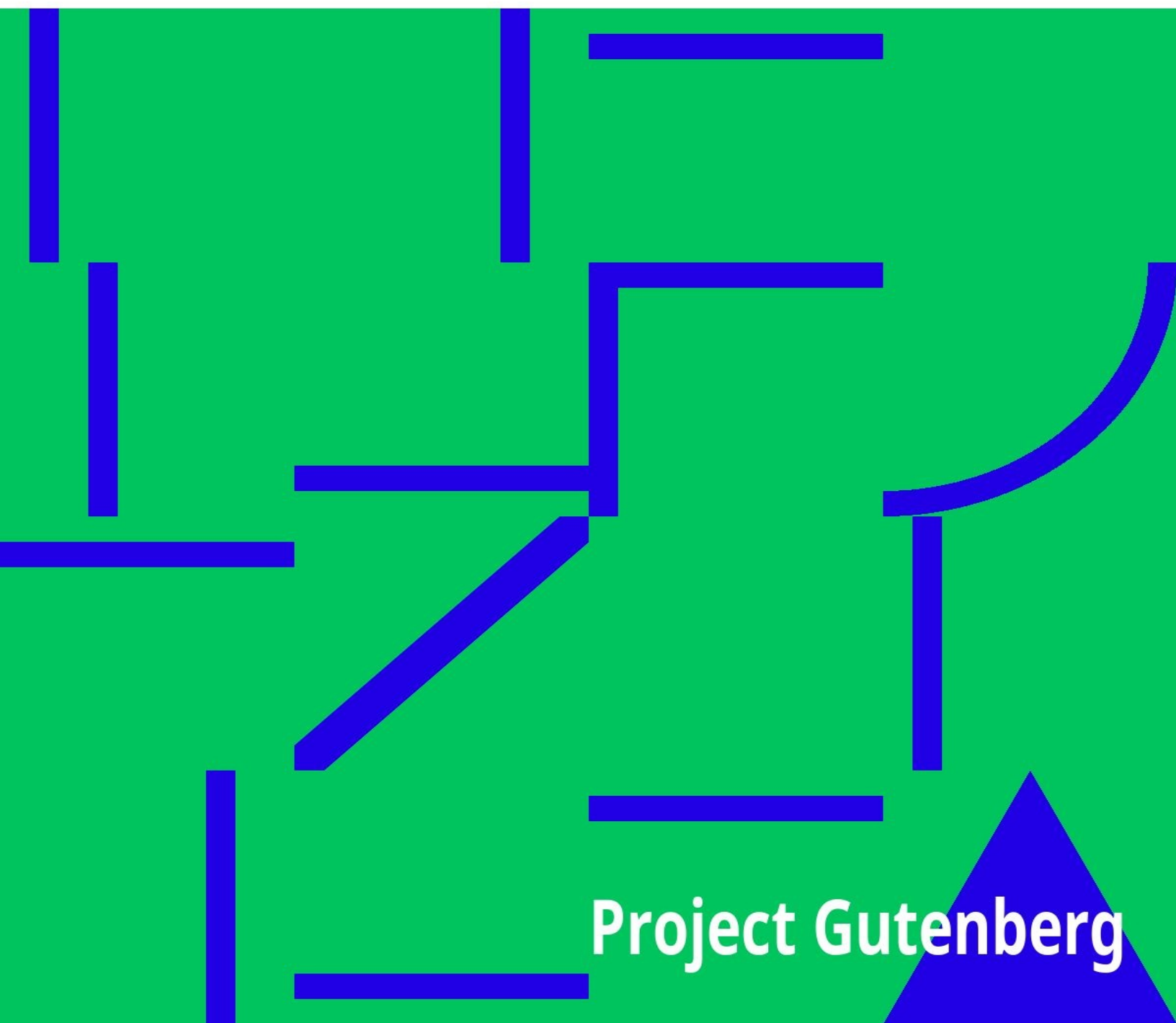


# The Broken Thread

William Le Queux



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William Le Queux

## "The Broken Thread"



## Chapter One.

### Concerns a Girl in Black.

“No. I mean the girl in black. The one leading the pom.”

“By jove! Yes. She’s uncommonly smart, isn’t she?”

“Her friend isn’t half bad-looking, either?”

“I don’t think so very much of her, Raife. But Southport at this time of year is always full of pretty girls.”

“Not one of them can compare with the girl in black—she’s ripping!” declared Raife Remington, a tall, well-set up, dark-haired, hatless undergraduate, who, in grey flannels, was walking beside his college chum, Edward Mutimer, at whose father’s house he was staying during the vac. Both were at Trinity, Cambridge, and both, being in their last year, were reading hard for their degrees.

Each morning in those warm August days by the summer sea they came out for a stroll on the seafront; bright with movement and gaiety, taking an airing before settling down to their studies for the day.

On this particular morning, about ten o’clock, the seafront was already full of men in flannels and lounge-suits, and women in garments of muslin and other such flimsy materials usually affected at the seaside, for stifled and jaded Londoners had flocked down there, as usual, to enjoy the sea air and all the varied attractions which Southport never fails to offer.

Raife Remington and his friend were strolling along, chatting about their old college days, idly smoking cigarettes, when they came up behind two well yet neatly-dressed girls, one about twenty, in a white pique coat and skirt with large pearl buttons, cut smartly; the other, about a couple of years her junior, who was fair-haired, very beautiful, and led a little black pom by a silver chain, was in dead black with a neat, close-fitting hat, with a turquoise blue band. Her skirt was short and well adapted for walking, displaying neat ankles encased in black silk stockings, and she

wore white kid gloves; yet the only touch of colour was the hat band and the bow of bright cherry ribbon upon the collar of the little black pom.

In every movement, in her gait, in the swing of her carriage and the way she carried her well-poised head, there was ineffable, unaffected grace. Narrow-waisted, slim, delicate, she was the very incarnation of exquisite daintiness and high refinement. Little wonder, therefore, that Raife Remington should have singled her out as the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

He and his friend took several hasty strides forward, in order to glance at her countenance, and in it he was not disappointed. Her soft fair hair was dressed with that smart neatness which characterised her whole attire, and her big, innocent eyes were of that deep child-like blue so seldom seen in a girl after she has reached her teens.

“By jove! What a ripping girl!” Raife again exclaimed in a low whisper of admiration. “I wonder who she can be, Teddy?”

“Ah, I wonder!” echoed his companion, and the two smart, athletic young undergraduates followed the girls unnoticed, for they were chatting together, and laughing merrily, entirely absorbed in their conversation.

Many persons were passing to and fro, as there always are on Southport seafront upon a summer’s morning, and so many smart motor-cars whirling up and down, even though the month of August is not the smartest season.

Raife Remington, eldest son of Sir Henry Remington, Baronet, was not usually impressionable where the fair sex were concerned. Yet from the moment his eyes had first fallen upon this pretty, fair-haired girl in black, he appeared to fall beneath the spell of her remarkable beauty.

Within himself he was longing for an introduction to her, while Mutimer, because they were smart and stylish, had inwardly set them both down as members of some theatrical company. Yet their clothes and shoes were of palpably better quality than those worn by members of musical companies which visited Cambridge. Therefore he, like Raife, was much puzzled. Most girls are aware, by natural feminine intuition, when they are admired, but the pair walking before them were utterly unconscious of

having attracted the attention of any one. Mutimer noticed this, and argued that they certainly could not be actresses.

“I wonder where they’re going?” remarked Raife in a whisper, but scarcely had the words left his mouth when a black and tan fox-terrier suddenly darted out from behind a man and, without provocation, attacked the dainty little pom and rolled it over ere any one was aware of it.

The tiny dog’s mistress screamed, and, bending, cried in alarm and appeal:

“Snookie! Oh, my poor little Snooks!”

In an instant Raife was on the spot, and with his cane beat off the savage terrier; then, picking up the little pom, which lay on the ground more frightened than hurt, he restored it to the arms of its frantic mistress.

“He’s not injured I think,” Raife exclaimed.

For the first time the fair-haired girl raised her blue eyes to his, startled and confused.

“I—I’m so very much obliged to you,” she stammered. “That man really ought to keep his horrid dog under control.”

“He ought—the brute!” chimed in Teddy Mutimer. “What a darling little dog,” he added admiringly, stroking the fluffy little animal admiringly.

“Poor little Snookie!” exclaimed his mistress, stroking her pet’s head, while the little animal wagged his bushy tail and turned up the whites of his big round eyes with an expression so pitiful as to cause all four to laugh.

The owner of the terrier, an over-dressed, caddish-looking man, had strolled on in utter unconcern, though well aware of what had happened.

“That fellow must be a fearful outsider,” declared Raife, “or he would apologise. He looks like a ratcatcher—or perhaps a dog-stealer. All dog-stealers wear straw hats and yellow boots, like his!”

Whereat the three others laughed.

Snookie, duly examined by his dainty little mistress, was declared to have suffered no damage, therefore after Raife had asked permission to walk with them—as they were going in the same direction—they all four found themselves chatting merrily as they strolled along, Raife at the side of the pom's mistress, and his chum with her foreign-looking companion.

Already Raife and his fair unknown, to whom his introduction had come about so suddenly and unusually, were chatting without reserve, for, as an undergraduate, he had the habit of contracting quick friendships, and his careless, easy-going manner she found attractive.

In the pleasant morning sunshine they sat for about half an hour, when at last Mutimer and the other girl rose from their chairs to walk together, leaving Raife, to his evident satisfaction, alone with his divinity in black.

“Do you live here?” Raife inquired, after they had been gossiping for some time.

“Oh dear, no,” was his companion's reply, in that voice he found so refined and musical. “We're staying at the Queen's. Do you live here?” she inquired in turn.

“No; I'm staying with my friend. He's up at Cambridge with me, so I'm spending part of the vac. with his people.”

“Oh, you're at Cambridge!” she exclaimed, “I was at the ‘University Arms’ with my uncle, about two months ago. We went round and saw the colleges. I was delighted with them.”

“Where do you generally live?” he asked, after she had told him that her name was Gilda Tempest.

“My uncle and I live a great deal abroad,” was her reply; “indeed, more than I care to—to be frank. I love England. But my uncle travels so much that we have no home nowadays, and live nearly all the year round in hotels. I get horribly tired of the eternal table d'hôte, the music and the chatter.”



“Rather pleasant, I should fancy. I love travelling,” remarked the young man.

“I grow sick to death of it,” she declared, with a sigh. “We wander all over Europe. My uncle is a wanderer, ever on the move and most erratic.”

“Are you staying in Southport long?” he enquired eagerly.

“I really don’t know. We may stay for a day—or for a month. I never know where we’re going. I have not been home for nearly two years now.”

“Home? Where do you live?”

“Father has a house in France—in a quaint little village called By— on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau. Do you know Fontainebleau?”

“Oh, yes,” he replied. “I went there from Paris once, with the gov’nor. We stayed at the Hotel de France—I think it was—at Fontainebleau. We went over the old palace and drove out to Barbison, and to Marlotte. Awfully charming places.”

“Ah! Barbison. That is the colony of artists. I know, I love it, and have often cycled over there, where I have friends. Father is a bit of a recluse, so I travel and look after my uncle.”

“And Marlotte—by the river. Do you know the picturesque little hotel there, and its al-fresco café—the garden with all the little summer-houses?”

“Oh, yes,” she laughed. “Do you know it, too? How gay it is on Sundays in summer. All the artists come out from Paris for the day.”

“It reminds me of Monkey Island, on the Thames. We used to go up there when I was at Eton.”

She looked at him suddenly with a fixed expression, and then said:

“You haven’t told me your name. I only know you as Snookie’s rescuer—you know,” and she laughed.

“My name’s Remington—Raife Remington,” he replied. “The gov’nor lives at Aldborough Park, not far from Tunbridge Wells.”

Her face changed in an instant. She seemed to suddenly hold her breath, though quite imperceptibly. For a moment all the colour left her soft cheeks, but as quickly she recovered all her self-possession, and exclaimed, in a changed tone:

“Is your father Sir Henry Remington?”

“Yes. Why? Do you happen to know him?”

“I—er—oh, no, I don’t!” she replied, endeavouring to conceal her consternation at the discovery. “Only—well—I—of course, had no idea that you were the son of a gentleman so well-known as Sir Henry.”

“My misfortune, perhaps,” he laughed, airily. “The gov’nor has brains—has been a member of Parliament for twenty years, and all that—I haven’t any.”

“You have.”

“They say I haven’t, at Cambridge.”

She was silent for some moments. What strange freak of Fate had thrown them together—he, the very last man on earth she desired to meet. And yet, she had found him such a bright, cheerful companion!

Her eyes were turned to where Mutimer and her friend, Maud Wilson, were strolling along the seafront.

The young fellow at her side was actually the son of Sir Henry Remington! The baronet’s name burned into her brain—it was branded there, as though seared by a red-hot iron.

The amazing revelation staggered her. That man seated so idly in the chair, his legs stretched out, displaying the latest make in ‘Varsity socks, was actually the son of Sir Henry!

She could not believe it.

Raife, on his part, was not exactly blind to the fact that mention of his father's name had unduly surprised her.

"I fancy you know the gov'nor—eh?" he exclaimed, chaffing her. "Do you? Tell me. Perhaps you've met him somewhere? He's at Upper Brook Street in the season, and at Mentone in winter. We have a villa there."

"No, Mr Remington, I have never had the pleasure of meeting your father," was her rather strained response. "But all the world has heard of him. One sees his picture in the papers very often. I only read yesterday his scathing criticism in the House of Commons on the Navy estimates, and his serious warning regarding the new super-dreadnought—which is building on the Clyde—the vessel which is to be the most powerful battleship afloat."

"You know more than I do, Miss Tempest," he laughed. "I never read the gov'nor's speeches. I heard too much about ships at home, before I went up to Cambridge."

"I suppose so," she laughed, and then, as though uneasy and anxious to get away, she added: "Look! Your friend is coming back with Maud. We must go," and she rose, a tall, graceful figure in neat black.

"No. Don't go yet," he urged, still remaining seated. "You surely aren't in such a great hurry! It's only just past ten."

"I have to go back to the hotel," she declared.

"Have you so very much to do—and is my society so terribly boring?" the young fellow asked, with a mischievous laugh.

"Certainly not," was her reproachful reply, and, as though against her will, she re-seated herself. "You really ought not to say that," she added.

"But you seem very anxious to get away. Why?" The girl held her breath, and her great blue eyes were downcast. No. She dare not raise her gaze to his lest he should suspect the terrible truth—he, the son of Sir Henry Remington!

"Well," she replied at last. "Because I have some letters to write, and—"

and to tell the truth, I have a dressmaker coming at half-past ten.”

“I suppose in a woman’s life one’s dressmaker is set upon a very high pedestal. All women must bow to the Goddess of Fashion.”

“You are horribly philosophic.”

“My philosophy is induced by your attitude towards me, Miss Tempest,” he declared. “You are a mystery. You were bright and merry until you knew my name, and then—well, then you suddenly curled into your shell. Really, I confess I can’t make you out!”

One more experienced than he would probably have discerned that a great and staggering blow had fallen upon his newly-found little friend. She was at a loss how to act—or what to say.

Her heart was thumping hard within her. What if he should discover the terrible secret which she alone knew! Fearing lest he should grow suspicious, she was all anxiety to get away—to place him and his memory behind her for ever.

Yet, somehow, he had fascinated her, and she sat there quite unable to leave him. Though the sunshine, the life and gaiety about her were brilliant, the whole earth had, for her, grown dark in one single instant. She hardly knew what she did—or what she said.

“I really must go,” she declared, at last, hitching up her pom from beneath her arm.

“Well, if you must, you must, I suppose, Miss Tempest,” he responded at last, with great reluctance. “I fear you don’t care for my society,” he added, with a sigh.

“How very foolish!” she cried. “Of course, I do—only, as I have explained, I have an engagement which I can’t possibly break. My dinner-dress is a positive rag.”

“Then let us meet later to-day,” he suggested. “This evening—at any time you like,” he urged. “Will you see me again? Do,” he implored.

For some time she made no reply. She was reflecting deeply. At last, with pale face, and striving to preserve a bold front, she replied rather frigidly: "No, really, Mr Remington, I am sorry, very sorry, but I cannot meet you again. I thank you ever so much for saving my little Snookie, but, in our mutual interests, it is far the best that we should not meet again."

"Why? I really don't understand you!" he exclaimed, much mystified.

"I am sorry, I repeat, Mr Remington—very sorry indeed—but I can't meet you again," she said, in a hard, determined tone. "I do not dare to."

"Engaged, I suppose—and fear tittle-tattle—eh?" he sniffed.

"No, I'm not engaged," was her rather haughty response, her cheeks colouring slightly.

"Then why cannot we meet? What prevents it?"

She looked at him with a strange, almost weird expression in her big luminous eyes.

"A barrier lies between us, Mr Remington," she said, in a low, very earnest voice. "We must never meet again after to-day—never?"

"But, Miss Tempest—you—"

"I have told you the truth," she said, firmly, rising with little Snookie tucked beneath her arm. "Please do not ask me the reason. Come, let us rejoin Maud and your friend."

She started off, and he, being helpless in the face of her determination, was compelled to follow her.

What, he wondered, was the mysterious motive of her refusal to see him again?



## Chapter Two.

### Presents a Curious Problem.

On entering old Mr Mutimer's house a telegram addressed to Raife lay upon the hall-table. Tearing it open, he read the brief summons. "Come at once, urgent.—Mother."

The words were startling in their brevity. Turning to his friend, he exclaimed in alarmed accents: "Something serious has happened at home, old man. See what the mater has wired." He handed the telegram to Teddy.

Teddy read it and gave it back. "I'm awfully sorry, Raife. There's a good train in about an hour from now. While you are waiting, you might ring up home and find out what's the matter."

"A good idea," said Raife. And at once he entered the study, and, taking up the telephone receiver, got a trunk call.

In less than five minutes he was speaking with Edgson, the old butler at Aldborough Park, his father's fine place near Tunbridge Wells.

"Is Lady Remington there?" asked Raife, eagerly. "Tell her I want to speak to her."

"She's—oh, it's you, Master Raife, sir! She's—I'm sorry, sir, her ladyship's not well, sir."

"Not well? What's the matter?" asked the young fellow, speaking eagerly into the mouthpiece.

"Oh, sir, I—I—I can't tell you over the 'phone," replied the old servant. "Her ladyship has forbidden us to say anything at all."

"But, Edgson, surely I may know!" cried the young man, frantically.

"We thought you were on your way home, sir," the butler replied. "Can't

you come, Master Raife?”

“Yes, of course, I’m leaving now—at once. But I’m anxious to know what has happened.”

“Come home, sir, and her ladyship will tell you.”

“Go at once and say that I am at the ’phone,” Raife ordered, angrily.

“I’m very sorry, sir, but I can’t,” was the response. “I have very strict orders from her ladyship, but I’m sorry to have to disobey you, sir.”

“Can’t you tell me anything? Can’t you give me an inkling of what’s the matter?” urged Raife.

“I’m very sorry, sir, I can’t,” replied the old man, quietly, but very firmly.

Raife knew Edgson of old. With him the word of either master or mistress was law. Edgson had been in his father’s service ever since his earliest recollection, and though fond of a glass of good port, as his ruddy nose betrayed, he was the most trusted servant of all the staff.

He would give no explanation of what had occurred, therefore, Raife, furiously angry with the old man, “rang off.”

The train journey from Southport seemed interminable. His mind was in a whirl. The brief words of the telegram, “Come home at once, urgent,” kept ringing in his ears, above the roar of the carriage wheels. He had the sensations of a man in a nightmare. What could have happened, and to whom? His mother had sent the “wire,” and therefore it most probably concerned his father.

And ever and again, at the back of his mind, racked with this horrible suspense and uncertainty, was the image of the mysterious girl whose acquaintance he had made on the Southport front. He could hear the low, sweet tones of her musical voice, he could see the grace of her dainty figure. Should he ever meet her again? Would she ever be to him more than a fascinating acquaintance?

When at length he got into London, he felt he could not bear the slow

torture of another railway journey. He went to a garage close to the station and hired a motor-car. From there to Tunbridge Wells seemed but a short distance: at any rate, there was action in the movement of the throbbing car, as opposed to the monotony of the train.

But even though the speed limit was exceeded many times in the course of that journey, it seemed hours to his impatient mood before they reached the lodge gates and raced up the stately avenue.

The avenue was three-quarters of a mile long, but at last, Raife Remington, at a bend in the drive, came in view of his home—a great, old, ivy-covered Tudor mansion, with quaint gables, high, twisted chimneys, and two pointed towers. At one end was the tall, stained-glass window of the private chapel, while at the other were domestic offices of later date, and in other forms of architecture.

Passing the inner gate, and between the lawns, where the flower beds were gay with geraniums, the car entered the great open gateway, and drew up in the ancient courtyard, around which the grand old place was built—that same quiet courtyard where the horse's hoofs of King Henry the Seventh had so often echoed upon the uneven cobbles, where Sir Henry Reymingtoune, Chancellor to Elizabeth, had bowed low and made his obeisance to his capricious royal mistress, and where Charles the Second, in later days, had idled, surrounded by his elegant, silk-coated sycophants.

