are being made, with a black mark against those holding the most important contracts. And there was a letter from Governor Roughton."

"Mr. Bookam hasn't drawn any cheques lately for large amounts?" Fischer inquired eagerly.

"There are three in his private cheque-book, sir, the counterfoils of which are not filled in," was the somewhat dreary admission.

Fischer groaned as he received the news.

"Have you any idea about those cheques?" he demanded.

"I am afraid," the other acknowledged, "that Mr. Bookam was not very discreet. I reminded him of your advice—that the money should be passed through Sullivan—but he didn't seem to think it worth while."

"Look here, let me know the worst at once," Fischer insisted. "Do you believe that any one of those cheques was made payable to any of the men who are under arrest?"

"I am afraid," the secretary declared sadly, "that the proceeds of one were found on the person of Ed. Swindles, intact."

Fischer sat for a moment with his head buried in his hands. "That any man could have been such a fool. An organisation would have been a thousand times safer. Max Bookam was only a very worthy and industrious clothing manufacturer, with an intense love for the Fatherland and a great veneration for all her institutions. What he had done, he had done whole-heartedly but foolishly. He was a man who should never have been trusted for a moment in the game. After all, the pawns count…."

Fischer took his leave and reached his hotel a little before midnight. Already he had begun to look over his shoulder in the street. He found his rooms empty with a sense of relief, marred by one little disappointment. Nikasti was to have been there to bid him farewell— Nikasti on his way back to Japan. He ascertained from the office of the hotel that there had been no telephone message or caller. Then he turned to his correspondence, some presentiment already clutching at his strained nerves. There was a letter in a large envelope, near the bottom of the pile, addressed to him in Nikasti's fine handwriting. He tore open the envelope, and slow horror seized him as he realised its contents. A long photograph unrolled itself before his eyes. The first few words brought confusion and horror to his sense. His brain reeled. This was defeat, indeed! It was a photograph of that other autograph letter. The one which he had given to Nikasti to carry to Japan lay— gross sacrilege!—about him in small pieces. There was no other line, no message, nothing but this damning proof of his duplicity.

A kind of mental torture seized him. He fought like a caged man for some way out. Every sort of explanation occurred to him only to be rejected, every sort of subterfuge, only to be cast aside with a kind of ghastly contempt. He felt suddenly stripped bare. His tongue could serve him no more. He snatched at the telephone receiver and rang up the number for which he searched eagerly through the book.

"Is that the office of the American Steamship Company?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What time will the *New York* sail?"

"In three-quarters of an hour. Who's speaking?"

"Mr. Oscar Fischer. Keep anything you have for me."

He threw down the receiver for fear of a refusal, packed a few things feverishly in a dressing bag, dashed the rest of his correspondence into his pocket, and with the bag in one hand, and an overcoat over the other arm, he hastened out into the street. He was obliged at first to board a street car. Afterwards he found a taxicab, and drove under the great wooden shed as the last siren was blowing. He hurried up the gangway, a grim, remorseful figure, a sense of defeat gnawing at his heart, a bitter, haunting fear still with him even when, with a shriek of the tugs, the great steamer swung into the river. He was leaving forever the work to which he had given so much of his life, leaving it a fugitive and dishonoured. The blaze of lights, the screaming of the great ferry-boats, all the triumphant, brazen noises of the mighty city, sounded like a requiem to him as in the darkest part of the promenade deck he leaned over the railing and nursed his agony, the supreme agony of an ambitious man—failure.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"What has become," Mrs. Theodore Hastings asked her niece one afternoon about a month later, "of your delightful friend, Mr. Lutchester?"

Pamela laid down her book and looked across at her aunt with wide-open eyes.

"Why, I thought you didn't like him, aunt?"

"I cannot remember saying so, my dear," Mrs. Hastings replied. "I had nothing against the man himself. It was simply his attitude with regard to some of your uncle's plans, of which we disapproved."

Pamela nodded. They were seated on the piazza of the Hastings' country house at Manchester.

"I see!… And uncle's plans," she went on reflectively, "have become a little changed, haven't they?"

Mrs. Hastings coughed.

"There is no doubt," she admitted, "that your Uncle Theodore was inveigled into supporting, to a certain extent, a party whose leaders have shown themselves utterly irresponsible. The moment these horrible things began to come out, however, your uncle finally cut himself loose from them."

"Very wise of him," Pamela murmured.

"Who could have believed," Mrs. Hastings demanded, "that men like Oscar Fischer, Max Bookam and a dozen other well-known and prominent millionaires, would have stooped to encourage the destruction of American property and lives, simply through blind devotion to the country of their birth. I

could understand," she went on, "both your uncle and I perfectly understood that their sympathies were German rather than English, but we shared a common belief that notwithstanding this they were Americans first and foremost. It was in this belief that your uncle was led into temporary association with them."

"Bad luck," Pamela sighed. "I am afraid it hasn't done Uncle Theodore any good."

Mrs. Hastings went on with her knitting for a moment.

"My child," she said, "it has probably imperilled, if it has not completely ruined, one of the great hopes which your uncle and I have sometimes entertained. We are both of us, however, quite philosophical about it. Even at this moment I am convinced that if these men had acted with discretion, and been content to wield political influence rather than to have resorted to such fanatical means, they would have represented a great power at the next election. As things are, I admit that their cause is lost for the time. I believe that your uncle is contemplating an early visit to England. He is of the opinion that perhaps he has misunderstood the Allied point of view, and he is going to study matters at first hand."