The Remingtons had, ever since the fourteenth century, played their part in England's government: once a great and powerful family, and even to-day a notable and honourable house.

As the car drew up at the door, Raife sprang out, and rushing through the great stone hall, the flags of which were worn hollow by the tread of generations, and where stood the stands of armour of dead Reymingtounes, he came face to face with old Edgson, grave and white-haired.

"Ah, Master Raife!" cried the old man, "I'm so glad you've come, sir. Her ladyship is in the boudoir awaiting you."

"What's happened, Edgson?" demanded the young man.



“Please don’t ask me, sir. Her ladyship will tell you,” was the old servant’s response, in a half-choked voice, and he turned away.

A few moments later, Raife entered the small, cosy little room, with the high, diamond-pane windows, whereon were stained-glass escutcheons. Two women were there, his mother seated with her face buried in her hands, sobbing bitterly, and, beside her, her faithful companion, an elderly spinster named Miss Holt, who had been in the family for many years and had, indeed, been at school with Lady Remington.

Miss Holt, who was on her knees trying to comfort Raife’s mother, rose as the son entered.

“Mother!” he cried, rushing towards her. “What’s the matter? Tell me—for heaven’s sake! Edgson will tell me nothing.”

But all the response from the agonised woman was a long, low groan.

“Miss Holt,” he said, turning to her companion. “Tell me, what has happened?”

The angular woman, whose face was pale and thin, raised a warning finger, and pointed in silence to the sobbing lady. Then she whispered:

“Come into the next room, and I will tell you.”

Both passed into the inner room, and when Miss Holt had closed the door, she said:

“I am sorry to have to break the awful news to you, Mr Raife, but a most remarkable and terrible affair occurred here, early this morning. From what I am able to gather, your father, who—as you know—sleeps over the library, was awakened about three o’clock by an unusual noise, and, listening, came to the conclusion that a slow, sawing process was in progress in the library—that some one was below.”

“Burglars!” ejaculated Raife.

“Your father took his revolver and the little electric flash-lamp which he always has in his room, and, preferring to investigate before ringing and

alarming the household, crept downstairs and noiselessly opened the library door. Inside, he saw a small light moving. In an instant, a man who had already opened the safe, drew a revolver and fired point blank at your father.”

“Shot my father!” gasped Raife, staring at her. “Yes. Unfortunately the bullet struck Sir Henry. He fell, but while on the ground, and before the burglar could escape, he fired and shot him dead. We were all alarmed by the shots—and for the rest, well, you had better ask Edgson. He will tell you. I must go back to your poor mother.”

“But my father?”

“Alas! he is dead,” was the thin-faced woman’s hushed response.

“Dead!” gasped Raife, staggered. “Then the fellow murdered him!”

Miss Holt nodded in the affirmative.

At that moment old Edgson entered with a message. The doctor had returned to see her ladyship.

Raife barred the old servant’s passage, saying:

“Miss Holt has told me, Edgson. Explain at once what had happened when you were all alarmed.”

“Well, Master Raife, I rushed down, sir,” replied the old fellow, white-faced and agitated. “Burton, the footman, got down first, and when I rushed into the library I found the poor master lying on the carpet doubled up, with blood all over his pyjama-jacket. He recognised me, sir, and declared, in a low, weak voice, that the thief had shot him. At first I was so scared that I couldn’t act or think. But, on switching on the lights, I saw the body of a stranger—an elderly man, wearing thin indiarubber gloves—lying near the French window.”

“Then my father was still conscious?”

“Quite. I sent Burton to the telephone to ring up Doctor Grant, in Tunbridge Wells, while I did all I could to restore the poor master. He was

then quite sensible. With Burton's aid I managed to get him on to the couch in the bedroom, and then he spoke several disjointed sentences while we waited for the doctor's arrival. He asked for you, sir, and told me to give you a message."

"A message, Edgson! What message did he leave for me?" asked the son, eagerly.

"His words were these, sir: 'Tell Master Raife that the blackguard deliberately shot me! Tell him—to be careful—to be wary of the trap. I—I hesitated to tell the boy the truth, but now, Edgson, alas! it is too late!'"

"The truth!" ejaculated young Remington. "What did he mean, Edgson? What did he mean about being careful of the trap?"

"Ah! I don't know, Master Raife," replied the old servant, shaking his head gravely. "Some secret of his, no doubt. I pressed the master to reveal it to me; but all he would reply was: 'I was a fool, Edgson. I ought to have told my boy from the first. Every man has a skeleton in his cupboard, Edgson. This is mine!' Then he murmured something about 'her' and 'that woman'—a woman in the case, it struck me, Master Raife."

"A woman!" echoed young Remington.

"So it seemed. But, Master Raife, in my position I couldn't well inquire further into the poor master's secret. Besides, her ladyship and others came in at the moment. So he uttered no other word—and died before Doctor Grant could arrive."

"But what does this all mean, Edgson?" asked the dead man's son, astounded.

"I don't know, Master Raife," replied the grave-faced old man. "I really don't know, sir."

"To my mind, it seems as though his secret was, in some mysterious way, connected with the fellow who shot him," declared the young fellow, pale and anxious. "My poor mother does not know—eh?"

"She knows nothing, Master Raife. In the years I have been in the service

of your family, I have learnt discretion. I have told you this, sir, because you are my master's son," was the faithful man's response.

"You had no inkling of any secret, Edgson?"

"None in the least, sir, though I have been in Sir Henry's service thirty-two years come next Michaelmas."

"It's a complete mystery then?"

"Yes, sir, a complete mystery. But perhaps you'd like to see the master's murderer? We've taken his body over to the empty cottage at the stables. I'm expecting the detectives from London every minute. Inspector Caldwell, from Tunbridge Wells, has wired to Scotland Yard for assistance."

"Yes. Take me over there, Edgson," said Raife, boldly. "I wonder if I know him! This secret of my father's which he intended to reveal to me, though prevented by death, I mean to investigate—to unravel the mystery. Come, Edgson."

And the young master—now Sir Raife Remington, Baronet—followed the grave old man out of the house and down the broad, gravelled drive, where, in the sunshine, stood the big square stables, the clock of which, in its high, round turret, was at that moment clanging out the hour.



## Chapter Three.

### The Fatal Fingers.

Upon a bench in the front room of the artistic little cottage, the exterior of which was half hidden by Virginia creeper, lay the body of the stranger.

He was of middle age, with a dark, well-trimmed moustache, high cheek-bones, and hair slightly tinged with grey. He was wearing a smart, dark tweed suit, but his collar had been disarranged, and his tie removed, in the cursory examination made by the police when called.

Upon his cold, stiff hands were thin rubber gloves, such as surgeons wear during operations. They told their own tale. He wore them so as to obviate leaving any finger-prints. Upon his waistcoat there was a large damp patch which showed where Sir Henry's bullet had struck him.

Old Edgson stood beside his young master, hushed and awed.

"He's evidently an expert thief," remarked Raife, as he gazed upon the dead assassin's calm countenance. The eyes were, closed and he had all the composed appearance of a sleeper. "Have they searched him?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the old man.

"Then I will," Raife said, and, thereupon, commenced to investigate the dead man's pockets.

The work did not take long. From the breastpocket of his jacket he drew out a plain envelope containing three five-pound notes, as well as a scrap of torn newspaper. The young fellow, on unfolding it, found it to be the "Agony" column of the *Morning Post*, in which there was, no doubt, concealed some secret message. There were, however, a dozen or so advertisements, therefore which of them conveyed the message he was unable to decide. So he slipped it into his pocket until such time as he was able to give attention to it.

In the dead man's vest-pocket he found the return half of a first-class

ticket from Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells, issued four days previously, while in one of the trousers-pockets were four sovereigns, some silver, and in the other a bunch of skeleton keys, together with a small, leather pocket-case containing some strange-looking little steel tools, beautifully finished—the last word in up-to-date instruments for safe-breaking.

Raife, holding them in his hand, carried them to the window and examined them with keen curiosity. It was, indeed, a neat outfit and could be carried in the pocket without exciting the least suspicion. That the unknown assassin was an expert thief was quite clear.

Old Edgson was impatient to return to the house.

“Perhaps her ladyship may be wanting me, sir,” he suggested. “May I go, sir?”

“Yes, Edgson,” replied the young man. “Tell my mother, if you see her, that I’ll be back presently.”

And the old servant, with his mechanical bow, retired, leaving his young master with his father’s murderer.

Raife gazed in silence upon the face of the dead stranger. Then, presently, speaking to himself, he said:

“I wonder who he is? The police will find out, no doubt. He’s probably known, or he would not have been so careful about his finger-prints. By jove!” he added, “if I’d met him in a train or in the street I would never have suspected him of being a criminal. One is too apt to judge a man by his clothes.”

The local police had evidently gone through the man’s pockets for evidence of identification, but finding none, had replaced the articles in the pockets just as they had found them. Therefore, Raife did the same, in order that the London detectives might be able to make full investigation. The only thing he kept was the scrap torn from the *Morning Post*.

He turned the body over to get at the hip-pocket of the trousers, when

from it he at length drew a bundle of soft black material, which, when opened, he found to be a capacious sack of thin black silk, evidently for the purpose of conveying away stolen property.

This he also replaced, and when, on turning the body into its original position, the shirt became further dragged open at the throat he noticed around it something that had probably been overlooked by the local constable who had opened the dead man's clothes in an endeavour to discover traces of life—a very fine silver chain.

Suspended from the chain was a tiny little ancient Egyptian charm, in the form of a statuette of the goddess Isis, wearing on her head the royal sign, the orb of the sun, supported by cobras on either side.

He removed it from the neck of the unknown, and, holding it in his palm, examined it. The modelling was perfect as a work of ancient art. It was cut in camelian about an inch and a quarter long, and, no doubt, five or six thousand years old. Up the back, from head to foot, were inscribed tiny Egyptian hieroglyphics, the circle of the sun, the feather, the sign of truth, a man kneeling in the act of adoration, a beetle and an ibis, the meaning of which were only intelligible to an Egyptologist.

“He wore this as a talisman, no doubt,” remarked Raife, speaking to himself. “Perhaps it may serve as a clue to his identity. Who knows?”

And, gathering the little goddess and its chain into his palm, he transferred it to his pocket.

Just as he did so, voices sounded outside the cottage. Edgson, with three men in overcoats and bowler hats were coming up the garden path.

They entered the room without ceremony, and old Edgson, who accompanied them, said:

“These are the gentlemen from London, Master Raife.”

Two of the men respectfully saluted the young baronet—for he had now succeeded to the title—while the third, Raife recognised as Inspector Caldwell from Tunbridge Wells.

“Well, Caldwell,” he said. “This is a very sad business for us.”

“Very sad, indeed, sir,” was the dark-bearded man’s reply. “We all sympathise with you and her ladyship very deeply, sir. Sir Henry was highly respected everywhere, sir, and there wasn’t a more just, and yet considerate, magistrate on any county bench in England.”

“Is that the popular opinion?” asked Raife, thoughtfully.

“Yes, sir. That’s what everybody says. The awful news has created the greatest sensation in Tunbridge Wells. I wonder who this blackguardly individual is?” he added.

The two detectives from Scotland Yard had crossed to where the dead man was lying, his white face upturned, and were scrutinising him narrowly.

“I don’t recognise him,” declared the elder of the pair. “He’s done time, no doubt. Look at his gloves.”

“An old hand, that’s quite certain. We’ve got his finger-prints in the Department, you bet,” remarked the other. “We’d better take off his gloves and take some prints as soon as we can; they will, no doubt, establish his identity. Mr Caldwell, will you please telephone to a printer’s somewhere near for a little printing-ink?”

“Certainly,” replied the inspector. “I’ll ’phone back to Tunbridge Wells and have it sent out by a constable on a bicycle.”

The three officers then proceeded to make a minute examination of the body, but Raife did not remain. He returned to the house, accompanied by Edgson.

A few minutes later he stood in the library before the open safe, plunged in thought. The sunshine streamed across the fine old room filled with books from floor to ceiling, for Sir Henry was a student, and his library, being his hobby, was cosily furnished—a pleasant, restful place, the long, stained-glass windows of which looked out upon the quaint old Jacobean garden, with its grey, weather-beaten sundial, its level lawns, and high, well-clipped beech hedges.



Raife stood gazing at the safe, which, standing open, just as it was when his father had surprised the intruder, revealed a quantity of papers, bundles of which were tied with faded pink tape: a number of valuable securities, correspondence, insurance policies, and the usual private documentary treasures of an important landowner. Papers concerning the estate were mostly preserved at the agent's office in Tunbridge Wells: only those concerning his own private affairs did Sir Henry keep in the library.

What had his dead father meant by those dying words uttered to old Edgson? That warning to be careful of the trap! What trap? What could his father fear? What truth was it which his father had hesitated to tell him—the important truth the telling of which had been too late.

He recollected his father's words as uttered to the faithful old servant: "I was a fool, Edgson. I ought to have told my boy from the first. Every man has a skeleton in his cupboard. This is mine!"

"And, further, who was the woman whom he had referred to as 'her'?"

The young man gazed upon the dark patch on the carpet near the door, soaked by the life-blood of his unfortunate father. The latter, so suddenly cut off, had carried his secret to the grave.

That big, sombre room, wherein the tragedy had taken place, looked pleasant and cheerful with the bright, summer sunlight now slanting upon it. The big, silver bowl of roses upon the side-table shed a sweet fragrance there, while the spacious, old-fashioned mahogany writing-table was still littered with the dead man's correspondence.

The writing-chair he had vacated on the previous night, before going to bed, stood there, the silk cushion still crushed just as he had risen from it. His big briar-pipe lay just as he had knocked it out and placed it in the little bowl of beaten brass which he used as an ash-tray.

The newspapers which he had read were, as usual, flung upon the floor, while the waste-paper basket had not been emptied that morning. The servants had not dared to enter that room of disaster.

Young Raife re-crossed the room, and again examined the open door of

the safe.

He saw that it had not been forced, but opened by a duplicate key—one that had, no doubt, been cut from a cast secretly taken of the one which his father always carried attached to his watch-chain. So well had the false key fitted that the door had yielded instantly.

In the darkness in that well-remembered room, the room which he recollected as his father's den ever since he was a child, the two men—the baronet and the burglar—had come face to face.

“I wonder,” Raife exclaimed, speaking to himself softly, scarce above a whisper. “I wonder if there was a recognition? The words of the poor gov'nor almost tell me that, in that critical moment, the pair, bound together in one common secret, met. They hated each other—and they killed each other! Why did the gov'nor admit that he had been a fool? Why did he wish to warn me of a trap? What trap? Surely at my age I'm not likely to fall into any trap. No,” he added, with a bitter smile, “I fancy I'm a bit too wary to do that.”

He paced up and down the long, silent, book-lined chamber, much puzzled.

As he did so, the sweet, pale, refined face of Gilda Tempest again arose before him. He had only met her casually, a few hours ago, yet, somehow why he could not explain, they had seemed to have already become old friends and, amid all his trouble, anxiety and bewilderment, he found himself wondering how she fared, and whether the dear little black pom, Snookie, was guarding his dainty little mistress.

True, a black shadow had fallen upon his home, a tragic event which had rendered him a baronet, and in a few months he would be possessor of great estates, nevertheless that thought had not yet occurred to him. His only concern had been for his bereaved mother, to whom he was so devoted, and from whom his father had hidden his strange secret. Through that dark cloud of mourning, which had so suddenly enveloped him, arose the beautiful countenance of the girl into whose society chance had so suddenly thrown him, and he felt he must see her again, that he must stroll at her side once again, at all hazards.

As his father's only son, he had a right to investigate the contents of the open safe, for he knew that one executor was away at Dinard, while the other, an uncle, lived in Perthshire. At present, his father's lawyer had not been communicated with, therefore he crossed again to the safe and methodically removed paper after paper to examine it.

Most of them were securities, mortgages, bonds, and other such documents, which, at that moment, did not possess much interest for him.

One bundle of old and faded letters which he untied were in a handwriting he at once recognised—the letters of his mother before she had become Lady Remington. Another—a batch written forty years ago—were the letters from his grandfather, while his father was at Oxford. With these were other letters from dead friends and relatives; but, though he spent an hour in searching through them, Raife discovered no clue to the strange secret which Sir Henry had died without divulging.

Then he afterwards replaced the papers, closed the safe and re-locked it with the false key which still remained in it.

His mother was still too prostrated to speak with him, therefore he again went across to the cottage where the police were with the dead assassin.

As he entered, one of the detectives was carefully applying printer's ink to the tips of the cold, stiff fingers, and afterwards taking impressions of them upon pieces of paper.

The secret of the dead thief's identity would, they declared among themselves, very soon be known.



## Chapter Four.

### Reveals Certain Confidences.

“Tell him to be careful—to be wary of—the trap?”

Those dying words of Sir Henry’s rang ever in his son’s ears.

That afternoon, as Raife stood bowed in silence before the body of his beloved father, his mind was full of strange wonderings.

What was the nature of the dead man’s secret? Who was the woman to whom he had referred a few moments before he expired?

The young fellow gazed upon the grey shrunken face he had loved so well, and his eyes became dimmed by tears. Only a week before they had been in London together, and he had dined with his father at the Carlton Club, and they had afterwards gone to a theatre.

The baronet was then in the best of health and spirits. A keen sportsman, and an ardent golfer, he had been essentially an out-door man. Yet he now lay there still and dead, killed by an assassin’s bullet. Raife’s mother was inconsolable and he had decided that it was best for him to keep apart from her for the present.

To his friend, Mutimer, he had sent a wire announcing the tragic news, and had, by telephone, also informed Mr Kellaway, the family lawyer, whose offices were in Bedford Row, London. On hearing the astounding truth, Mr Kellaway—to whom Raife had spoken personally—had announced his intention of coming at once to Tunbridge Wells.

At six o’clock he arrived in the car which Raife had sent for him—a tall, elderly, clean-shaven man in respectful black.

“Now, Mr Kellaway,” said Raife, when they were alone together in the library, and the young baronet had explained what had occurred. “You have been my father’s very intimate friend, as well as his solicitor for many years. I want to ask you a simple question. Are you aware that my

father held a secret—some secret of the past?”

“Not to my knowledge, Mr Raife—or Sir Raife, as I suppose I ought to call you now,” was the sombre, and rather sad, man’s reply.

“Well, he had a secret,” exclaimed Raife, looking at him, searchingly.

“How do you know?”

“He told Edgson, the butler, before he died.”

“Told his servant his secret!” echoed the lawyer, knitting his brows.

“No. He told him something—not all.”

“What did he tell him?” asked Mr Kellaway, in quick eagerness.

“My father said he wished that he had been frank with me, and revealed the truth.”

“Of what?”

“Of his secret. He left me a message, urging me to beware of the trap. Of what nature is the pitfall?” asked the young man. “You, his friend, must know.”

“I regret, but I know absolutely nothing,” declared the solicitor, frankly. “This is all news to me. What do you think was the nature of the secret? Is it concerning money matters?”

“No. I believe it mainly concerns a woman,” the young man replied. “My father had no financial worries. He was, as you know, a rich man. Evidently he was anxious on my behalf, or he would not have given Edgson that message. Ah! If his lips could only speak again—poor, dear gov’nor.”

And the young man sighed.

“Perhaps Edgson knows something?” the solicitor suggested.

“He knows nothing. He only suspects that there is a lady concerned in it,

for my father, before his death, referred to 'her'."

"Your respected father was my client and friend through many years," said Mr Kellaway. "As far as I know, he had no secrets from me."

Raife looked him straight in the face for a few moments without speaking. Like all undergraduates he had no great liking for lawyers.

"Look here, Kellaway," he said slowly. "Are you speaking the truth?"

"The absolute truth," was the other's grave reply.

"Then you know of no secret of my father's. None—eh?"

"Ah, that is quite a different question," the solicitor said. "During the many years I have acted for your late father I have been entrusted with many of his secrets—secrets of his private affairs and suchlike matters with which a man naturally trusts his lawyer. But there was nothing out of the common concerning any of them."

"Nothing concerning any lady?"

"Nothing—I assure you."

"Then what do you surmise regarding 'the trap,' about which my father left me this inexplicable message?"

"Edgson may be romancing," the lawyer suggested. "In every case of a sudden and tragic death, the servant, male or female, always has some curious theory concerning the affair, some gossip or some scandal concerning their employer."

"Edgson has been in our family ever since he was a lad. He's not romancing," replied Raife dryly.

Mr Kellaway was a hard, level-headed, pessimistic person, who judged all men as law-breakers and criminals. He was one of those smug, old-fashioned Bedford Row solicitors, who had a dozen peers as clients, who transacted only family business, and whose firm was an eminently respectable one.

“I have always thought Edgson a most reliable servant,” he admitted, crossing to the safe, the key of which Raife had handed to him.

“So he is. And when he tells me that my father possessed a secret, which he has carried to his grave—then I believe him. I have never yet known Edgson to tell a lie. Neither has my father. He was only saying so at dinner one night three months ago.”

“I have no personal knowledge of any secret of the late Sir Henry’s,” responded the elder man, speaking quite openly. “If I knew of any I would tell you frankly.”

“No, you wouldn’t, Kellaway. You know you wouldn’t betray a client’s confidence,” said Raife, with a grim, bitter smile, as he stood by the ancient window gazing across the old Jacobean garden.

“Ah, perhaps you’re right. Perhaps you’re right,” replied the man addressed. “But at any rate I repeat that I am ignorant of any facts concerning your father’s past that he had sought to hide.”

“You mean that you will not betray my dead father’s confidence?”

“I mean what I say, Sir Raife—that I am in entire ignorance of anything which might be construed into a scandal.”

“I did not suggest scandal, Mr Kellaway,” was his rather hard reply. “My father was, I suspect, acquainted with the man who shot him. The two men met in this room, and, I believe, the recognition was mutual!”

“Your father knew the assassin?” echoed the lawyer, staring at the young man.

“I believe so.”

“It seems incredible that Sir Henry should have been acquainted with an expert burglar—for such he apparently was.”

“Why should he have left me that warning message? Why should he seek to forewarn me of some mysterious trap?”

The old solicitor shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. The whole, tragic affair was a complete and absolute mystery.

The London papers that afternoon were full of it, and already a host of eager reporters and press-photographers were waiting about on the off-chance of obtaining a glimpse of Raife, or any other member of the bereaved family. More than one had had the audacity to send in his card to Raife with a request for an interview, which had promptly been refused, and Edgson now had orders that the young master was not at home to any one.

Raife, still unconvinced that Mr Kellaway was in ignorance of his father's secret, took him across to the cottage where lay the body of the stranger. The police were no longer there, but two doctors were making an examination. The inquest had been fixed for the morrow, and the medical men were consulting prior to the post-mortem.

The cause of death was only too apparent, but the principles of the law are hidebound, and it was necessary that a post-mortem should be made, in order that the coroner's jury should arrive at their verdict.

Later Raife, assisted the family solicitor to gather out the contents of the safe and make them into bundles, which they sealed up carefully and counted.

"Of course," Kellaway said, "I am not aware of the contents of your lamented father's will, and I frankly confess I was rather disappointed at not being asked to make it."

"I think it was made by some solicitors in Edinburgh," was Raife's reply. "Gordon and Gordon, I believe, is the name of the firm. It is deposited at Barclay's Bank in London."

"The executors will, no doubt, know. You have wired to them, you say?" Then, after a pause, Kellaway added: "The fact that Sir Henry engaged a strange solicitor to draw up his will would rather lead to the assumption that he had something to hide from me, wouldn't it?"

"By jove, yes," was the young man's response. "I had never thought of that! He wished to preserve his secret until his death. I wonder if the will



reveals anything?”

“Perhaps—who knows?”

Raife remained silent. He was still carefully removing the papers from the steel inner drawer of the safe—a drawer which had been overlooked when he had made his investigation. The papers were mostly memoranda regarding financial transactions, sales and purchases of land, and other matters. Among them were a number of old letters, mostly signed by George Mountjoy, who had been member for South Gloucestershire, and his father’s particular crony. He had died a year ago, and Sir Henry had keenly felt the loss of his life-long friend.

They had been as brothers, and old Mr Mountjoy was frequently a guest at Aldborough for months at a stretch, and treated quite as one of the family.

Letter after letter he turned over aimlessly, reading scraps here and there. They were strange letters, which showed a great bond of friendship existing between the two men. In some, Mountjoy asked Sir Henry’s advice regarding his most intimate and private affairs, and in others he gave the baronet his aid, and made suggestions regarding his line of action in many matters.

One struck him as very strange. Dated from the Hotel Angst, in Bordighera, over three years ago, it contained the following passage:

“As you have asked my advice upon the most secret page of our history, my dear Henry, I am most decidedly and emphatically of opinion that it will be best to allow them to remain in entire ignorance. He should, however, be diplomatically warned lest the pitfall you fear be placed in his path—as no doubt it will be sooner or later.

“Under no circumstances whatever would I alarm your wife by revealing to her the truth. Remember the state of her health is delicate, and undue anxiety would most probably shatter her nerves. No, remain silent. Only you and I know the truth, and that it is our duty to keep it strictly to ourselves.

“I know how it must gall you, and how helpless you must feel in the strange, unheard-of circumstances. But I beg of you to regard the threats as idle ones. For your safety I fear nothing, but for Raife it is different. He should be warned, but not in a way to cause him undue anxiety; only to impress upon him the need of shrewd precaution against his enemies.

“I shall never divulge the truth, and you, my dear Henry, should still preserve a calm and smiling face. Too well I know the extreme difficulty of doing this; but remember there is not the least suspicion of the truth abroad, and that most men in every walk of life have ugly secrets which they would not care to expose to the light of day.

“Your son, Raife, is in ignorance. Let him remain so, I beg of you. The truth, if told, will only bring unhappiness upon you both. He is young and fearless. Warn him against the trap that we, alas! know will be set sooner or later. But further than that do not go. I shall be back in London at the end of this month, and we can discuss the situation further.”

The remainder of the letter consisted mainly of Riviera gossip.

Raife stood staring at the sheet of grey note-paper, his brows knit in wonder.

“What is it?” asked Kellaway, noticing the effect the letter had had upon the young man.

“Read that,” was his reply. “It shows that my suspicions were well-grounded. My father had a secret—a secret which was known to no one else besides his friend, George Mountjoy. Read it, Kellaway. It is evident from that letter, and from the poor gov’nor’s dying message urging me to be careful, that I am in some strange, mysterious peril! What can it be?”



## Chapter Five.

### The Mystery of the White Room.

The routine of a coroner's inquest does not vary much. In this instance the victim of a very obvious murder being a man of great distinction, a man who had rendered his country high political service, aroused widespread interest. Tunbridge Wells, where it was decided to hold the inquiry, was crowded with visitors as it has never been since the days of Beau Brummell and Beau Nash, those gay leaders of old-time society which foregathered at Bath, Tunbridge Wells, and the other inland spas of our country, to drink the waters, intrigue, elope, fight duels, and make for *la joie de vivre* as it was then constituted.

Every hotel was crowded, and even some of the old-world coaching inns revived the ancient glories that belonged to them in the days when society travelled by post-chaise and coach, and footpads and highwaymen were a terror on the King's highway.

A mixed throng promenaded the old Pantiles, discussing with breathless interest each item of fact or speculation that leaked out from the overcrowded and evil-smelling court-room. There were gaily dressed "society" women, newspaper men—descriptive writers—representing papers all over the country, the United States, Paris, and Rome. The tenants of the murdered baronet and farmers drove in from the countryside. A crowd of well-dressed idlers, those ghouls who appear to gloat over crime and its details wherever it may occur.

The rumour that Sir Henry Remington was the victim of political assassination gained credence. The newsboys shouted the startling headlines and sold more evening newspapers than if it had been the result of a football cup-tie.

Lady Remington, as became her position, the wife of an aristocrat, nerved herself for the occasion and gave her evidence calmly, and in a low, musical voice. The old butler, Edgson, an aristocrat of his craft, repeated the story we already know. The police had failed to identify the body of the dead assassin. Raife's evidence threw no light on the subject.

The verdict of murder by a person unknown was returned. The foreman asked permission, as representing the tenants, tradesmen and residents of the country around, to express their sympathy with the family of the late Sir Henry. With the indulgence of the coroner, he supplemented the testimony that Inspector Caldwell had given in the death chamber, when Raife met him there with the detectives from London.

The court-house was soon cleared. The unwonted crowd of visitors scattered, returning to their destinations, and Tunbridge Wells resumed its normal state, leaving the tragic mystery still unsolved.

Lady Remington, with Miss Hope and a maid, had returned in the car to Aldborough Park. When her ladyship reached her boudoir she collapsed, after the strain of the proceedings of the coroner's court. The vulgar stare of the mixed crowd in the close room, the foetid atmosphere, the printed impertinences of some of the newspaper reporters, all had served to shatter her nerves, already tried by the tragic loss of the loved husband who had been her idol—her only love. The sweet-faced, grey-haired old lady reclined in a semi-conscious state, yet sobbing bitterly in the privacy of her boudoir. The rigid Miss Hope displayed a part of the anomalous dispositions of womenkind. Her austere features relaxed, and with tears, at first trickling, then flowing, she ministered to the stricken widow and gave what comfort she could.

The superficial austerity of a mature spinster should be treated with indulgence. Blighted love leaves a blight on the temperament of some women, whom a malignant fate has doomed to a solitude for which, by nature, at the outset, they were not intended. The history or life-story of Miss Hope does not concern this narrative further than this—that all the pent-up and hidden charm of a once passionate nature extended itself to this lady in great distress. Although the privacy of the boudoir should screen from public ear and gaze much of the tragedy of bereavement, who shall say that the sympathetic record of such a beautiful scene of human emotion is not justified?

Through her sobs Lady Remington spoke in a low, sweet voice. "Leave me, now, Miss Hope. You have been very kind. Thank you so much. You cannot do any more for me! I must fight this grief alone."

There was no angularity of movement, no austerity of countenance now in Miss Hope. Her very voice assumed a softness that would have seemed strange to those who were only familiar with the mental mask she had so long worn in public. She started towards the door, and held it half open. Then, closing it again with swift, graceful movements, she crossed the room and knelt at the lounge on which Lady Remington reclined amidst soft rich cushions of eiderdown. She wept no more; nor had tears left her face stained. Instead, a radiance suffused her cheeks, and her eyes glistened, betraying a beauty that had long been hidden by the set expression of that mask, assumed at first, habitual by long use.

“Lady Remington! Oh, Lady Remington! let me speak—let me tell you! I, too, have suffered. Don’t stop me. Let me tell you a story to the end. It may help you.”

Then commenced a life-story, told musically, almost rhythmically, of love, deceit, treachery, ending in a debacle that soured a beautiful disposition of a lovely girl. Miss Hope did not imply that she had been a lovely girl, but her radiant face, with the deep grey eyes, that for the first time during many years disclosed their full size and the limpid look of sincerity, made it evident to the stricken widow. Abruptly she finished the story, and, rising from her knees, she started across the room again. She had proceeded a bare pace or two when Lady Remington, with a vigour, surprising for her years, almost leapt from the lounge, and, throwing her arms around Miss Hope’s neck, exclaimed “Gladys! Gladys Hope! you have taught me a lesson in bravery that I will never forget. You are no longer Miss Hope. You are, if you will let me, Gladys, a dear, dear friend to me. As long as I am spared I will endeavour to be more than a friend to you!”

They embraced again and again, until the arrival of the maid with tea afforded the opportunity of a closing scene that had been tense and affecting to both women.

The new baronet left the coroner’s court, and, walking down a long stable-yard of one of the hotels, escaped from the inquisitive crowd that pursued him, by entering a coach-house with a side door that led to the scullery and kitchen of the hotel. Quickly he made for a door in the narrow passage that led to the coffee-room and main entrance. Unbolting

the door, which was seldom used in these latex days, he slipped into a narrow alley way. With rapid strides he found himself, unobserved, in one of the old post-houses in a side street. Raife walked right through the low-ceilinged bar to the private parlour, with its oak beams, swinging lamp, and wide, open fireplace and chimney, from which were hanging a few hams and a side of bacon. In a wooden arm-chair with high back, without cushions, sat an elderly man, pink-cheeked and clean-shaven except for two tufts of close-cropped side whiskers. He was smoking a long churchwarden pipe, and the air was redolent with the perfume of a Virginian tobacco, which, if too pungent in excess, possessed an aroma which, by indulgence, is, by some at least, considered not nauseating. He was smoking shag tobacco. At his side, on a deal table which had been scrubbed once a day at least, for some seventy years, was an old brown toby of Kentish ale.

Kent is the garden of England, and Kentish hops are responsible for much that has been good in English manhood. Mr Twisegood was born in Kent of a long line of Kentish ancestry, and Kentish hops had formed a substantial portion of his and their daily fare. Rising from his chair as Raife entered, he displayed a portly and robust frame.

“Good afternoon, Master Raife,” he said. “I’m very sorry to hear all this ’ere bad news about your father, Master Raife. I beg your pardon, Master Raife, I suppose as ’ow as I ought to call yer Sir Raife now, sir. Beg your pardon, Master Raife—I mean Sir Raife, sir!”

In spite of the heavy load on his mind, Raife smiled, and, laying his hand on the old man’s shoulders, said cheerily, “No, Twisegood, I hope I shall always be Master Raife to you—and to some others. Yes! Twisegood, it’s a sad case and I’m much troubled. I’ve come to you to help me.”

“Lud a mussy, sir, help ’ee! What can I do to help the likes o’ you? I’ll help, sure enough, if I can help. Now tell me, Master Raife, what can. I do for ’ee?”

When Raife was a lad, and a mischievous lad, there were many scrapes out of which he had been lifted by old Twisegood. Before the old man inherited the public-house that had been a post-house, he had worked, as many of his ancestors had, on the Remington estates.

There still remains, in spite of the spirit of unrest and agitation, which, rightly or wrongly, pervades the land, a strong sympathy between the old families and their tenants and retainers. Twisegood was of the type that made true knighthood, when knight-errantry was in a cause that they felt to be good. The Twisegoods had been retainers of the Reymingtounes since the Tudors, and the spirit of loyalty was strong within him when the young master had said, "I've come to you to help me." Raife smiled again and said: "I don't want much, Twisegood, I want you to let me have the long white room overlooking the stable-yard. I want you to see that the shutters will bolt firmly from within, and see to it that when the lamp is lit no light can be seen from without."

"Is that all you want. Master Raife? I'll see to that sure enough. When do you want the room, sir?"

Raife replied: "I want to go up there now, but you can see to the other things later."

"Yes, sir. I don't know whether the room be tidy or no, but come along o' me."

They went up a wide staircase with twisted solid oak balustrades, to a wide landing on the first floor. The old man produced a bunch of large keys which jingled until he found one to fit the rusty lock, which turned with difficulty. The door creaked when it reluctantly opened, and they entered together. A faded scent of lavender met them. A yellow film of warm sunlight filtered through the white blinds that hung from the bay window. A white drugget covered the faded carpet, which showed slightly at the edges a dull crushed pink. A huge four-post wooden bedstead hung with white dimity. A white ceiling surmounted, and a white wall paper, with pale pink roses confined within vertical stripes of dull yellow, surrounded the room. Two ancient high-backed chairs covered in holland, and a more modern deep-set, low-lying arm-chair, covered in the same material, faced a huge fireplace of shining black metal. Fire-dogs, fender and fire-irons hammered from steel. A vast copper coal-scuttle of simple, almost crude shape, well charged with coal, stood at the side of the white supports of a deep white mantel-shelf.

There were no pictures on the walls. White candelabra and china vases

of quaint shape stood before a small, and very imperfect, mirror on the mantel-shelf. Long white curtains hung in front of the bay window. The whole effect of this big white room, bathed in a warm glow of filtered sunlight, was startling. To Raife it was soothing. Twisegood crossed to pull up the blinds.

“Don’t do that,” Raife said, as he walked to yet another white curtain which screened a small door. The key was in the door. He opened it. It led to a narrow winding stairway with a strong oak door at the bottom. He called to Twisegood for the key. The stairs creaked as the burly old man descended and placed the key in the lock and turned it. “That will do. Give me the key. Have the lock oiled, and buy some soft carpet and put it on this stairway. This leads into the loose box, doesn’t it? or have you altered the stalls lately?”

“No, sir! They be just the same as when you stayed here last, sir.”

They ascended the crooked stairway, returning to the white room. Raife stood in front of the fireplace gazing at a small miniature on the mantel-shelf. At a glance it appeared to be the only pictorial ornament in the room. Neatly framed in a thin ebony oval was the most beautiful enamel of a woman’s face in high, powdered head-dress, and an exquisitely-modelled bust. Raife picked it up and, looking at the back of the frame, read this inscription pasted on:

To William Twisegood for a brave service rendered.

“How did you get this, Twisegood?” asked Raife.

“Why, sir! That be a long time ago, sir, when I wur not more’n a lad. I be older’n wot your father was, and there come along a day when he wor down along the copse by Tyser Wood, and the young master, he was then, and he was a good plucked ’un. He had his gun along o’ him and was out after rabbits just afore the first, when the partridges open the season. I be going along atop among the turmits, when I hears him a ordering some fellers off his ground. I listens, and presently there’s a scuffling. I slips down through all the bracken and bramble, and there I sees him a scrappin’ hard, with all the blood a streaming down his face. There was Nick Blacker and Bill Boneham, each a holdin’ a lurcher dog,



whilst Nick's three sons was a pasting the young master as hard as they could. But they wasn't a getting all their own way, for he was mighty quick with his fists, was Master Harry. They didn't see me a coming. I ups with a couple of bits o' rock-stone and I aims at Dick. I hits him clean and down he goes. I 'as a stout ash stick in my 'and and I rushes up to Bill. Before he has time to know wot's up, I lands him a good 'un. Then I shouts to make believe that there's others a coming. Nick gets up and off they all start on a full run.

"Well, Master Harry! he was young those days, and thought I was brave. So he gave me that miniature and told me as 'ow it was his grandmother. But bless yer, Master Raife, that wasn't all he gave me."

The old man stopped for want of breath. He had lived his fight over again.

"Is there anything I can get for you, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, Twisegood, have you got any of Mrs Twisegood's home-made wines left?"

"Why, yes, sir. 'Twouldn't be the old 'Blue Boar,' if we hadn't got some of that. Or would you rather have some of her sloe gin? That was a drink of the old coaching and posting days. Try some, sir."

"All right, thanks, bring me some of that."

Raife sat in the deep arm-chair and his mind was a whirlwind of mixed thought and emotion. On the one hand, the mystery of his father's murder had not been revealed at the inquest. Nor had any light been thrown upon his father's dying words—that cryptic utterance which rang in his ears with a dull insistence that maddened him.

"Tell him to be careful—to be wary of the trap—every man has a skeleton in his cupboard—this is mine." Then those last three fateful words: "her—that woman." Who is that woman? If he only knew. His father fought three lads in the copse at Tyser Wood, as he had just learnt from Twisegood: that was easy. To fight an unknown woman, to be wary of a trap—that is hard.

The full force of an August sun still bathed the world in its glorious light,

and the warm glow came through those drawn white blinds of this mysterious white room. In spite of that, Raife shivered.

Old Mr Twisegood returned with the sloe gin. Raife said: "Although it's August and the sun is shining, I feel cold. Let us light that fire." Soon the hearth roared with crackling flames, and Raife was left to himself and his troubled thoughts.

The white room of the "Blue Boar" had been famous for many generations. The secret stairway leading into the loose box in the stable had formed the means of many an escapade, and young Sir Raife was very familiar with its possibilities.

To-day he merely wanted to reflect, and the peaceful atmosphere and general air of quietude suited his mood.



## Chapter Six.

### In the Southern Land of Adventure.

Raife's passion for Gilda had been as sudden as it was fierce, and here, in the solitude of this strange white room, he allowed his pent-up feelings to obtain the mastery of him. Twisegood having closed the door, Raife paced up and down the long room with rapid strides, reiterating his admiration for her beauty. At length, he decided to return to Aldborough Park. On his way he sent a telegram and eagerly awaited a reply on the following morning, but no reply arrived.

The thousand and one details that surround the funeral of the head of an old family are very trying to those who are responsible for the dignity of the function and its safe conduct. Raife had been sorely tried in his position as the new head of the family.

At last the ceremony was completed and most of the mourners had returned to their homes. With a haste that attracted attention, at least, in some quarters, he went to Southport, and then called at the "Queen's," and, having asked for Miss Tempest, was rather surprised when the hall-porter handed him a note. He hastily tore it open and read:

"Dear Mr Remington—Our friendship is forbidden. For your sake—and for mine—forget me.

"Gilda Tempest."

The keenness of a young man's passion is only enhanced by obstacles. Mystified and baffled, Raife yet repeated his resolve to find the girl who had enthralled him.

Many weeks passed by at Aldborough Park, where the bailiffs and stewards of the estates foregathered with the solicitors of the family for the purpose of installing the new regime. Raife was somewhat impatient of the tedious nature of much of the work. To get away from the monotony, he hid himself several times in the long white room of the "Blue Boar."

He was sitting there, one afternoon, deeply abstracted and cursing the luck that had robbed him of that mysterious girl whom he loved, when he heard footsteps on the secret stairway that led to loose box in the stable. Hastily drawing the white curtain aside by opening the little door, he was confronted by his old college chum, Edward Mutimer, in whose company he had been when he met Gilda Tempest.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “what are you doing here, Mutimer?”

Mutimer laughed, and said: “Well, I went up to the Park, and no one knew where to find you. I guessed you were a bit tired of parchments and documents, so I took my chance of finding you here. I asked old Twisegood, but he wouldn’t give you away. But, somehow, I thought his manner was a bit strange, so I thought of the loose box and the old stairway—and here I am!”

“Good! I’m glad to see you, Mutimer. You were quite right, I’m tired to death of parchments, leases and settlements, and I’ve been coming here lately to get away from them. We’ve had some fun in this old room when we were kids, haven’t we? Twisegood’s a rare good sort, too. He never gave us away.”

“Well, I say, Raife, I didn’t altogether come here to disturb you for nothing,” said Mutimer. “I think I’ve got some news for you. I couldn’t help noticing how keen you were on that girl we met one day at Southport.”