Pamela nodded.

"I think he is very wise, aunt," she declared. "I quite expect that he will come back a warm advocate of the Allies. No one would have a ghost of a chance who went to the country here on the other ticket."

"I believe that that is your uncle's point of view," Mrs. Hastings assented…. "Why don't you ask Mr. Lutchester down for a couple of days?"

"If you mean it, I certainly will," Pamela agreed.

"Quite incidentally," her aunt continued, "I heard the nicest possible things about him in Washington. Lady Ridlingshawe told me that the Lutchesters are one of the oldest families in England. He is a cousin of the Duke of Worcester, and is extraordinarily well connected in other directions. I must say he has a most distinguished appearance. A well-bred Englishman is so different from these foreigners."

Pamela laid down her book and drew her writing block towards her.

"I'll write and invite him down at once," she suggested.

"Your uncle will be delighted," Mrs. Hastings purred….

Lutchester received his invitation in New York and arrived in Manchester three days later. Pamela met him at the station with a couple of boatmen by her side.

"If you wouldn't mind sailing home?" she proposed. "The house is practically on an island, and the tide is just right. These men will take your luggage."

They walked down to the little dock together.

Pamela talked all the time, but Lutchester was curiously tongue-tied.

"You'll find Uncle Theodore, and aunt, too, most amusing," she confided. "It is perfectly obvious that there is nothing uncle regrets so much as his temporary linking up with Fischer and his friends; in fact, he is going to Europe almost at once—I am convinced for no other reason than to give him an excuse, upon his return, for blossoming out as a fervent supporter of the Allies."

"Are you going too?" Lutchester inquired. "Shall I? Well, I am not really sure," she declared, as they reached the little wooden dock. "I suppose I shall, especially if I can find something to do. I may even turn nurse."

"You will be able to find plenty to do," he assured her. "If nothing else turns up, you can help me."

They stepped on to the yacht. Pamela, a radiant vision in white, with white flannel skirt, white jersey and tam-o'-shanter, took the helm, and was busy for a few moments getting clear. Afterwards she leaned back amongst the cushions, with Lutchester by her side.

"In the agitation of missing that buoy," he reminded her, "you forgot to answer my last suggestion."

"Is there any way in which I could help you?" she asked.

"You can help me in the greatest of all ways," he replied promptly. "You can give me just that help which only the woman who cares can give to the man who cares for her, and if that isn't exciting enough," he went on, after a moment's

pause, "well, I dare say I can find you some work in the censor's department."

"Isn't censoring a little dull?" she murmured.

"Then you choose—"

Her hand slipped into his. A little breeze filled their sails at that moment. The wonderful blue water of the bay sparkled with a million gleams of sunshine. Lutchester drew a great breath of content.

"That's aunt on the landing-stage, watching us through her glasses,"
Pamela pointed out, making a feeble attempt to withdraw her hand.

"It will save us the trouble," he observed, resisting her effort, "of explanations."

Lutchester found his host and hostess unexpectedly friendly. They even accepted with cheerful philosophy the news that Lutchester's work in America was almost finished for the time, and that Pamela was to accompany him to Europe almost immediately. After dinner, when the two men were left at the table, Hastings became almost confidential.

"So far as regards the sympathies of this country, Mr. Lutchester," he said, "the final die has been cast within the last few weeks. There has always been," he proceeded, "a certain irritation existing between even the Anglo-Saxon Americans and your country. We have fancied so often that you have adopted little airs of superiority towards us, and that your methods of stating your intentions have not always taken account of our own little weaknesses. Then America, you know, loves a good fight, and the Germans are a wonderful military people. They were fighting like giants whilst you in England were still slacking. But it is Germany herself, or rather her sons and friends, who have destroyed her chances for her. Fischer, for instance," he went on, fingering his wineglass. "I have always looked upon Oscar Fischer as a brilliant and far-seeing man. He was one of those who set themselves deliberately to win America for the Germans. A more idiotic bungle than he has made of things I could scarcely conceive. He has reproduced the diplomatic methods which have made Germany unpopular throughout the world. He has tried bullying, cajolery, and false-hood, and last of all he has plunged into crime. No German-American will henceforth ever have weight in the counsels of this country. I do not mind confessing," Mr. Hastings continued, as he himself filled his guest's glass and then his own, "that I myself was at one time powerfully attracted towards the Teuton cause. They are

a nation wonderful in science, wonderful in warfare, with strong and admirable national characteristics. Yet they are going to lose this war through sheer lack of tact, for the want of that kindliness, that generosity of temperament, which exists and makes friends in nations as in individuals. The world for Germany, you know, and hell for her enemies!… But I am keeping you."

Lutchester drank his wine and rose to his feet.

"Pamela is sitting on the rocks there," Mr. Hastings observed. "I think that she wants to sail you over to Misery Island. We get some unearthly meal there at ten o'clock and come back by moonlight. It is a sort of torture which we always inflict upon our guests. My wife and I will follow in the launch."

"To Misery Island!" Lutchester repeated.

His host smiled as he led the way to the piazza steps. Pamela had already stepped into the boat, and with the help of a boatman was adjusting the sail. She waved her hand gaily and pointed to the level stretch of placid water, still faintly brilliant in the dying sunlight.

"You think that we shall reach Misery Island before the tide turns?" she called out.

Lutchester stepped lightly into the boat and took the place to which she pointed.

"I am content," he said, "to take my chance."

THE END

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