“Yes! yes! Go on! Gilda Tempest is her name. Where is she?” almost shouted Raife, as he leapt from his chair, grasping Mutimer’s arms with a grip that made his friend wince.

“Easy all, old chap, a little bit softer. I think I know where she is. You know she was staying with her uncle at the ‘Queen’s.’ Well, they left there quite suddenly, just after your governor died. I was at the railway station and saw her and her uncle. They had not much luggage. As I was at the booking-office window, I heard the old man whisper to her: ‘When we get to town we must wire for rooms. Nice is a busy place, and the Hôtel Royal is liable to be crowded.’”

“Thanks for what you’ve told me. Mutimer, I’m just crazy over that girl. I’ll follow her to the ends of the earth, but she shall be mine. Yes, by jove!

Gilda Tempest shall be mine. Mutimer! I'm not a murderer by nature, but I could slay the man who gets between me and that woman."

"By the by, Raife," said his friend, apparently disregarding the confession of love, "did anything come to light over your governor's dying words. It was something about a 'trap,' and there was a woman in it, wasn't there?"

"No! nothing came to light. It looks as though I've got a very first-class family skeleton in my cupboard." Raife said this reflectively, rather sadly. Then, bracing himself up, he exclaimed: "It'll take several skeletons to scare me, however. I don't think I'm either timid or nervous."

"Ha! ha! Well, now for a trip to Nice," he added, with a don't-care-a-hang air, "and be bothered to the lawyers for a time. I'll find Gilda Tempest. I swear I will, and her old uncle can be hanged for a meddling old ass."

It was in March when the young baronet, who in such tragic circumstances had just inherited large estates and twenty thousand pounds a year, arrived at the Hôtel Royal, on the Promenade des Anglais, at Nice.

His mother, the widowed Lady Remington, accompanied him. Having disposed of her ladyship in a cosy corner among the palms, Raife started on his hot-headed search for Gilda. He was not long disappointed, for in the big lounge of the hotel, not crowded at this moment, he saw Gilda, exquisitely dressed, and accompanied by a distinguished-looking old man.

The old gentleman was Doctor Danilo Malsano—the uncle of Gilda Tempest. Doctor Malsano was tall, and there was a certain air of distinction about him. A superficial graciousness of manner disguised from the casual observer the sinister cast of his countenance.

He had long black hair, receding from a high forehead, leaving two circular, bald patches on either side. A powerful jaw, and somewhat hollow cheeks, with glittering white teeth and small ears, completed the clean-shaven appearance, with the exception of his eyes and bushy eyebrows.

More has been written on the subject of eyes than of any other portion of

human anatomy, but Doctor Malsano's eyes were unique. At a glance they suggested a squint. Here was neither a squint nor an aggravated form of astigmatism. The right eye was of a steely blue, that pierced the observer with the sharpness of a gimlet. The left eye was a swivel eye, and served the purpose of preventing one from determining which eye was gazing at you. There is a certain type of Scotch sheep-dog which possesses eyes of the colour of the doctor's left eye. It is almost colourless, and with a dark spot in the centre of the right iris.

The doctor's striking appearance contrasted strongly with the fragile beauty of the fair-haired young girl, with the eyes of deep-blue, who walked by his side: narrow-waisted, delicate and slim, with a well-poised head on a rounded neck of alabaster whiteness. Raife devoured this vision with his eyes before crossing the foyer to her. The whole charm of the striking personality of the young girl was enhanced by that distinguished grace of style that characterises the refined in temperament. Raife crossed over to her and, with a bow, claimed her acquaintance. Gilda politely but frigidly declined the acquaintance, informing Raife that he was mistaken.

Raife was astounded—staggered. Accepting the situation that had just been dealt to him, and with flaming cheeks smarting from the blow, so sudden and unexpected, he left the hotel by the main entrance and joined the throng of promenaders.

His thoughts lingered on the insult he had encountered. He fancied he had detected a sneer on Doctor Malsano's countenance. Rage and wounded vanity possessed him. At the table d'hôte he was distraught, and sorely puzzled Lady Remington with his absent-minded attentions and disjointed conversation. Seeking the first opportunity of escaping his mother's over-anxious regard for his health and spirits, he again found his way into the open air and avoided the crowd. Finding a secluded bench under a group of palms and surrounded by brilliant blossom, he sat down and sought repose in the solace of a choice Habana cigar. It was a secluded spot, and the depths of shadow from foliage were rendered more mysterious by the vivid yet luscious moonlight that flooded the countryside. Long he gazed in front of him, still smarting under that stinging snub that had, at the same time, wounded him sorely and enraged him. The latest heir of the Reymingtounes of Aldborough

was not of the stuff to court a snub or endure it. Rage alternated with crumpled dignity, and he fumed, puffing his Habana viciously the while. He had sat there a long time, until the few strollers, who had found themselves near this secluded corner, seemed to have returned to the warmth of house or hotel.

Raife threw the end of his cigar far in front of him, and, rising from the bench, crossed the promenade and leant against a railing. He shivered slightly, for a March night in Nice may be chilly, even treacherously so. Thus musing, he glanced at one of those daintily-illustrated little pamphlets that advertise the resorts of the Riviera. A thought flashed through his mind. His father's last words, as he lay dying from the assassin's revolver, came to him. "I was a fool, Edgson. I ought to have told my boy from the first. Every man has a skeleton in his cupboard. This is mine." And the last haunting words of all came to him:

"Beware of the trap—she—that woman."

Why had this beautiful young girl come into his life at such a tragic time? Could it be possible? No! Perish the thought. Nothing but good could come from that sweet countenance that had enthralled him from the first glance. But, then, who was this uncle, Doctor Malsano? The very name was evil-sounding, and, in spite of his distinguished air, that swivel eye, with much else of his striking countenance, was sinister.

Raife now felt certain that he had recognised a sneer on the man's face—a malicious sneer, when Gilda had snubbed him.

These long minutes in that full flood of southern moonlight were fraught with much that might be good—or bad—for Sir Raife Remington, Bart. In spite of his passionate outburst in the long white room of the "Blue Boar," at Tunbridge Wells; in spite of his vehemently-declared intention to win that beautiful girl for his wife—or die—he was possessed of a premonition of danger ahead. Again his father's dying words rang in his ears, and the blood-stained chamber, the scene in his ancestral hall of his father's cruel murder, came vividly before him, and he was tempted to "beware of the trap."

In such mood he turned on his heel and sauntered yet a little farther from

the Hôtel Royal, where he was staying with his bereaved mother.

The southern lands are the lands of intrigue and mystery. They are the lands of deepest nights and brightest days, and that alternating intensity enters into the characters of the peoples who inhabit them.

As Raife was lighting a second cigar, he was vaguely conscious of a young boy or girl who dodged in the shadows behind him. The strongest man likes to meet his friends face to face, but a potential foe lurking in shadows on a moonlight night in a southern land, is disconcerting.

Watching an opportunity, therefore, Raife wheeled suddenly around, and making a dash for the youngster, secured him. The young girl, who appeared to be about thirteen years of age, did not seem alarmed, but smiled seductively, saying: "Signor Raife! meet a preety signora. Meea take you there."

At the same time, the girl handed Raife a piece of paper on which was written:

"Quite safe. Follow the girl."

Again those words of warning from his dying father.

Was this the trap.

In his present mood he did not care, and welcomed an adventure even if it should be dangerous.

He followed the little girl.

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## Chapter Seven.

### Who was the Apache?

Raife Remington followed the mysterious little girl, she dodging her way through the patches of silver light and gloomy shade. He strode in a gloomy, almost defiant manner, which implied that there was trouble ahead, and he was determined to meet it. As they approached the Hôtel Royal they passed a group of men who appeared to regard Raife with more than the ordinary interest that an obviously English, or perhaps American, visitor should attract. Now in the full light of the moon, enhanced by the brilliant street-lamps and the lights of the town glistening here and there, they dived into a side street. The little girl beckoned to Raife and he approached her. Then pointing to a café she said: "Signora meeta you there."

The child disappeared and Raife sauntered in the direction indicated. With an air of nonchalance he relit the cigar which had gone out. There seemed to be an air of mystery about the transaction. He waited for a minute or two but no one appeared, until he felt a sense of impatience mixed with irritation. The event of the afternoon still rankled within him, and he was simmering with a stifled rage and indignation. The suggestion of a "trap" appeared evident, and he determined to enter the rather dimly-lit café and call for a cognac. He approached the entrance, and his hand was upon the handle of the door, when, from apparently nowhere, the figure of a man appeared. He was dressed in a long coat, loose at the neck, displaying a flowing necktie or cravat of black. His wide-brimmed black hat covered his countenance, and his general appearance suggested a denizen of the Latin quarter of Paris. In a soft undertone he lisped: "Pardon, monsieur! mademoiselle," or as he pronounced it, "mams'elle arrivera tout à l'heure. Vous voulez attendre, monsieur?"

Raife's knowledge of French was superior to his knowledge of Italian, and he turned to talk to this person who seemed to have sprung from nowhere. His movement must have been leisurely, for when he looked around the stranger had disappeared. The message was simple enough. "Mademoiselle will arrive presently. Will you wait, sir?" What did all this

mystery mean? Why was a little Italian girl sent to lead him to a place of appointment with a lady who sent a cryptic message written without a signature. Who was the person, apparently an Apache, or from the Latin quarter of Paris, who sprang from nowhere and disappeared into space? As Raife contemplated these matters, the cloaked figure of a woman came round the corner of the street.

“Ah! Sir Raife! I hope I have not kept you waiting long. I could not get here quicker.” She was out of breath, and her words came quickly.

Raife at once recognised the voice and form of Gilda. Her form was disguised in the long rich cloak that she wore, and her face was hidden by a large hat, from which a deep veil was draped around her face, but her rich, low, contralto voice was evident—especially to Raife.

All there was of mistrust, of suspicion, indignation or resentment disappeared, as she placed her hand upon his arm, looking up at him through the folds of her deep veil. Her eyes appealed to him.

“I tried to get here before, but they wouldn’t let me get away. Of course, you got my message.”

In spite of her extraordinary behaviour that afternoon, a few hours ago only, everything seemed quite right and natural to Raife now he heard her voice, and saw those eyes, and felt the soft touch upon his arm. In an absent-minded way he said: “Oh, yes! I got your message and I came at once. Where shall we go? I do want to talk to you.” Then collecting his scattered senses, he asked a dozen questions rapidly. “Who was the Apache fellow? Why did you snub me this afternoon? What was the meaning of the note you left for me at the ‘Queen’s,’ Southport? Oh, Gilda, tell me what is the meaning of all this mystery! If there is any trouble let me help you.”

The girl, with a sob, replied: “Sir Raife, don’t ask me any questions. Trust me. It is very hard for me—but don’t ask questions. Let us walk back along the Promenade des Anglais.” Then, dreamily, as if to herself, she added: “Yes—the promenade of the English. We are English. At least, there is no doubt that you are. I sometimes wonder what I am.”

They walked together until they reached the promenade again. There,

under the light of a street-lamp, they renewed their talk. He, still interrogative, asked questions to which she would or could not reply. All she would say was, "Please! Please, don't ask me questions. Just trust me," and, with a soft tremor in her tones, she added: "Will you be my friend?"

Raife's conquest was complete. All sense of mistrust had disappeared with the first seductive notes of the voice he had longed to hear again, and, to-night, that voice was his.

"I trust you. I trust you implicitly, and I will be your friend."

For good or evil his word was given, and the word of a Remington was never lightly given. Passion or love, call it what you will, has led men and women into strangely incongruous and many dangerous situations. This promise, given with the impetuosity of youth aglow and veins afire, might lead to tragic disaster or the consummation of a pure and natural union.

The flow of lover's conversation is frequently intermittent, and sometimes erratic, and now there was a lull in the talk. At length Gilda said: "I read in the newspapers that your father was killed—or murdered by an armed burglar." Raife shuddered at the allusion. Continuing, she added: "Did you see the body of the murderer?"

Raife said: "Oh, yes! I saw the body of the brute."

"What was he like?"

"He didn't look much like a burglar. At least, not like the burglars we've read about in books and that sort of thing."

"How sad it must have been for you all—for you—and your mother."

There was a ring of sympathy in her voice, and Raife felt grateful for the words of comfort.

Then Gilda asked, "Was he well-dressed, then?"

"Oh, yes! Quite well-dressed, and he had money in his pockets and wore jewellery."

“How strange,” she added, with a slight quiver. “What sort of jewellery?”

“Oh, the usual sort of things, you know—a watch and chain and a plain signet ring! He also had a curious kind of charm hanging by a chain around his neck. I took possession of that, hoping some day it might serve as a clue. He was a strange-looking chap, and I would like to find out who he was. In fact the gov’nor, before he died, said something about a ‘trap,’ and other things of that sort, and I’d like to discover what it’s all about. There’s some deep mystery surrounding the whole affair.” Gilda shivered, and said: “Isn’t it terrible!” and, after a pause, added: “It’s getting cool to-night. Shall we walk towards the hotel?”

As they walked towards the Hôtel Royal, Raife produced from his pocket the charm he had removed from the assassin’s neck, and, handing it to Gilda for her inspection, said: “Here’s the charm. It seems to be Egyptian, a figure of the goddess Isis, and there are all sorts of queer hieroglyphics on the back of it. Queer-looking thing for a burglar to wear, isn’t it?”

Gilda took the charm and her eyes sparkled as she held it tenderly, and seemed almost to fondle it. Then, nervously, and sharply, she said: “Oh, how interesting! I love any thing Egyptian, and I have quite a lot of scarabs. Do give this to me as a token of your friendship. It will bring me luck. Fancy it having been worn by a murderer. I shall go to the tables at Monte Carlo, and if you give it to me, it will be my mascot.”

Raife was very much in love with Gilda, and he would give his life, willingly, to serve her. The spirit of mystery seemed to enshroud this delicate, fragile girl. Why should she be fascinated by this gruesome relic of his father’s murder? He did not reply for a minute or so. Gilda handed back the charm, saying: “No, you don’t want to give it to me. And yet, how I feel I would like to own it. I don’t know why, but it fascinates me.”

“Take it, Gilda,” he eventually said, fondly calling her by her Christian name, “and I hope it will bring you a lot of luck.”

Gilda placed the quaint little charm with the thin gold chain in her reticule.

They had now reached the entrance of the Hôtel Royal, and together they entered. Raife cast an eager glance around. To his great relief, Lady Remington, for it was late, had retired to rest.

Gilda whispered: "Let's go up the staircase. There's a quiet alcove there, and my uncle has gone to his room."

In the brilliantly-lit foyer of the hotel an orchestra was discoursing music to a crowd of visitors, who lounged or promenaded at their sweet will. Many eyes were turned to the handsome couple as they ascended the richly-carpeted staircase in search of that quiet alcove which promised much to Raife, and perhaps some pleasure to the mysterious young girl who accompanied him.

The south of Europe belongs, in a sense, to no country. It is cosmopolitan. There is a charm in the pleasure-land of Cosmopolis, for it discourages speculation as to the lineage of your neighbour. One handsome couple merges into another, and the shrewdest guesses as to nationality are liable to be miscalculated. Therefore the glances that were directed towards Raife and Gilda were less inquisitive than they were of admiration. At the top of the staircase Raife assisted in the removal of the long cloak which had effectively hidden the dainty figure underneath. Hat and veil being also laid aside, Gilda's beauty revealed itself and dazzled the young man, further enmeshing him in the net of her mysterious charm.

She had, to a large extent, prevented a flow of conversation by extracting his promise after those appealing requests: "Please don't ask me questions. Just trust me. Will you be my friend?"

The aromatic fumes of oriental tobaccos, blending with the scents of rare exotic blossoms, and the variety of perfumes, with which women associate themselves, rose in a seductive, almost vaporous column to the broad landing which overlooked the throng in the foyer below.

Raife Remington and Gilda Tempest had risen from their seat in the alcove, and leant over the marble balustrade. Each gazed on this scene of artificial gaiety with mixed emotions. For some minutes, neither spoke. The languorous tones of violin and 'cello in subdued concert, died away. The orchestra rose from their seats, to rest after the ordeal of the prolonged musical medley of alternated rhapsody, tango, and serenade. The movement became general, and the hum of conversation in a babel of talk swelled upwards.

At last Gilda spoke.

“I must go now. Tell me again that you have forgiven me, and that you trust me.”

“Gilda, I tell you again that I trust you. If you are in trouble, send for me, and I will endeavour to help you.”

“Good-night, Raife!” and she started up the next flight of stairs. Half-way up she stopped, and looking round, beckoned him. When he approached she whispered: “What is the number of your room? One never knows in these foreign hotels. I might need you.”

“My number is 26,” he said. Again they parted, he wondering what she meant by placing so sudden a confidence in him.

As he descended to the foyer for a final smoke, and that refreshment we have christened a “nightcap,” he glanced upstairs again hoping to gain a final glimpse of his beloved. Instead, he saw—or was it fancy?—a tall figure looking down on him with a sardonic smile. For a moment only the sense of mistrust pervaded him. Then with an impatient gesture he muttered: “What’s the matter with you, Raife Remington? You’re all nerves to-night. It’s time you had that whisky and soda.”



## Chapter Eight.

### The Doctor's Double Personality.

Raife Remington finished his cigar and returned rather lazily to his room, thinking all the while of the vision of loveliness that had so entranced him—his mind—his soul—his very being.

The little Yale key opened his door, and the lock yielded gracefully to its turn.

Even on the Riviera, the wide expanse of beautiful country which begins on the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and extends northwards somewhere towards the Alps—there are Yale keys.

Yale keys may come from anywhere. They do not all arrive from the United States, the land of their invention. Wherever they are found, or wherever they may come from, they serve a useful purpose. They are small and flat, and it is possible to get more Yale keys into a given space on a ring, than any other keys with a reputation for security.

The other keys that Raife Remington carried were not of this nature. The key of the white room at the old "Blue Boar," in Tunbridge Wells was much more ponderous. Those of Aldborough Park were invented before the days of Yale and Harvard. The locksmiths who forged and hammered the keys of Aldborough preceded the foundation of American universities. They were cumbersome, and they lay heavily in the pockets of the light suit of clothes which is customary on a spring night at Nice. Raife also sat heavily in the chair, which faced the fire in his room in the Hôtel Royal, after his last cigar and "nightcap" below.

He dreamt of the events which had crowded a long day. His mind was obsessed. A thousand recollections of mysterious occurrences attacked him from without and within. The sleep, which is a half-sleep, bordering on a doze, gave him no rest. He awoke from this state of semi-somnolence. There was a tap—a very distinct tap or rap at the door. Half-clad, and yawning, he rose from his chair and opened the door. A neatly-clad chambermaid stood without, and with an accent which is charming

to us of the North, said: "Sir Raife, Miss Tempest send me to you. She say, she lose her keys. Perhaps, Sir Raife, your keys will open her valise. Will you, Sir Raife, lend your keys for the occasion?"

Most young men are human, and the obvious is natural to humanity. Raife promptly replied to this neatly-clad, soft-voiced young woman: "Yes. To be sure. Tell Miss Tempest I am sorry if she has suffered any inconvenience from her loss. If any of my keys will open her valise, I am glad to have been of service."

The maid retired. Sir Raife lazily went to bed, now to sleep, for a short while, that tired sleep that comes to youth which is only in love, and has no greater anxiety than a torn heart recently healed.

The maid returned to Gilda's room and handed the bunch of keys to her, saying: "The Signor send you his keys with ze great pleasure—Signorina."

The Southern man and matron smile so often that one cannot always separate the smiles and decide which is cynical, and which is gracious or friendly. The maid retired, smiling.

Gilda took the keys and gazed at them.

Then, with a fondling grasp, she handled them—murmuring the while: "These are Raife's keys—the keys of Aldborough Park."

Gazing into space, with a glazed expression, she sank upon the lounge at the foot of her bed and gasped: "Why must I do these hateful things!"

A soft knock at the door awakened her from the lapse which had ended in this momentary display of despair. Gilda went to the door expecting that the maid had returned for some trivial purpose. Hastily placing the keys in one of those hidden places which women secrete among their clothing, she opened the door, saying, "Yes. What is it?" The maid was not there.

At this hour, which was early, very early, for the Hôtel Royal at Nice, there stood a lugubrious figure. Tall, crumpled, yet retaining a somewhat dignified demeanour, Doctor Malsano stood there at his worst. In a stifled, sepulchral voice he demanded: "Have you got them—the keys?"



The frightened girl, with a devilment which belongs to all who may hold a whip-hand for a moment, lost her temporary sense of dismay and answered boldly: "What do you want?"

He hissed the words at her. "Have you got the keys? The keys, I tell you. Have you got them?"

That moment of bravery left Gilda almost as quickly as she had become possessed of it. The swivel eye, and the rest of that remarkable countenance and personality, in spite of his dishevelled and distorted appearance, regained the mastery.

Gilda collapsed and weakly replied: "The keys! Yes, I have the keys!"

The doctor entered and Gilda handed them to him. Those keys of Aldborough Park, obtained by subterfuge from Raife—! With a snarl the doctor snatched them and left the room. When Gilda Tempest slept a calm sleep, without which beauty will not last, Raife Remington tossed and turned on his bed of unrest. The excitement of the renewed meeting with Gilda had, to an extent, subsided, and in the feverish hours that followed, his mind coursed through all the dramatic events of the last few months. His sense of reason strove hard to rescue him from a mad passion—a passion that every worldly instinct told him would lead to ruin—worse than ruin—death. Yes! death. An inglorious, profitless death.

Doctor Danilo Malsano sat in his room at the Hôtel Royal. A small phial was on the table that faced him. He picked it up and swallowed the contents. His convulsed face presently resumed a more normal, a more peaceful expression. It was a soothing drug that he had taken—one to which he was well accustomed. The soft rays of the red-shaded electric lamp suffused the room, the oval mirror on the dressing-table reflected a saturnine, yet smiling countenance.

The doctor spoke in a whisper to himself, each short sentence was succeeded by a chortle, a subdued chuckle. "The arm of coincidence is long! The cursed Anglo-Saxon is proud—very proud, but he is a very simple fool. One of them is dead. It may be this young fool's turn next. Gilda loves him, too. That is a pity. Yet it must be."

These soft-spoken reflections, with the drug, seemed to pacify the

perturbed mind of this extraordinary man, and he appeared to doze for a while. Presently he sprang to his feet and his frame displayed surprising activity. Taking Raife's keys in one hand, he opened a valise, from which it was evident that he had travelled much. Yet the labels of hotels, cities, and townships had been so cleverly manipulated, that they were hard to decipher. Opening the valise, he produced some wax, on which, with the dexterity of a practised hand, he took the impressions of the keys of Aldborough Park.

It was late when the doctor had completed his task. The first grey streaks of dawn crept through the long curtained windows, as he stealthily opened the door of his room. Surveying the silent corridor with care, he stole stealthily to Gilda's room and tapped gently. The frightened girl, accustomed to the strange demands of her uncanny uncle, replied with surprising promptitude.

He hastily thrust Raife's keys into her hand, muttering: "Give these back to the young fool, and see to it you don't lose your head. I will meet you in the coffee-room at ten o'clock, and you can introduce him to me."

At ten o'clock on the morning following these occurrences which appeared of such evil portent, Gilda Tempest, daintily clad in a light gown of soft material in which chiffon seemed to predominate, walked into the coffee-room of the hotel and took her seat at a table, laid for three, next to a window which commanded a view of the Promenade des Anglais. The doctor had planned the arrangement of this table with that prescience which characterised all his movements. She had not been seated many minutes, and was sipping some coffee—the coffee that, in spite of modern facilities, seems to be only obtainable on the continent of Europe, when Sir Raife Remington entered the room. He crossed to the table at which Gilda was seated and greeted her.

To his pleasure and astonishment she said, heartily: "Good morning. Sir Raife. Won't you take a seat at our table? I expect my uncle, presently, and he will be very pleased to see you. First of all, let me thank you for the loan of your keys. It was so distressing, I could not find my keys anywhere, and, in desperation, I thought of your kind offer to help me if I needed it."

Raife laughed heartily, and, taking a seat opposite to her, said: "Please don't thank me for a small thing like that. I meant, more especially, I would like to help you in something big, as the Americans would say—something real large, should the occasion arise."

Gilda appeared positively radiant on this bright, sunny morning, and her soft, pleasing voice thrilled him as she said: "Did you get the keys back? I sent them to your room by the chambermaid, and, do you know, one of them just fitted the little trunk I wanted to open. It contained this gown I'm wearing, and I've put it on in recognition of your kindness to me in my distress."

Again he laughed, saying: "Oh, yes, I got the keys all right!"

Then, with a strange, strained tone in her voice, she said: "Here comes my uncle."

Wherever Doctor Danilo Malsano entered people turned to look. His striking personality was of such a nature that it seemed more than ever strange that he could move about so easily, unobserved, when he was carrying out his nefarious schemes.

Raife rose from his chair as the doctor approached the table, and, gracefully, Gilda introduced: "My uncle, Doctor Malsano—Sir Raife Remington."

With Saxon rigidity Raife bowed, but the older man with a warmth and graciousness extended his hand, compelling acceptance. Raife took the old man's hand, and the contact caused him to shudder.

They took their seats at the table and the incongruous trio indulged in the vague generalities that are frequently associated with a breakfast-table. This was not a *déjeuner à la fourchette*. By common consent, coffee and dainty Vienna bread, with perfect butter, constituted the meal.

Raife could not fail to notice that Gilda's radiance had subsided, and, in the presence of her uncle, a subdued conventionalism had superseded.

Once more, in spite of his brief sense of complete trust in this girl, who had not only entered but monopolised the moments of his life, whether

awake or asleep—once more the fateful words of his dying father rang in his ears.

“Beware of the trap—she—that woman.”

He was roused from this reverie by the doctor’s words, uttered with a cordiality and accompanied by a smile that ill accorded with the sinister chuckles of the previous night.

Doctor Malsano, taking wax impressions in the dead of the night of the keys of his niece’s wooer, was a different person from the cheery old gentleman who said: “You are staying with your mother, who is a widow, I understand, Sir Raife?”

“Yes,” responded Raife. “My mother is with me here. She takes breakfast in her room. Since my father’s death she is fragile and delicate.”

“Ah, yes! I heard of your father’s death. Let me see. He was murdered, wasn’t he? Murdered by some blackguard of a burglar?”

Gilda winced. The doctor’s face was earnestly sympathetic.

Raife replied: “Yes, he was murdered by some blackguard of a burglar. Thank God, the burglar died too.”

The doctor crooned rather than spoke. “We won’t talk of sad things on this bright, sunny morning. Nice is charming, isn’t it, and so full of smart people? The Baroness von Sassnitz is staying here—in this hotel, I’m told.”

“Yes,” responded Raife, “she is a friend of my mother’s, and sometimes stays with us at Aldborough Park.”

“Aldborough Park! Dear me, I’ve heard of that some time. It’s a fine old Tudor place near Tunbridge Wells, isn’t it?”

Raife said: “Yes. It’s a fine old place. It belongs to me. There have been happy days at Aldborough, but yet I cannot help thinking that some people seem to thrive on the misery of others.”

“That’s true,” the doctor crooned again, “It’s sad, but it’s true.”

Then, cheerfully, Raife said; “I hope, doctor, that you and Miss Tempest will honour me with a visit there some day soon, and we’ll try and make merry again. If we can, we’ll forget that villainous assassin.”

Again Gilda winced, and, dropping her serviette, stooped to pick it up, thus hiding a scarlet flush that suffused her cheeks.

Without replying to the invitation and, with a suddenness that appeared to be anent nothing, Doctor Malsano said:

“Oh, Sir Raife, I’ve forgotten to express my thanks to you for the charming talisman you have presented to my niece, which I see she is wearing around her neck!”

Raife and Gilda both started at this extraordinary sally. Neither knew that the doctor was aware of the gift. The slight gold chain to which the talisman was attached was barely visible, whilst the figure of Isis was entirely screened from view. It heaved on Gilda’s palpitating breast, behind the bodice of her charming and dainty morning gown. Without apparently heeding the embarrassment of the young couple, he proceeded:

“There is a delightful mysticism about Egyptian mythology that charms me. Let me see, Isis was a goddess, wasn’t she? To be sure she was a goddess, and the record of her does not always make pleasant reading.”

Raife gazed steadfastly at this mysterious man, and marvelled at the meaning of his cryptic utterances, which came from him graciously, and with a smile that was bland, until the swivel eye destroyed the illusion.

Gilda was trained to the startling nature of her uncle’s methods, and collected her senses rapidly, remarking: “Yes, wasn’t it kind of Raife—Sir Raife I mean, to give it to me. I told him you would be pleased.”

Raife was more mystified than ever. She had not said anything of the kind to him. And what was the meaning of that lapse—the omission of the title in speaking before her uncle? Truly, the depths of these personalities were unfathomable. In spite of it all he had sworn to trust Gilda and

remain her friend. He was a Reymingtoune and he would keep his word. Apart from that, he loved her, and love remains as blind to-day as when Cupid became fully fledged and wore wings.

The revolutions of an excited mentality are rapid, and a thought flashed through Sir Raife Remington's mind. Who was that mysterious-looking, slouch-hatted, and cloaked Apache type of person, who bade him wait for Gilda when she was late for her appointment? Was he a secret agent of Doctor Malsano? What would be the outcome of this hotbed of mystery? It mattered not. Only one thing mattered. He loved this frail, beautiful young girl. He had sworn to trust her and to be her friend.

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## Chapter Nine.

### Foiled by the Work of a Modern Detective.

The sunlit day that followed the breakfast at the little table laid for three, was full of happiness for Raife. He rapidly planned a motor-car ride. There were many details to be arranged. Lady Remington must be propitiated. The conventionalities of the South are less exacting than those of the North, but some of them must be observed. Lady Remington accepted the specious circumstances invented by Raife, and Doctor Malsano and his niece, Gilda Tempest, were duly introduced to her ladyship. The presentation was a characteristic presentment of difficulties overcome by an astuteness that youth can assume when love is the guide to the occasion. *Il dottore* displayed a suavity that was charming to Lady Remington, and Raife snatched the opportunity for those small attentions that accompany a youthful courtship. All that had savoured of mystery disappeared when the car bounded over the white roads that clamber over the hill and mountain sides of the sunny Mediterranean shore. To those two young hearts it was Elysium. A discreet Italian chauffeur paid those few attentions necessary to the well-ordered mechanism of a modern motor-car, and smiled once or twice when it occurred to him that so much happiness could not exist without a tragedy—somewhere-sometime. A bend in the steep road, a precipitous declivity with a loose stone wall on either side, and a glorious prospect of blue sea, and rich coloured landscape, brought the happy party to one of those meeting grounds, where perfectly trained waiters and caterers for human comfort assort themselves.

Joyously they alighted, and Raife proceeded to plan the arrangements for an al-fresco entertainment. Happiness was the keynote of the pleasure jaunt, and the stately Lady Remington seemed pleased with the companionship of the dignified doctor. The details of an entertainment are rendered easy in a land where men, women, and children are trained through the centuries to the refinements of pleasure.

Raife and Gilda found themselves wandering alone in a grove of trees, those dark-hued olives with leaf and branch in silhouette against a

cerulean sky. This was the first occasion when opportunity had served for the display of a pent-up passion. With a fierceness that belongs to the madness of a love that has been controlled, almost discomforted, by circumstances Raife caught Gilda in his arms! Love may be blind, but love is alert. Crumpling leaves and a footstep brought Raife to his more complete sense. Turning, he saw the uncanny form of the Apache person, the forbidding creature who had spoken to him outside the café, on the night when Gilda had sent the little Italian girl to fetch him to her. With a gesture of impatience, that expressed thwarted opportunity, he said: "Who is that fellow, Gilda? Why is he here? How did he get here?"

Gilda trembled, and held her head between her hands. "I don't know," she stammered. "Don't ask me. I don't know!"

Brief is the life of golden opportunity, and Raife's happiness had been broken by this phantom person of the forbidding aspect. A Saxon can love, but a Saxon can sulk. All that was Saxon in Sir Raife Remington induced him to sulk at this moment. They returned to where the tables were laid with that tempting display of napery and polished silver which is so well understood by the continental caterers. Lady Remington and Doctor Malsano were conversing agreeably. Gilda was evidently distressed, and Raife remained sulky. As they met again, the doctor was saying: "Your son was telling me, Lady Remington, that the Baroness von Sassnitz is a friend of yours. She is staying, I understand, at the same hotel with us?"

"Oh, yes, Doctor Malsano, I know the baroness. She visits us at Aldborough Park, my son's place, you know, near Tunbridge Wells."

"How very interesting. I have often felt I would like to meet the baroness. They tell me she is a very brilliant lady." This was said with much unctiousness.

The day that had opened so brightly, and with so much pleasure to Raife, was no longer pleasing to him. He was haunted by that Apache-looking fellow, whose hateful appearance in the olive grove had robbed him of the gratification that he felt should have been his. The course of true love is rarely smooth. It is often very rough. The weird happenings, since Raife and Gilda had met and talked, the brief love way into their souls on the front at Southport, had crowded their lives with mixed joy and sorrow.



In these charming al-fresco surroundings, where the daintiness of human service blended with nature's choicest gifts, there should have been peace and quietude of spirit. It was not to be. The haunting thought of his father's dying words recurred again and again. "The trap—. She—that woman."

His whole life's blood should go out to this woman, whom he loved with a passion that belonged to a fierce nature. Yet at every pace or revolution in the progress of their intimacy there was a dark passage, a sinister obstacle.

The dignified uncle repelled him, although he, apparently, was fascinating his stately and severely exclusive mother. The forbidding figure of the Apache had completed, for a while, his sense of depression. The happiest people were, apparently, Lady Remington, the doctor—and the chauffeur—who had found companionship with a soft-eyed, brainless, dark-skinned maid, of the type that serves, and is happy in serving.

When the hired car bowled merrily around on the return journey and pulled up at the hotel, and a smiling group of servants assisted them in their entrance to the hotel, the Baroness von Sassnitz greeted Lady Remington. The opportunity and all the circumstances were of such a nature that it was almost necessary that Lady Remington should make the presentation. Thus Doctor Malsano and Gilda Tempest met the Baroness von Sassnitz.

It is necessary to talk of the Baroness von Sassnitz. She was rich, and of ancient lineage, but not of that old-world type which belonged to middle and eastern Europe, when the most exalted lady was little more than the ordinary *frau* or housewife. The baroness was brilliant and accomplished, and she was endowed with a commanding presence. She was handsome rather than beautiful, and as for her age—what does it matter so long as she remained attractive, and commanded the admiration of most, and the devotion of many, men.

Modern travel is so easy and it is so frequent that there is a closer intercourse in the society of nations. Switzerland and the Riviera are the acknowledged playgrounds where, by international accord, the crook may jostle the noble, and the conventions of the capitals of the world are

allowed a licence and freedom undreamt of a decade ago.

Lady Remington first met the baroness at the Angst Hotel, Bordighera. The frigid bows which are grudgingly given by the highly-born in such circumstances, melted somewhat when, next season, mutual recognition was forced on them by an untimely jostle at the gaming tables of Monte Carlo. Of course those tables were never really fashionable, but they have always been fascinating. They possess the requisite diablerie to amuse the most exclusive and bored aristocracy of the countries of Europe. A further chance meeting at San Moritz completed the essentials necessary to break down the hidebound conventions that surround women's introductions to one another.

Lady Remington and the Baroness von Sassnitz thus became friends. The baroness, so much younger than Lady Remington, possessed a vivacity and sense of initiative in the matter of social entertainment, which were very pleasing to her ladyship. The arduous nature of the late Sir Henry's political life had been responsible for much that was almost drab in his wife's career, which had been beautifully devoted to her husband.

The baroness's jewels were a frequent topic of conversation in most of the capitals of Europe. The joy of possession is very great to the woman who owns jewellery, and the joy seems to increase with the risk that is attached to travel. The hairbreadth escapes, the thrills, and the states of panic attending the conveyance of the baroness's jewels from one spa to another, were worth more than the cost of those expensive baubles. Her maid lived in a constant state of dread and apprehension in her efforts to protect the precious trinkets. There was not a crook in Europe who was not striving to outwit that poor woman and rob the baroness at the same time. Every variety of human emotion followed in their train, and the alert little Fräulein Schneider was the custodian of the priceless baubles, and ever on her guard to confuse the common enemy. Humanity is frail, and the most austere have a weak spot. Fräulein Schneider's vigilance had become so much a part of her character that there were very few who detected the weak point in her armour. Coiled in a shapeless bunch at the back of her head there were long plaited strands of yellow hair. No one ever knew just how much of that hair there was, but the strands seemed interminable. This yellow hair was the one weak spot through which she could be approached. It was combed and pomaded, and

plaited with scrupulous care. Everything about Fräulein Schneider was characterised by extreme care, from the guarding of the baroness's jewels to the setting of the miniature black and white bonnet that surrounded the mighty monument of yellow hair.

“What beautiful hair, Fräulein!” was sufficient to extract a gratified smile, which was the first step towards relaxed vigilance. Doctor Malsano knew this weakness, and he watched and waited for the opportunity to apply the knowledge for his profit. A polished criminal is liable to take long chances when a big haul of booty appears probable. The doctor had shown himself rather indiscreet these last few days. Crossing the foyer of the hotel, after a long chat with the charming Lady Remington, he stumbled and almost fell into the arms of a little Englishman, who protested in such a ludicrous voice that the incident raised a titter among the guests at the hotel. There was no desire for laughter on the doctor's part. In that brief, short while he had recognised Detective-Inspector Herrion of Scotland Yard. This immaculate little gentleman, with his fair hair parted in the middle, and a waxed moustache, was none other than the famous Herrion. A detective to-day, to be successful on the continent of Europe, must combine the qualities of an Admirable Crichton, with the cunning of a stoat. Detective-Inspector Herrion excelled these attributes, and, under alternating masks that varied from the superficial inanity of a Scarlet Pimpernel to the repellance of a viper, he did society much daring service. The apparent young sprig of aristocracy, with the deliciously insipid drawl and the grotesque monocle, was none other than Herrion, the one man of all others whom Doctor Malsano dreaded. This dainty little gentleman presented a very different appearance a few minutes later as he stripped before the mirror of the hotel washstand he revealed to himself the sinewy and fibrous muscles of the well-trained athlete.

Herrion was an athlete trained in that lithe school that embodies every active form of sport, from football to fencing, from *la savate* to the modern savage form of fighting and boxing. Equally deadly with a Browning revolver, a rifle at 800 yards, or a right and left among the birds in stubble or turnips.

This was the form and frame hidden behind such a mask of bored manner and faultless attire as could only be assumed by a Scarlet Pimpernel in his leisure moments. He was truly a man to be feared, and

Doctor Malsano had learnt by bitter experience to run when his little, astute enemy loomed on the horizon. The recognition had been mutual at the time of the stumble, and Herrion knew the doctor was not staying in the Hôtel Royal for the cause of philanthropy. When the incident that produced the recognition had ceased to attract attention, the detective dodged through a service door used by the staff, and, making his way along corridors, knocked at an office door. Responding to the invitation to enter, he said to the rotund, bald-headed little man, ensconced in a big chair and surrounded by a maze of books and papers, "Forgive me, signor, for my brusque intrusion. Have you the Baroness von Sassnitz staying in your hotel?"

"Ah, inspector! It is you. I thought it was what you call ze greased lightning. I don't know whether the baroness you speak of is staying in the hotel, but I will inquire," and, ringing a bell, the jovial little manager continued: "You see at Nice we have so many barons, counts, ze English lords and people with titles, and at the Royal,"—this he said with a whimsical smile—"you see, Mr Inspector, we have the *crème de la crème* of what you call the *haut-ton*, the best society."

In response to a bell a man in livery entered, and, with the deference of an inferior, asked for instructions. The manager, with an austere manner that contrasted with his previous geniality, ordered: "Go to the bureau and ask whether the baroness—what is the name, Mr Herrion?" The man started and looked surreptitiously at the detective. Herrion frowned and said, "The Baroness von Sassnitz, signor."

As the man closed the door to go on his errand, the inspector said: "I'm sorry you disclosed my identity to that man. Who is he? Has he been long in the service of the hotel?"

"Ah, I'm very sorry, Mr Herrion. I did not think it would matter down here in this old office of mine. Again, Mr Herrion, I see my mistake. I am sorry."

The messenger returned, and said, "The Baroness von Sassnitz is staying in the hotel, signor, with her maid, the Fräulein Schneider."

"Thank you," and, as the man glared at the detective again, the manager repeated, "You can go."

Herrion followed him to the door and proceeded to talk to the manager. Suddenly wheeling, the officer opened the door and hauled from without the messenger.

“You were listening to our talk outside,” he said to the man, and turning to the manager, asked: “Do you know this man, signor? I don’t think you will find him a very good servant for such an aristocratic hotel as the Royal.”

The little manager rose from his chair and said furiously: “Go! go at once, this hotel is no place for a man like you. Go! I tell you, go, and I will see to it that you do not stay in Nice.”

The man attempted to explain, but the manager of a Riviera hotel is a despot in such matters, and the good name of a hotel must not be smirched by an inferior servant.

When the man had gone, Herrion continued his talk: “The Baroness von Sassnitz is very wealthy, signor, and she carries with her jewellery that is almost priceless. These people who will carry jewellery around with them are a great trouble to us. Before I intruded in your office I saw a man in the foyer, who is one of the most accomplished thieves in Europe. He is not here for a good purpose. That messenger whom I hauled, *sans cérémonie*, into the room, is, I have reason to believe, in league with this other criminal. I have seen a man skulking around at night in the costume of what might be the Quartier Latin of Paris, but he looks more like an Apache, and I strongly suspect this is the same man.”

“*Ma foi!* Mr Herrion, but if that is so, I and my proprietors are profoundly grateful to you.”

“Well it is, in some sense, my duty to prevent crime as well as to hunt down criminals and bring them to justice. I am not in Nice for this particular piece of work, but I saw a chance of nipping this man’s plans, and I hope I have done it. The rest of the work I leave to you. Good day, signor!”

When Herrion had left, the rotund little man leant back in his chair and laughed to himself.

“*Ma foi!* But when I was in London the crooks of Soho, Hatton Garden,

and the other quarters used to laugh at the English detectives, with their big boots, pipe, and what they call a skull cap. But, this man Herrion, he's what they call 'in another class.'"



## Chapter Ten.

### The Mystery of some Disappearances.

The doctor, after his encounter with Herrion, hastily ascended the main staircase and made his way to his room. Gilda was in the foyer talking to Sir Raife Remington. With a surprising agility, the doctor flung his belongings into his valises and then scribbled a note. Ringing the bell he called for his bill, at the same time instructing the waiter to hand the note to Miss Tempest, whom he would find in the foyer. "Call Miss Tempest," he added, "by saying that I wish to speak to her. Don't hand her the note in the presence of Sir Raife."

The waiter, with a profound bow, withdrew to obey the instructions, slightly elevating his eyebrows.

A few more instructions and Doctor Malsano left the hotel, ostensibly for a stroll along the Promenade des Anglais. He soon doubled his tracks and secured a motor-car. Seated in this he donned motor goggles of the mask type, attached to a jaunty looking cap. A gaily-coloured silk muffler from his overcoat pocket, with the other alterations he had effected in his room, completed a transformation that had converted the sombre personality into a somewhat flashy-looking tourist. The modest luggage was easily negotiated, and a trail of white dust was all that remained of the courtly old doctor.

Gilda's conversation with Raife was interrupted by the arrival of the discreet waiter, who invited Miss Tempest to meet Doctor Malsano upstairs. Raife looked lovingly at her retreating figure. As she disappeared behind a marble pillar he saw the waiter hand her a note, which she hastily secreted in her bodice.

His heart gave a desponding throb. What was this fresh mystery? Why was the progress of their strange courtship to be jarred by a series of uncanny surprises?

He rose from his seat and crossing the foyer glanced up as her transcendingly beautiful but fragile form swept with a stately grace along

the landing. She stood for a moment and started to read the note. Then, catching sight of Raife, she lowered it to her side and continued her journey upwards. More torture. Why did she disguise the note? What can have been the cryptic contents? Raife was enthralled with the subtle charms of this wonderful woman creature. Yet all his judgment kept telling him that their course could only lead to tragedy. A score of times a day he tore his soul in shreds by asking himself fatuous questions, to which he could find no answer. He was impelled with the fascination of a will-o'-the-wisp, and Gilda was the spirit that danced before him night and day.

Gilda reached the retirement of her room, and then read the note, which said:

“H of S Y is here. I have gone. Join me as soon as you can at C—. If we fail to meet there or at B—, meet L in a week or two.”

Haunted and hunted, deprived of all real companionship save that of this conspirator criminal who called himself her uncle, Gilda's courage failed for a brief while.

Falling on to the lounge, covered with dainty dimity, which was at the foot of the bed she must soon vacate, this fragile girl, whose nerves had stood her in good stead so many times, sobbed.

Yes! hunted from place to place. Hunted by fear of a Nemesis that pursued unrelentingly. When the entrance hall was practically deserted and the dining halls were crowded, a tall figure, cloaked and shrouded in a motor veil, crept down the stairs and entered a car in waiting. Into the mysterious night, quite slowly and silently, the car forged its way. Gilda did not know where she was going and had merely said to the chauffeur: “Drive on slowly until I tell you to turn.”

The fiendish malignity of an accomplished criminal has formed the subject of much moralising. Criminals of the type of Doctor Danilo Malsano are, fortunately, rare. Their astounding gifts, which they use in a distorted form, make detection difficult, and escape easy.

To his mind it did not appear brutal to involve a beautiful young girl in a nest of criminal intrigue. A day or two after the sudden disappearance of



uncle and niece, the quiet little town of Bordighera was made more attractive by the figure of a wistful-looking girl, who gazed across the deep-blue sea. Bordighera does not possess the fashionable and extravagantly gowned appearance of Nice. There is less of glitter, less of glare than in most of the towns of the Riviera. Gilda had come here hoping to attract no attention by reason of the comparative obscurity of the place. Instead of staying at an hotel, she had found lodgings in an obscure street.

For the first time she felt a sense of peace in her life and, away from her uncle's baneful influence, a restored freshness was entering her very being. She sat gazing across that beautiful sea with its blue surface flecked by rippling streaks of turquoise, or purple, or deep emerald, as its wondrous depths were affected by a brilliant sun. Distant smoke trailed in the wake of some steamer that may have "tramped" the world around, or of an Orient liner that was conveying white rulers to the far-away portions of our Eastern Empire.

Gilda thought of Raife and his mad passion for her. She wished to tell him all—at least all she knew. She felt that she could hardly tell how much she knew, nor did she know how much she could tell. She did realise that she had treated him badly, but why had he followed and discovered her? Should she put an end to her perplexities by a short, sharp road to death? Rousing herself from this reverie, Gilda left the seat, with the wonderful view, and sauntered along a winding path embowered with foliage. As she turned the bend of the pathway she saw in front of her, on a jutting headland, an elderly lady and a young man. They, in turn, were gazing seaward.

The young man of to-day is more daring in his costume and displays more individuality than those of a generation ago. It was not hard, even at this distance of a few hundred yards, for Gilda to recognise Raife Remington standing on the jutting rock with his mother.

This young man, who had just inherited large estates and a handsome income, in tragic circumstances, was easy to identify. With a lineage dating from Henry the Seventh, and the later period when Sir Henry Reymingtoune was Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth, and men's fashions rivalled in costliness those of the women, it was natural that Raife should

possess judgment in such matters.

Queen Elizabeth has been counted the most extravagantly dressed woman of all time, unless it may be believed that the Queen of Sheba affected a similar extravagance. The pictorial souvenirs of the costumes of Elizabeth are more reliable than those of the days of Sheba, but it is not an important point to decide.

The centuries that have elapsed since the brave days of Drake, Frobisher and Hawkins, and the other bold admirals who founded the British empire, have induced a comparative drabness in men's clothing, and a severity in style.

Much of this has been altered in these later years by imaginative young Americans, who have learnt to deck themselves out more elaborately in cravaterie, hosiery, and general lingerie, whilst newspapers devote columns to the cut of suitings, and the latest form of shoe string, or the brim and feathered tuft that should rule the form of an Alpine hat. These despised and minor considerations now, concern the youth of Britain and the continent of Europe.

Sir Raife Remington, Bart., possessed always the correct judgment in such matters. He allowed his tailor, hatter, hosier, bootmaker, and what not, just the correct latitude. They should, and did, only supply him with clothing that conformed sufficiently with the fashion of the moment, without displaying an *outré* taste.

If coloured socks were *de rigueur*, and a variety of tints in shirts and cravats were the order of the day, the general effect should be conformable to the fiat of his tradesmen, without being conspicuous. In short, Raife Remington was a well-dressed man, and his fine, athletic figure, displayed to perfection the clothes he adorned.

Gilda Tempest saw Raife's form in the distance, and the old spirit of dread and unrest returned to her with an added fury.

Where should she go? How could she leave Bordighera without being discovered by Raife or his mother? Where also was the dreaded H of S Y? Turning in the beautiful pathway, she hastened, with drooping form, back over the cliffs, and sought the seclusion of her obscure lodgings in

the back part of the quaint and quiet old town.

Long she schemed and planned for a way out of the difficulty. All the soothing reflections of the afternoon had gone, and in place was the renewal of trouble, unrest and danger.

The darkest hours of night and trouble precede the dawn.

Gilda, in the throes of her anxiety, gazed into space. She was awakened from her half-dazed thoughts by a discreet tap at the door. Her buxom, beaming-faced landlady entered and asked the young 'mees' the signorina, "Would she like an automobile ride in the beautiful evening time? The signorina looked pale and tired and it might do her good. The chauffeur of the Count Lyonesse had invited her and her husband for a ride, and if the young 'mees' would accompany them all would be well. The Count had gone away for a week and all was safe."

This was the streak of dawn which rapidly became daylight, as Gilda saw her chance to escape from Bordighera in the guise of a peasant and accompanied, nay, safely chaperoned, by these good, simple folk, who saw no harm in a joy-ride in the automobile of the absent count. She must persuade them to take the route by the Col di Tenda through the long tunnel north into Italy, then to Cuneo. If she could induce them to "fetch" Cuneo, how should she give them the slip? She had left the bulk of her trunks at Nice. She must dispose of papers; but folks who live like Doctor Malsano and Gilda Tempest don't preserve incriminating documents. How could she give them the slip at Cuneo? "H of S Y" would not follow her. He would follow her uncle—if he could.



## Chapter Eleven.

### The Tragedy of a Fateful Joy-Ride.

When Doctor Malsano and Gilda Tempest had so mysteriously and suddenly disappeared from the Hôtel Royal, at Nice, Raife Remington received a note on the following morning. It was a characteristic note, and quite unsatisfactory. It merely served to add to the state of his mental perturbation. He could not, and would not, believe aught that was ill of the beautiful girl whom he loved with all the fire of his strong nature.

The note ran: "My uncle and I have been called away on business suddenly. Will you present our regrets and apologies to Lady Remington?"

Cold, terse, and quite inexplicable. It did not state where they had gone, or whether they would return. This extraordinary creature who fascinated him, had left his life again as strangely as she had entered into it. The circumstances were difficult to explain to his mother. Her training left more to be desired in such matters than was offered here by this strange young woman, and her mysterious uncle. Lady Remington spoke with a maternal austerity to her son.

"It all seems very strange. They seem to come from nowhere, and with an even greater rapidity they return nowhere. The doctor, Doctor Malsano I mean, is very interesting sometimes when he talks. At other times those curious eyes of his do not inspire confidence. Miss Tempest is a beautiful girl, my dear, but are you sure she is the right kind of girl for a Remington to associate with?"

Raife stammered: "Yes, mother. Gilda—I mean Miss Tempest, is quite all right. She, or he, will write and explain later."

Lady Remington continued, "I think I was rather premature in introducing them to the baroness."

"That was all right, mother. We shall hear soon, and all will be explained," replied the son. At heart he felt little more than his mother that all was

right, and he was wondering very hard as to what was the meaning of these renewed mysteries.

To change the subject and gain an excuse for time, he added: "By the by, shall we spend a few days at Bordighera before returning to Aldborough?"

His mother readily concurred, feeling it would be good to change the scene of action for a while. Then she added: "Yes, but I expect there's a good deal for you to do still, at Aldborough."

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The Count's car pulled up in front of the door of the quaint little house in the side street, on the evening of the day when Fortune seemed to have snatched Gilda Tempest from the jaws of danger.

She had dressed with an assumed jauntiness, hoping to match the costume of the benign and buxom landlady, who had so generously extended the invitation.

Before the party were comfortably seated, a small basket containing light refreshment and some flasks of Chianti were placed aboard. Then the car started on its journey. Gilda, with a tact that came from the training of many emergencies, easily persuaded the chauffeur, who was already charmed by his fair passenger, to take the road up the Roya valley to the French frontier. Thence along the broad, straight military road with the snow-clad Alps, already lilac tinted, to the Col di Tenda. As they were gaily speeding, with merry laughter, a figure sprang from the roadside and waved to them. The road here was deserted, save for the Count's car with its merry, human freight. The chauffeur applied brakes and rapidly stopped. Gilda shuddered and hid her face as well as possible, for the wayfarer, who had adopted this drastic means of attracting attention to his needs on the wayside, was none other than the ex-messenger of the Hôtel Royal at Nice. Here was that forbidding person, with the air of an Apache, and the costume of the Quartier Latin, the man who had acted as her uncle's agent in the criminal plots that he was evolving during their stay there.

With the rapidity of thought and action that came to her of the hunted,

haunted life, Gilda obscured her face and became engrossed in some quickly planned operation that kept her from the man's view. He spoke Italian, but with a French accent. He first asked the way to the Col di Tenda. Then, as Gilda's landlady smiled at him, he emboldened himself to ask for a lift. The cheery old landlord and landlady cried, "Yes! jump in." Both were slightly flushed with the wine and contents of the basket they had brought with them. Gilda, as she realised that this horrible person was actually sitting in the tonneau of the car behind her, almost shrieked with fear. The landlord poured out more wine and the merriment soon bordered on excess, as the car bounded upward and swung around corners with a reckless, devilish swing. Gilda, trembling, yet with the well-feigned assumption of one of those mysterious ailments familiar to women who want to be left alone, waved aside the offers of wine; but the chauffeur appeared to enjoy it. With one hand on the wheel, he drank copiously as each glass was handed to him with a merry *camaraderie*. Now and then a lunge or jolt made even the merrymakers behind exclaim "Oh!" The chauffeur seemed to want the fair occupant of the seat next to him to admire his deeds of "derring-do" at the wheel.

With a muffled roar they entered the long tunnel through the mountain. All but Gilda sang merrily as they bounded through the cavernous depths of this giant undertaking. On they sped with a recklessness that fascinated Gilda and at last, alarmed the landlady. With a final plunge they were out again into the open, but Gilda's mind was distracted in spite of the devilish excitement of this mad "joy-ride." How could she get rid of that hated Apache man seated behind? He was so near to her. Had he recognised her yet? She hoped rather than felt that he had not. She was thankful for the reckless exploits of the now thoroughly excited chauffeur. It distracted attention from her, and they were rapidly approaching the goal she had aimed for. Here and there the groups of Italian and French guards had eyed, with indulgent smiles, the mad career of this strange family party. Even Gilda's face was illumined with a wan smile, as she realised the incongruity of this scene. It was merry, in spite of the fact that it was fraught with such danger for her. A few more bends in the road on the steep side of the mountain, and they would be there, for good or evil, as destiny might decide.

"Oh! la-la!" cheerily shouted the landlord. "One more glass of the good wine."

He poured it out. The chauffeur gazed in front of him with a bright yet glassy stare, as he realised the dangers of the precipitous road. The landlady passed him a glass, laying her hand on his shoulder. He turned to take the glass. There was a sharp skid of the wheels that sounded like a hiss. A moment of lull, an eternity of despair, a loud, shrill shriek from the landlady—the car and its occupants had mounted a steep bank and lay overturned on its side. All was now silence, and Gilda did not know how long the silence had lasted. It was quite quiet when, with difficulty, she extricated herself from the twisted mass of débris. The other merry occupants remained silent, and the quiet of it was appalling. She muttered to herself and stifled her sobs, which were half groans. With much labour and difficulty she mounted the fateful bank and clambered to the roadway. The sun had gone down, a golden ball of fire, set in a bank of purple cloud edged with a brilliant orange.

It was now dark and a sense of oppression seemed to pervade the place.

Gilda's mind worked rapidly. The necessity for action was immediate. Where was that Apache man, and had he survived?

The zealously guarded frontier road was not to be left long without a passer-by, and soon the measured tread of feet announced the approach of a patrol.

They halted when they discovered the ominous gash in the road, made by the swiftly swerving wheels of the now ruined car. An examination of the wreck disclosed the sadness of the disaster. Huddled in a group were the dead bodies of the landlord, his wife, and the chauffeur. Where was the Apache man? He was not to be found. Had he lived—escaped to remain an agent for evil in this world—a further or continued source of trouble to the sadly stricken girl?

The telephone was not far away, and the soldiers, who sympathised, with all the warmth of their Southern hearts with the beautiful and distressed signorina, soon found means of escort for Gilda.

Thus she reached Cuneo, a further step on the long, lone journey to the unknown. Beyond a shaking, she was none the worse for the accident.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### The Second Burglary at Aldborough Park.

Stewards, bailiffs, solicitors, and the men of affairs who are called in on the occasion of the death of the head of the family, had finished their work at Aldborough Park. Life had resumed its normal state. The new baronet had taken possession, and was entering into the duties of his position with commendable spirit and enterprise. Lady Remington witnessed her son's interest in the affairs of the estates with much pleasure.

Her mind was greatly relieved that they had seen the last of the mysterious Gilda Tempest and the forbidding Doctor Malsano. She was satisfied that Raife had overcome his mad infatuation for the woman, and as for the doctor, no possible good could come from such an association. She sincerely hoped they would forget the impulsive invitation extended to them whilst they were at Nice.

The Baroness von Sassnitz was staying at the Park. She had brought the inevitable jewels, without which, and their attendant anxiety, her otherwise placid life was incomplete. Fräulein Schneider, the baroness's maid, and the faithful custodian of the priceless trinkets, was there. Alert as ever, she wore the importance of her trust, as she wore those multitudinous coils of yellow hair. They were all a part of the institution that she represented.

Edgson, the faithful old butler, ruled the servants' hall with a firm but genial sway. The yellow coils were the subject of much discussion among the other servants, but Edgson had ruled, with a fine decision, that it was both unladylike and ungentlemanly to discuss a lady's back hair in the servants' hall. The Fräulein Schneider, herself, maintained an austerity becoming the importance of her position, and the subject was therefore not discussed directly with that lady. Only one person was believed to have dared to a direct allusion to the crowning piece of the Fräulein's headgear. One James Gibson, called "Jim" by his intimates, was possessed of a manly frame, well set off by Melton corduroys and leather gaiters. His curly beard was black, and well-trimmed, whilst his sparkling



black eyes, that twinkled above his round, rosy cheeks, were counted irresistible by the lasses of that Kentish countryside.

Report had it that Jim met the Fräulein in the town of Lewes, nine miles away, and there purchased a fancy comb, which he induced her to wear for a brief while.

Unwittingly the comb was in position when the Fräulein responded to a sudden summons from the baroness. Not even the Fräulein Schneider could stand the withering stare, assisted by a jewelled lorgnette, of an indignant baroness, whose maid had dared to wear a comb in her well coiled, and oiled hair. The comb was never seen again.

For safe keeping the baroness's jewels were placed in the strong safe in the wall of the library, during her stay at Aldborough Park.

The shooting season was near at hand, and Raife had invited his old college friend, Edward Mutimer, preparatory to the opening of the first of September, when the party would be increased.

Perhaps no festival was treated with greater respect and ceremony than that of "St. Partridge." On the first of September, through the centuries, the line of shooters with the dogs and gamekeepers, have set forth in search of the "birds" that until this day had been so jealously guarded. The Aldborough estates have always been strictly preserved and famed for partridge and pheasant alike.

At eventime, when the shooters had returned from the prolonged and sometimes tiring sport, the fine old Tudor mansion, snug and warm within its ivy-covered walls, rang with the merriment that accompanied the hospitable festivities of such occasions.

The privileged dogs did take their place before the fire. There were "Grouse," the setter; "Jo," the pointer; "Nellie" and "Judy," the two spaniels; "Prince," the black retriever; whilst three or four less useful, less trained, but generally more pampered and self-assertive, were grouped around.

The toast of "St. Partridge" was given with the brevity that most good toasts deserve. Champagne, followed by port, are the wines for these

commemorations.

In the servants' hall the gamekeepers and every man and woman of the large household joined in the general festivity, and the usual liberality of the servants' hall was still further extended. On such nights the genial old butler was at his best, for the task fell to him to propose the toast of "St. Partridge," and do the honours generally. His well-studied and hoary witticisms came with such a hearty burst of his own laughter, that the infection spread around the depleted board, until joy was on every countenance.

On such a night sleep would be heavier than usual. By general consent the potations that followed dinner were not excessive, but a little more liberal, as became the occasion.

One by one the household, in its many varying branches, retired, each in his or her direction up one of the many winding staircases, and along corridors to their respective rooms, with stifling yawns, and walking with a respectful silence until the last of the doors opened and closed.

The guests also lingered longer than usual in billiard-room or library, and they, in turn, having received the ministrations of the servants allotted to them, retired up the wide oak staircase, over the soft, deep carpet.

The most astute criminal, even burglars, will choose sometimes a wrongly-timed occasion for his offence against society.

It was a few nights after the "First," when Sir Raife and the rest of the household had sought the sleep that follows sweetly on a long day's shooting. Lazily knocking the contents of his pipe into the fire, he climbed into the four-posted bed with its pale-blue curtains hanging around. The old-fashioned, and even the mediaeval, survived in many directions at Aldborough Park, and this bed was one of the survivals.

Although fatigued beyond the ordinary point, even after a long tramp over stubble and turnips, up hill and down dale, Raife did not sleep. His mind was too active, and his thoughts trended in directions which left him sleepless and troubled.

The recollection of his father's murder, and the dying words which, in

spite of the intervening months and the exciting events that had transpired, still, on such an occasion as this, caused him anxiety.

Insomnia may not be a disease, but it is a very serious complaint at the moment of suffering. There are some people who possess mentality of a calibre that permits them to lie awake during long and dark nights. Others, of a higher-strung fibre, cast bedclothes and resolution to the corners of the room, and rise to smoke, to read—or do anything rather than endure the torture of wakefulness caused by a troubled mind. Raife rose from the high, old-fashioned bed and proceeded for a light and his dressing-gown, when he heard sounds that arrested his movement and attention. Premonition of danger displays a very high sense in animals. The later stages of civilisation have made matters so safe for human beings, that the premonitive sense is becoming rare. Environment undoubtedly affects such a sense, and the proximity of the library to Raife's bedroom may have affected his alertness, and kept him awake. Certainly there was something, somebody moving, and the noise was in the direction of the library—the room of sad, tragic association. “Nerves” do not imply timidity, and Raife of the Reymingtons was hardly likely to be a timid man. At the moment he was possessed of a strong spirit of revenge. His father had been cruelly shot by a burglar in that very library, where those stealthy sounds were proceeding from. He did not wait to don a dressing-gown. Hastily snatching his Browning revolver from under his pillow, he proceeded along the dark, oak-panelled corridor. Gloomy old helmets, empty shells of armour that had protected his ancestors in many a fray, frowned upon him. As he crept quietly, but quickly, over the familiar soft carpets, he thought also of the baroness's jewels, those gems that attracted trouble in their train. They were in the iron safe embedded in the wall of the library. If there was to be a vendetta, he—Raife Remington—would see to it that the feud was well sustained on his side. The last few yards he covered on tip-toe, gripping his Browning in his hand. At last, he was peeping through the door, determined to have the first shot in the contest that had been forced on him. All such contests are cowardly. The midnight marauder carries long odds in his favour—the greatest being the unwillingness of the man, who is protecting his own property, to fire first. In this aggravated case his father's spirit, through the memory of his dying words, impelled Raife to fire first and shoot straight. Justice was on his side and Raife brought the revolver to a level for aim, as he peered into the room. The sight that met him was so

staggering that he involuntarily gasped.

Holding an electric torch in one hand, a case of the baroness's jewels in the other, and kneeling before the open door of the safe, he saw the outline of the figure of a woman. Raife's involuntary gasp was sufficient, for the woman, who had displayed wonderful craftsmanship in achieving her purpose, switched off the lamp. It was too late. With a bound Raife had seized her by the throat and dragged her to the wall, switching on a powerful electrolier.

His horror and consternation reached the highest human point when he recognised Gilda Tempest, the woman he loved—the woman of mystery—the woman he had trusted! She had asked him to trust her—to be her friend. He had responded with the whole of his heart and enthusiasm, and this—this hideous nightmare was his reward.

Raife slung her from him with force, and hissed: "You hideous fiend! Is this womanhood—the womanhood that I—I had loved?"

Gilda fell in front of the open door of the dismantled safe. For a full minute her sobs filled the old library, till they became a moan, a prolonged wail.

Raife placed the revolver in the pocket of his pyjamas and crossed the room with bowed head and heaving chest. His face was contorted with rage, and his hands and fingers worked convulsively. He re-crossed the room and gazed at her with a look of intense hatred. Slowly she rose to her knees and crawled towards him with clasped hands. Then, clutching at his knees with upturned face, a still beautiful face, she ceased her sobbing. In low, mellifluous tones she pleaded: "Raife, Raife! I have wronged you. I have wronged you grossly, grievously. But listen to me, spare me! I, too, have been wronged. I have not been a willing agent. I have been forced, yes compelled, to do these foul, hateful things."

Raife looked down on her with a contemptuous glance. "You have acted well before. You are acting well now. Before I give you in charge of the police you can tell me, if you will, why you borrowed my keys at the Hôtel Royal, at Nice?"

"No! No! Raife, Sir Raife! Believe me, I am not naturally bad. My uncle—

at least, he tells me he is my uncle—forces me to do these things. When he looks at me and tells me what to do I am afraid, but I must obey. I simply must, I can't help it.

“He made me get your keys and told me the story to tell you. He is clever, so clever.” Here Gilda shuddered, and then trembled violently all over. Passionately she raised her voice a trifle, saying: “He is horrid! He is hateful—yes, awful!” Then, relapsing almost into a state of coma, she continued: “I must obey. Yes, I must obey.”

At this moment there was a violent knock on the door, and Raife almost dragged Gilda to a curtain and hastily thrusting her behind, crossed to the door and said lazily, in a tired key: “Yes, who is there?”

Edgson's, the old butler's voice, came from without in trembling tones. “Lud a mussy! Is that you, Sir Raife? You have given us a fright! I saw a light in the library and thought there was burglars again. And I've got all the men and the gardeners and we've surrounded the house.”

Sir Raife laughed a forced, hearty laugh, exclaiming: “Well done, Edgson! You were quite right, but there aren't any burglars this time. No, I'm just at work on some of my papers, that's all.” Then, turning the key and holding the door slightly ajar, he added: “Give them all a drink, and send them to bed again. I shan't be long myself, now.”

The old man replied respectfully: “Very good, Sir Raife.” As he walked down the long corridor behind the other servants who had accompanied him on his well-planned police expedition, Edgson laughed softly to himself. He remembered some of the stories told to him of Master Raife's escapades in the long white room at the “Blue Boar.”

It was not a very good explanation, but it served at the moment.

When the sound of the last footsteps had died away, Raife returned to Gilda and beckoned her from the curtains, saying:

“Now, Gilda, tell me all that happened after you disappeared from the hotel at Nice. Tell me some of the worst of this man Malsano's crimes?”

Gilda told how she had seen Raife and Lady Remington at Bordighera.

Of her flight from there in the motor-car, of the accident and her escape, and the long journey by a circuitous route to England, where she met her uncle. She told how he had planned this burglary, and was plotting to steal the jewels whilst the baroness was at the Hôtel Royal, Nice.

In a low, musical voice, she related the long story of a young, beautiful girl's life, ruined by the unscrupulous machinations of a human fiend. She reclined in a deep, leather arm-chair, facing the still open safe, with the baroness's jewels scattered about on the floor.

The simplicity with which she told her sad story, the sincerity of her manner contrasted with the incongruous surroundings and recent events.

Raife Remington's mind and heart were torn with confused passions. His pride had received a shock so cruel, that it seemed utterly impossible to condone the offence. He was still suffering from a sense of extreme exasperation. Was this girl telling the whole truth, or only a portion?

He rose from the corner of the table on which he had been sitting, and proceeded to pick up the scattered jewels and the various articles on the floor. He replaced them in the safe and closed the door with the false key that was in it. It was made from the wax model traitorously obtained from him by Gilda. At her uncle's enforced bidding? Yes, but how true was that story? He placed the key in his pocket. Much of the mystery of this extraordinary girl's actions had been speciously explained away. What was there more of mystery remaining? The struggle between his better sense, his wounded pride and the weird fascination of this wonderful woman lasted for some time. Gilda lay back in the luxurious leather chair, and gazed, with a glazed expression, into space.

At length, he turned to her and said: "Gilda, you have hurt me more than I can tell. If this man, Malsano, who says he is your uncle, has compelled your actions, which appear so unnatural, I forgive you. Promise me that you will leave him, hide from him and go into the world you know so well, and lead a pure and clean life. You have shown yourself to be clever enough. Promise me, Gilda, and come to me if you want help. I will help."

He held out his hand. She sprang from the deep recesses of the chair. Clutching his hand, she smothered it in passionate kisses.

Then gazing at him, she said: "I promise! I promise, Raife! May I go now?"

Mechanically Raife said: "Yes."

In two seconds the dainty figure of the young girl was sliding down a silken rope from the library window to the ground below. Amazed at the rapidity of the action, Raife watched her disappearing form as it glided sinuously into a bunch of rhododendron bushes.



## Chapter Thirteen.

### Into a Trap and Out of it.

When Gilda Tempest had disappeared in the dead of night among the rhododendron bushes, Raife stood at the open latticed window of the old library, which had so nearly been the scene of a second tragedy. He was amazed at the squirrel-like movements of this wonderful girl, who had just played the part of burglar with the dexterity of a practised hand.

Yet she had told the tragedy of a life-story with a restrained, dramatic power that was convincing—at least to him. Again she had taken possession of him and all his thoughts: his love and passion were for her.

On the morning following these extraordinary occurrences, there was seated an old gentleman, wearing blue spectacles, on a secluded seat on the Parade at Brighton. He appeared to be immersed in a book that he held close to his face. An observant onlooker would have noticed that his attention was less engrossed in the book than in the passers-by, of whom, at this point of the Parade, there were not many. A neatly-uniformed nursemaid, with her two young children, approached the seat and appeared to show intention of taking possession of the scant amount of room that was left vacant. The old gentleman uttered a snarl, and glared through his blue spectacles so ferociously that, by common consent, the children refused this particular seat at that particular moment. The old gentleman was again left in sole possession. In spite of the book, impatience seemed to characterise his gestures. At last, with a grunt of satisfaction, he observed, in the distance, the person for whom he had waited.

An elderly lady shuffled her way along the front. As she approached this secluded spot, after looking round warily, she took her place at one end of the seat. The old gentleman raised his hat courteously and said: "Well! where are they? Have you got them?"

In a beautiful voice, but in tremulous tones, the old lady said: "No, I have not got them."



With a half-suppressed howl, he said: "What! you have not got them? You lie! You are deceiving me."

Still tremulously, but quite restrained, she replied:

"No! I have not got them, and I am not deceiving you. Let me tell you what happened."

In spite of the blue glasses the old man's face assumed a contorted expression of anger that was hateful to behold. Grasping her arm with a vicious grip, he almost shrieked: "Again I tell you, you lie! Where are they? You dare not tell me you have bungled after all the care I took."

"Hush!" she whispered. "You will be heard. Yes! I bungled."

Then this innocent-looking old lady told the events of the previous night at Aldborough Park, for it was Gilda Tempest disguised with consummate craft. The old man writhed and fumed, as each incident of that eventful night was narrated to him in the soft and musical tones of this young criminal of the beauteous countenance. The crime of a burglar is at all times contemptible. This story of an attempted burglary was peculiarly repellent, coming from the lips of a young girl who was so dearly loved by the "intended victim." To have stolen any property belonging to Raife Remington would have been discreditable, but to attempt, with all the skilled burglar's art, to steal those valuable jewels of the baroness, which had been entrusted to Raife for safe keeping—that was to place him in the most invidious position. It sounded hateful in the hearing. Yet this old reprobate of the deepest dye was the cause of this young girl's downfall, and he was furious at her failure.

With a resumption of his usual self-control he hissed: "Those jewels are worth thirty thousand pounds. You were clumsy to miss such a prize. Now listen to me. That young fool's father killed your father."

Gilda shuddered, and tears trickled down the cheeks which had been skilfully lined to disguise their youthful beauty.

Again, stooping towards her, his words were reduced almost to a whisper as he said: "Look at me straight in the eyes, Gilda, and listen. You must make love to that man. He cannot, and shall not resist you. He must

marry you, and you—must—ruin—him. That shall be your revenge. It shall be my revenge—and your father's revenge."

Then, springing to his feet with extraordinary vigour, he added:

"Come now! Remember what I have said. It must be. It shall be."

People turned to look at this peaceful and distinguished-looking "old" couple sauntering down the front to their hotel.

There is an unscrupulous type of villain in this world, whose power for harm is unbounded. Even as the weasel, the stoat, and certain of her types of ferocious animals, kill for the lust of killing, so these evil-minded people pursue their depredations. The worst of this type exercise a curious fascination over women.

It is not essential to discuss the possibilities of hypnotism, mesmerism, or any other forms of mind influence, or thought transference. A perusal of the newspapers, and even a general observation of those around us is sufficient to satisfy us of the existence of this power. Curiously, it would more generally seem to be exercised for evil rather than good. Doctor Danilo Malsano exercised his malicious influence over Gilda Tempest with all the malignancy of the type of predatory blood-sucking animals, to which allusion has been made.

It was easy, therefore, for plans to be made to encompass the downfall and ruin of Raife Remington. Subterfuge brought clandestine meetings between the young couple. The clandestine element is that which appeals most strongly to the ordinary lover. Raife Remington loved Gilda Tempest with a fierce passion, which he could not control, but, in many senses, he was an ordinary lover.

He was now well aware of Gilda's skill as a "thief"—a burglar. The thought rankled in his mind, but still he could not stave off the desire for her company. A smile from her chased away the hateful reminiscence of the night in the library at Aldborough Park, when she was fully revealed as a thief. There were other mysterious circumstances that, in his ordinary mood, he could not explain away, but when Gilda smiled and looked at him with her appealing eyes, all doubt vanished.

He was certain of one thing—Doctor Malsano was a blackguard, and he hated him. Again, his sense of reason—nay of duty—impelled him to give information to the police that would lead to the arrest and conviction of this arch-criminal—a criminal who used his uncanny powers to employ, as a dupe, a sweet, beautiful girl whom he called his niece.

His influence appeared almost supernatural, and yet, his cowardice was evident in the fact that he adopted such foul methods. So, in spite of all this, when Gilda smiled, that baneful person, her uncle, was safe from arrest as far as Raife was concerned.

There were many incongruities in this courtship. Their first meeting, and each subsequent meeting, had been quite unconventional—yet there was nought but pure thought as far as this couple were concerned when they met.

The baleful influence of the doctor at other times alone made for trouble.

In all these circumstances, then, it is not surprising that the quaint, old-world, white room of the “Blue Boar” at Tunbridge Wells should have become the rendezvous when it was the only opportunity that served.

Raife Remington’s sense of proportion had restrained him for a week or two, and he had not met Gilda. Doctor Malsano was not the type of man to allow his victim to elude his machinations for long. Gilda was, therefore, compelled to adopt the disguise of a hospital nurse, and, with full instructions from information obtained by the doctor, visited Tunbridge Wells. On the pretext of a patient who was expected from town, she obtained a room at the “Blue Boar.” It was not hard to invent a ruse to ensure Raife’s attendance at the “Blue Boar.” When Gilda met him on the staircase, her old influence returned, and under the chaperonage of the landlord, Mr Twisegood, they started the interview. The astute, old Twisegood chuckled as he discreetly left the room, but, at the same time, he had no real knowledge of the state of affairs. Nor was Raife aware that this “accidental” meeting had been cunningly planned by Doctor Malsano.

For long they talked. Gilda exercised her fascinating arts, and Raife succumbed more completely than ever. The conquest was complete, and

Raife arranged to meet her in town, where they should run less risk of observation, and each should enjoy their own society unmolested by the inquisitive.

During all this strange courtship the ordinary caresses, in which lovers freely indulge, had been few indeed. Now, to-day, when Fate seemed propitious, their caresses were less restrained, and, for the first time, Raife kissed Gilda passionately. The fire of youthful kisses will destroy discretion. The sight of a neatly-costumed nurse being passionately embraced by the youthful owner of Aldborough Park would have made an interesting film for a cinema. In real life the casual or accidental witness of such a scene, is liable to be shocked. In this instance the genial old landlord of the "Blue Boar" was ascending the stairs, and saw sufficient of the impassioned incident, through a mirror, to encourage him to give a loud and friendly cough. The process of disentanglement was instant and complete. Most of us are familiar with it. With a discreet tap on the door, which had been, with an inadvertence which was frequent on such occasions, left partly open, the old man announced: "If you please, Sir Raife, Lady Remington is coming upstairs and would like to see you."

Raife merely exclaimed, in a tone that indicated panic, and the exclamation consisted of one word only—a characteristically English utterance, "What!" Hastily pushing the old man out of the room, and, closing the door, he stood for a moment bewildered. Then Raife ejaculated in short, disjointed sentences: "Good heavens! The mater! What brings her here? How did she know?"

Gilda stood calmly. She had been well trained to avoid panic in an emergency.

A man ceases to be an aristocrat when he allows panic to be more than momentary. Sir Raife Remington, Bart., was an aristocrat. Gilda's practised eye looked at the window and calculated the drop.

With a discretion inherited through generations of "service," Twisegood had descended the old staircase.

Lady Remington, with the instinct of a mother, ascended the staircase. Her rather "exalted" tones sounded from without:

“Is this the room, Twisegood?” Her hand was upon the handle of the door.

Then did inspiration seize Raife.

Whispering hurriedly: “You go down this staircase,” pointing to the secret exit, “into the loose box at the bottom and wait your chance.”

To Gilda, who had shown such dexterity in descending by a silken rope from the library window at Aldborough Park, it was easy to find a “way out” by a staircase, even if it did lead her into a loose box in a stable!

When Lady Remington explained that the horse in her brougham had cast a shoe, and that Twisegood’s man was attending to it—and that Twisegood had said that Sir Raife was upstairs, it became easier to understand why Lady Remington was climbing those stairs at that unpropitious moment.

Sir Raife expressed his opinion of affairs to Twisegood at a later date.



## **Chapter Fourteen.**

### **Haunted by the Spirit of the River.**

There are brief times of happiness in the careers of most people, and it is a fortunate circumstance that, in the majority of instances, memory reverts to happiness rather than to misery.

The gambler prefers to remember the times when he won. The joys of our youth linger in our minds until we approach the border-line of dotage. Among the joys of the youth of most of us are the joys of love. There are few who cannot remember the thrill that accompanied the first kisses with the girl we loved. The happy moments when the world was a vista of promised pleasure! There is happiness in the quiet content of drab surroundings, and there is the delirious happiness of forced gaiety. The pleasure spots of this world are many and varied. "The Great White Way" of New York has its thrills and excitements. Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and the Riviera all possess their pleasure atmosphere and zones, but the vast swing and swirl of London gaiety is a thing apart.

Raife Remington and Gilda Tempest came to London to enter into what they determined should be the love zone of pleasure, which should complete their lives. By a tacit understanding, now that the first and most important stages of conquest had been acquired, the doctor did not appear more than necessary. Raife was rich enough for a full indulgence in the round of gaiety that London offers, especially to those who are to the manner born. Raife was to the manner born, and he possessed the gift of selecting those varied entertainments which appeal to most youth, but more especially to young and beautiful women.

Gilda, now to a considerable extent away from the depressing and exacting influence of her uncle, experienced, for the first time, the joys of love and of comparative freedom. Her lightest whims were gratified, and together, light-heartedly, they joined the gay whirl of entertainment. Dressed in the richest attire and bejewelled, she was the observed of all, and envied by most women. By men she was admired. By the man to whom she had given her heart she was adored, and Raife had acquired a wonderful skill in courtly admiration. He was living in his old-world suite of

rooms in Duke Street, St. James's, and Gilda and her uncle occupied a suite in a new Bloomsbury hotel.

September, and even October, are frequently the most kindly months in England, in the matter of genial climate, and are more suggestive of perfect summer weather than that afforded by July.

On a night in September, Raife and Gilda were dining at the Savoy Hotel. He had chosen a table, and, prior to dinner, they were overlooking the river and the embankment, with the long sweep of lights that lead mysteriously into gloom, whilst the flickering reflections of the murky Surrey side sparkled in the swiftly-moving stream at high tide. He was supremely happy. She appeared to be, but it was not possible to fathom the depths of a heart and mind that had been subordinated to the sinister workings of a hard and cruel disposition. There are few who have looked upon that ancient waterway who have not been influenced by its fascination. To-night its mystery entered into the spirit of Raife, and for a brief while he was affected by the outlook. His had been a great happiness for two weeks now, and he had chased away every grim thought in connection with Doctor Malsano and Gilda. They whispered a brief love-talk and then entered the salon, and crossed to the table which was awaiting them. The waiters performed those mystic evolutions which indicate the relative rank of the diners who are to occupy their tables. It appeared evident that Raife was a person of importance. Apart from this testimony from the waiters, he and she were evidently the cynosure of the rest of the richly-clad diners. With a gay laugh he spoke softly across the table.

"Gilda, that view of the river depressed me for a while. There was something of gloom and hidden mystery about it. Shall we drink some champagne to-night?"

"Yes, Raife, by all means. Don't let a horrid river depress you. I'm never depressed now that you are mine."

The soft light from the shaded lamp fell on her lovely form. A pink glow suffused her bare arms and heaving breast. The jewels that decked her sparkled, and her wonderful, lustrous eyes looked at him with a strange, tender look as she uttered those last words, "Now that you are mine." He

answered: "Yes, Gilda, I am yours." There seemed to be still some sense of foreboding, in spite of all the happiness of the last two weeks and the luxurious gaiety of their present surroundings. The spirit of that ancient river had left a sense of sadness which Raife could not alter. The waiter arrived opportunely with the wine, and they both drank a glass of the sparkling champagne, the wine which has made much merriment and led to much sadness.

The dinner progressed with all the stateliness of service, and the exquisite choice of food which is associated with a restaurant whose *chef* receives the salary of a statesman.

Gilda said, during one of those intervals, when a *pièce de résistance*, which is to follow, has justified a delay:

"Oh, Raife, uncle said to-day—"

With a gesture of impatience he interrupted: "Don't tell me what your uncle said. I don't want to know what he says. I only want to know what you say."

Then he smiled, as many another lover has smiled, who was tempted into a lapse of perfect and complete adoration of his loved one. Even in these happy conditions, where everything seemed favourable to a perfect courtship, love was on tenterhooks.

The dinner was finished, and those supplementary accompaniments to the modern meal were in progress. Cigarettes—cigars—liqueurs, were in course of leisurely consumption by some people. Others were leaving, to continue their round of pleasure at theatre—revue—music-hall, or in one of the hundreds of haunts where the leisured ones congregate at night-time. Among those who were leaving were two men, both of whom carried a distinction with them. One, who was the personification of perfectly-dressed dandydom, with a drawl, nudged his companion's elbow and indicated Raife and Gilda at their table. He whispered to his companion "I will tell you something about them presently." The other replied: "Do, old chap! They're a deuced handsome couple, whoever they are." They passed out.

Others were moving, and some, as they passed, bowed to Gilda. Raife



could not get over the depression which had come over him as they had leant over the balustrade and gazed at the sad-looking river before dinner. He found an excuse quite early in the evening and accompanied Gilda to her hotel in Bloomsbury. There was a strained manner which had broken the chain of happiness that had lasted for two weeks. Having bade adieu to Gilda he told his chauffeur to drive him to his rooms in Duke Street. When he arrived, he hastily donned a dressing-gown, and, calling his man, ordered a fire to be lit. A disturbed mind frequently desires the solace of a fire, and Raife's mind was perturbed with a sense of foreboding. A box of cigars, with a decanter of brandy and some soda-water, completed his equipment for a moody contemplation of affairs. As he reclined in the deep-set leather arm-chair, he appeared a perfect paragon of manhood. He was clad in a thin Japanese silk dressing-gown of many and bright-hued colours. The sombre black of his evening clothes underneath, heightened by the dazzling brilliancy of a broad expanse of shirt-front, completed the colour scheme, revealed in the subdued light from a shaded lamp on the small oriental table at his side. Trouble sat heavily on his handsome countenance, as he gazed into the crackling flames of the fire that his man, Pulman, had recently lit.

"Anything more, sir?" asked that discreet person, a fine type of the unrivalled English manservant.

"Nothing more, Pulman." And as the door was being softly closed, he called out: "Oh, Pulman, I don't want to be disturbed."

"Very good, sir," and he retired. As he disappeared downstairs he said to himself: "Ten to one there's a woman in the case. That ain't at all like Sir Raife, leastways, not as I have known him all these years." Pulman sighed a sigh of wisdom as he opened the door in the basement on his way up the area-steps to a neighbouring hostelry.

Left to himself, and secure from intrusion, Raife rose from his chair and crossed the room to a small black cabinet of exquisite design. Producing a tiny bunch of keys he opened the door of the cabinet, and from a small door within, which sprung open as he touched a spring, he took forth a richly-chased and jewelled miniature frame. The miniature portrait was of Gilda Tempest. He gazed at it, and, as is the wont of young men who gaze at the portraits of their lady love in the seclusion of their own room,

he touched it lightly with his lips. Then a sudden twinge seemed to attack him, and a pained expression pervaded his face. He looked at it lovingly, and muttering: "Ah! If I only knew. What is this unfathomable mystery?"— he replaced it in the drawer.

Raife sat long and moodily. He helped himself freely with the brandy and soda, but the stimulant did not soothe his troubled mind.

After a certain hour the streets of St. James's are silent, and Duke Street, where Raife's rooms were situated, is not an exception. To-night the very quietude, which is generally desirable, oppressed him further. Rising again from his chair, he removed his dressing-gown and donned a long overcoat and a golf-cap. Choosing a stout walking-stick, he went out into the night. The streets of St. James's are well guarded by police, but the city nightbird is witty in his ways, at the same time, evasive and elusive. As Raife swung into Jermyn Street, he was conscious of a figure that slouched behind him. Stopping abruptly at the corner of St. James's Street, he wheeled around to find that the figure was now walking in the other direction, or rather did he appear to crawl. Raife walked down St. James's Street, and at the bottom he chartered a passing taxi. Chance enters largely into the movements of the lovelorn mind, and chance impelled him to direct the driver to Hammersmith. At the wide junction of streets called the Broadway, he dismissed the taxi and wandered around for a while. He noticed another taxi pull up almost immediately after his own, and a familiar figure in a long coat and flowing tie, got out and crossed to a coffee-stall. Curiosity prompted him to follow. Some heavy traffic impeded his progress for about half a minute, and when he reached the coffee-stall the figure had disappeared. He called for a cup of coffee which he did not drink.

The trouble entered his mind again and he soliloquised: "Was he being shadowed? If so, why? Who was this mysterious figure, and where had they met before?"

"Bah!" he exclaimed aloud. "What do I care?" The coffee-stall keeper looked at him, and, with a wide experience of such matters, assumed that he had been drinking.

Raife sauntered away, leaving his coffee untouched, which more than

ever confirmed the coffee-man's view of the subject. Again a blind impulse steered Raife, and he found himself wandering among the queer little streets and alley-ways that fringe the riverside and lead to Hammersmith Mall. The tide was high and the dull swish of the water, as it swung past the moored barges, soothed his troubled mind for a while, and he became engrossed in the strangeness of his weird surroundings. A slight mist came off the river and added to the mystery. He had now reached that part of the Mall made famous by William Morris, and those brilliant men who founded the Kelmscott Press, and restored the merits of English typography and printing. The houses of Chiswick Mall and Hammersmith Mall are famous for their old-world charm, and many of them suggest, from without, the wealth and comfort within.

Time flies quickly to the engrossed and contemplative mind. Raife had seated himself on a sort of disused capstan, and was gazing at the river as he smoked his pipe. At rare intervals, he heard footsteps in the distance, and assumed they were bargees, or other workmen, going to their nightly occupations. The rumble and clink of machinery proclaimed the proximity of a brewery that does not distinguish between night and day in its operations.

Once, looking round, as he imagined footsteps that were too stealthy for those of a British workman, he fancied he saw the mysterious figure of Jermyn Street and the Broadway. He chased away the thought as merely fanciful and the result of his perturbed brain. The incident trended in his thoughts, however, towards that persistent person. Presently, it flashed through his mind and brought a crowd of recollections to him: the curious meeting with Gilda at Nice; the message conveyed by the little Italian girl among the orange groves by moonlight; the message delivered at the entrance of the café!

Yes! He was sure now. It was that Apache fellow, who looked as though he might be from the Latin quarter of Paris, and yet was not. But had not Gilda told him that he was killed in the motor smash outside Cuneo? Again he said: "Bah! What does it matter? Or, what do I care?"

With a suddenness that took him quite off his guard he was seized from behind. His arms were pinioned in a firm grip, whilst another man, holding a revolver, went through his pockets. As becomes an outraged

Englishman, whether he be plebeian or aristocrat, Raife swore violently, and struggled viciously. At length, the man who searched his pockets, said: "It's all right, sir, he's got no weapon or arms." Still holding the pistol in front, his arms were released from behind. Raife turned to face the man with the iron grip who had pinioned him so easily. Both men gave a start and an exclamation of surprise.

"Good heavens! Herrion—Inspector—what's the meaning of this?" demanded Raife.

"Well," said Inspector Herrion, for it was he, the immaculate Scarlet Pimpernel of Scotland Yard, "we hardly expected, Sir Raife, to find you here, at this hour of the night."

Raife laughed, and said: "I couldn't sleep, so I took a stroll."

"Rather a long stroll, Sir Raife, from St. James's to the Mall, Hammersmith, in the middle of the night," said Herrion with a curious smile. "May I call on you in the morning, sir?" he added.

"Why to be sure, I'll be delighted to see you. But leave that infernal grip of yours behind," and they both laughed.

At this moment there was a trampling of bushes in the garden behind, the swinging and slamming of a heavy iron gate, and then a shout: "Stop him!" A cloaked form, with flowing tie, dashed past a few yards from where the trio stood. They joined in hot pursuit, but the Apache, for it was he, was fleet of foot and had a good start. Further, he seemed to know every alley and byway in this maze of wharves and streets.

Taking part in the chase, Raife was handicapped by his ignorance of the neighbourhood, and, at the outset, ran into a post in the dark and placed himself *hors de combat* in the matter of speed. Raife was a runner, but to charge full tilt into a post was a sore handicap. After a while, Herrion, the dapper, little detective-inspector, was the only one left in the chase, and he ran as well as the Apache, but the Apache had the start, and, with the inherited cunning of his breed, understood the art of doubling. The inspector was unfamiliar with these alleys and slums, and it looked as though the Apache had got clean away. They came to a *cul de sac* and there was no trace of him. With the consummate skill of his class, he had

vanished into space and was gone. The two policemen and Raife retraced their steps and met other officers. Herrion was not the type of man to abandon his quarry without taxing his extraordinary resources to the end. He deployed his men to the best of their knowledge of the locality.

A rat will hide from its pursuer with great cunning, but even a rat will lose its way in a clumsy manner, sometimes. That Apache had reckoned without the state of the tide. He had wormed his way out of the *cul de sac*, and had intended to hide among some launches in one of the creeks that find their way in shore, if it had not been high tide. He had lost time, and, in his efforts to redouble his tracks, was sighted by Herrion, who at once started in pursuit. The Apache turned and ran. Something caused him to stumble, and over he plunged into the swinging tide, to be sucked under a barge and drowned—or to escape again. They searched in vain.



## Chapter Fifteen.

### Raife's Resolve.

On the day succeeding Raife's night excursion, having refreshed himself by a little sleep, that had come readily after the night's adventure, and those aids that come to a rich man in rooms in St. James's, he was planning a day's pleasure-hunting with Gilda. He was writing a note, making an appointment, when his man, Pulman, entered and announced a visitor. "Mr Herrion wishes to see you, sir."

"Ask him in, Pulman, I'll see him at once," said Raife.

Inspector Herrion entered, immaculately clad, as usual, but without the drawl in his speech which he used principally at society functions, and when he felt it would serve him in his work.

"Good morning, Herrion," said Raife, cheerily, and with extended hand. "What were we chasing that fellow last night for? I got so keen on the hunt, I forgot to ask what it was all about."

Herrion smiled a cryptic smile, and then said solemnly: "Sir Raife, I want to speak very seriously to you on a subject that concerns you deeply, and the rest of your family."

"Great Scott! Herrion, what's the meaning of this? What's it all about? You look like an undertaker. Come, my dear fellow, what's it all about?"

"Well, Sir Raife, I am speaking to you entirely outside my professional capacity. If you take offence, I can't help it. I shall be very sorry, but, I repeat, I can't help it. It is the high regard in which I hold you and your family that prompts me to speak."

Raife laughed heartily and said: "Come, come, Herrion, you're getting worse and worse. I shan't take offence. Sail ahead and tell me all about it. First of all, have a drink."

"Well, I take you at your word, but please listen to me to the end."

Raife dispensed the drinks and Herrion proceeded:

“The man we chased last night was one of a gang of burglars. I had word they were making an attempt on Gildersley House, which contains a lot of valuable property, and there is jewellery and plate, too. I was right. Somehow, we did not succeed in catching them. When I seized you, I did not, of course, recognise you, and I thought you were one of the gang.”

Raife intervened. “I think that’s rather amusing, don’t you?”

“No, Sir Raife, I fear not. That Apache-looking fellow is practically in the employ of a certain Doctor Malsano.”

Raife started, and his expression became engrossed.

“The important part of what I want to say is,” proceeded the detective, “that, although it is merely a coincidence that you should have been in the middle of the night on the scene of an attempted burglary, I saw you, earlier in the evening, dining at the Savoy with a Miss Gilda Tempest, who is supposed to be the niece of this Doctor Malsano.”

Raife sprang from his seat and said: “Come, come, Herrion, I can’t hear a word against Miss Tempest.”

“I ask you to keep cool, Sir Raife, until I explain to you how serious is the situation. It is incredible to feel that your good name—Sir Raife Remington—should be associated with a gang of continental swindlers, of whom this lady is the decoy.”

Again Raife hotly intervened. “I must ask you, Herrion, not to drag Miss Tempest’s name into the dust.”

“It is true, I think you will agree, that my professional position entitles me to speak.”

Raife winced, but his was not the nature to give in easily. In spite of his own personal knowledge of the doctor, and of Gilda, he loved the girl dearly, and love is blind—sometimes to the point of madness.

Herrion continued: “I assure you, in confidence, that Doctor Malsano and

Miss Tempest are liable to arrest at any moment. When I was in Nice, a short while ago, they had a plan for stealing the Baroness von Sassnitz's jewels. She was staying at the Hôtel Royal, and so were they. In addition, this Apache-looking fellow, who fell in the river last night, was in their service for the purpose. He was employed as a messenger, and I had him removed. I had other work on and could not stay to protect the baroness's jewels. I did my best in the circumstances. The doctor caught sight of me in the hotel, and he, and his niece, disappeared at once."

This was circumstantial enough, and, but for the obstinate strain in all young lovers, would have carried conviction. Raife remained obdurate, almost defiant, but the skilled observation of the famous detective noticed that he was wavering. With great dignity and deliberation he added: "Sir Raife Remington, in your own interests, I beg of you to abandon this mad alliance. It is suicidal."

Raife rose from his chair and walked slowly around the room. He mixed himself a whisky and soda, and drank the contents at a gulp. He crossed the room to Herrion, and, extending his hand, said:

"Herrion, you are right. I thank you heartily for your most disinterested action. I will abandon the whole accursed crew. They have blighted my life."

The strong, stern, little man, relentless in the conviction of crime, unwavering in the performance of his duty, had saved a man's name—a family name. A whimsical smile spread over his countenance as he left the room.

Two days later Gilda Tempest received a letter from Raife. It was brief, and to the point. It stated that it was his duty not to be associated with a man whom he was convinced was an unscrupulous criminal. He expressed regrets and bade farewell.

Gilda's wonderful, beautiful, and yet inscrutable face did not tell how much she suffered. Doctor Malsano was furious, and showed growing signs of weakness by allowing his passion to get beyond control.

A few days after the foregoing events, Raife Remington, accompanied by Colonel Langton, was on his way to Egypt. Colonel Langton was a big-



game shooter, and a club friend of some years standing. Their intention was to make for Khartoum and thence up the Blue Nile.

“The Nile-guarded city, the desert-bound city,  
The city of Gordon’s doom.  
The womanless city, cradleless city,  
The city of men—Khartoum.”

This was to be the goal of Raife Remington who had emerged from a great crisis, the crisis of a dangerous passion for a woman. A passion for a beautiful woman—but a woman whose very presence seemed to herald trouble. The big game was to be found beyond Meshrael Zerak, and he was to forget the loss of his love, with the companionship of his friend, Colonel Langton, among the mysterious and unfathomable Arabs of the desert.

Some men are destined, by nature, to live in an atmosphere of altered plans or broken hopes. Raife Remington’s inheritance had, so far, been attended by both. Raife got to Khartoum, but he did not reach Meshrael Zerak; there were other plans for him. When he and Colonel Langton arrived at Khartoum, there remained much to be done before it was possible to get together the entire outfit necessary to a big-game shooting expedition. Colonel Langton’s experience was essential to this part of the work, and Raife took the opportunity of seeing what there is of the fantastic life of the desert city of Khartoum. In the daytime the city slumbers, and when the stars or moon rise, there is life. There are cafés in Khartoum, as well as poultry-farms, in this late land of the Mahdi and incredible horrors. Raife selected a seat at a café from which point of vantage to observe the passers-by on the broad plank walk. He called for a bottle of Greek wine, an impossible concoction, less for his consumption than as a passport or ticket for the use of the table and chair, and the enjoyment of the vantage point of observation. There were many other tables at which men sat, for be it remembered that Khartoum is “The womanless city, the cradleless city. The city of men.” They were men of many nations, from Greece, Sicily, Roumania, and nomadic Semitics from no one knows where. The British conquerors govern there, as in so much of the east and south, not by weight of numbers, but by the inherited knowledge that he is pre-eminently the sahib, the acknowledged ruler in such quarters.

There was not much of comfort in the café of Raife's choice. The Greek wine was bad, the food he called for was worse. A couple of arc lights shed a flickering brilliance which revealed myriad insects of all sizes and shapes, and possessed of malignity in varying degree. They fell in shoals all over the place and created a sense of nausea. In spite of all this, overhead was the deep-blue vault of the unfathomable skies flecked by a million stars. The stolid, sulky silence of the dusky Arabs, in every variety of costumes, which include the turban, the tarboosh, loose, flapping drawers, and the coarse woven jibba, added to a melancholy sense. If it were possible to supplement Raife's dejection, that was achieved by the snuffling dogs who sought garbage under chair and table, and a certain smell which belongs to much of the East.

Raife tired of the café, the plank walk, and his neighbours. He rose from the table, paid his *addition* and sauntered away. He was passing a narrow, evil-smelling street of the native quarter when he heard blows and cries. Raife, being unfamiliar with Oriental methods, sought a reason for the disturbance, imagining that a good row would cause a diversion and relieve the monotony of the last few hours. He proceeded down the street and discovered that there was a woman in Khartoum, and she was being beaten by a big, dusky Nubian. The woman seemed to look appealingly at Raife, and he, with all the proper, but, in the circumstances, unwise impulse of a normal man of the West, sailed in and hit that Nubian many blows with his useful fists. He should then have beaten a hasty retreat, but he did not. The result of this later indiscretion was that he received from somebody, from somewhere, a stab in the shoulder, which taught him some of the wisdom necessary in the Orient. He found his way back to his hotel, and the regimental surgeon, being sent for, treated the wound, which, though not very serious, would take a long time to heal in a place like Khartoum.

When Colonel Langton returned from purchasing water-bags, sacks, girths for camels, and many of the articles necessary for a well-equipped caravan, he discovered Raife bound up in bandages, and the regimental surgeon putting on the finishing touches to a very neat job of surgery. Having learnt the cause of things, the Colonel swore, in a characteristic fashion, at the prospect of his plans for big-game shooting being at least altered, if not indefinitely postponed.

The news of the occurrence spread, and a few of the officers called on Raife to learn about it. The story having been repeated several times, headed by Colonel Langton, the regimental surgeon and each visitor, in turn, talked interminable lectures on the folly of Raife's action.

Raife's pride, as well as his shoulder, was sorely hurt. He felt he had made an ass of himself, and that these fellows, with their experience, were inwardly laughing at him. He cursed the fact that, for the second time, a woman had landed him in trouble.

His days at Khartoum were very miserable. His wound would not heal and he saw that he would be a drag on the expedition if he started. He decided to return to Cairo, and try and patch himself up there.

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## Chapter Sixteen.

### The Mysterious Stab in the Dark.

A few weeks after Raife's unfortunate interference in a Nubian's domestic affairs at Khartoum, he was reclining amid soft cushions on the piazza of Shepherd's Hotel at Cairo.

There may be no women in Khartoum—at least, there was one, who, being in trouble herself, made trouble for Raife—but there are women at Cairo. Just what the attraction is, no one really knows. It is hot and dusty. There are flies, mosquitoes, and plenty of other irritating little things in Cairo. But Shepherd's Hotel is generally full of visitors, and there is a predominance of gaily and richly-dressed women. They come from all countries and speak many languages. The language that one hears more than any is that of the United States of America. Americans do not, individually, stay longer, but there are more of them, therefore the supply is greater. Further, the American woman is a good talker; that is, she talks quickly and talks quite a good deal. There are several of them who talk very well.

Exclusiveness used to be the prerogative of the English to a greater extent than most other countries. As the English are becoming less exclusive, so American women are cultivating the habit. The new generation of American women have cultivated, almost inherited, a score or more of little habits, mannerisms—perhaps affectations, which are quite charming to the impressionable young English person. There is a certain *gaucherie* about the English which, in turn, retains a charm for the American woman. They would openly hate one another if it were not for these peculiarities, which make the one interesting to the other.

The limelight of publicity has always been turned on to the American boy and girl from infancy. For that reason they have never suffered from shyness. Until recently there has been an excess of privacy in the lives of the English of most ages. That has been altered, and now there are English girls who can rock a chair level with any girl from Kentucky to California.

Of course, the voice question had almost as much vogue as the colour question. That, in turn, has been altered. There are as many soft contraltos, or, at least, mezzo-sopranos coming from the United States as from England nowadays. Altogether, there is less need for antagonism and more need for good fellowship between the United States and Great Britain, than at any period since "The Great Misunderstanding" of a hundred years ago. This helps to explain the circumstances of the very rapid friendship that had sprung up between Sir Raife Remington, Bart., of Aldborough Park, and Miss Hilda Muirhead, the daughter of Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead, Esq., President of the Fifth State Bank of Illinois, U.S.A.

In writing of Americans it has ever been customary to allude to their wealth, of which many people possess an exaggerated estimate. The successful American is, frequently, very generous, and it is from that freedom and generosity that the exaggerated notion springs.

Mr Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead was not a very wealthy man, but he was a prosperous man, and a generous man, a fine and courtly type of the American banker.

His daughter, Hilda, who had formed such a rapid friendship with Raife Remington, on the piazza—the balcony—in the drawing-room—on the staircase—in the foyer—or any of those places where friendships are made abroad, calls for more description.

Hilda Muirhead was not more than twenty. In some respects she had the knowledge and experience of a woman of thirty. In other respects she was a simple *ingénue*, with the attractive grace of a gazelle-like child. The latter was her natural mood and attitude. The former had been acquired and thrust upon her by the bitterness of cruel experience at an immature period of her life.

She had a gift of talk, and the charm of her conversation won for her the attention which invariably ended in admiration. Many girls, of any nationality, do not realise the value of natural and intellectual conversation. Her father had seen to it that Hilda did. Hilda's mother died in her infancy, leaving Hilda an only child of a devoted and gentle parent.

Hilda's appearance was striking in the extreme, and if she had been of the "abounding" type who flaunt themselves for admiration, she would have, in an obsolete vernacular, "swept the board." Her restraint and lack of self-consciousness were an addition to her charm.

Her hair was a glory to behold. Few had seen the full extent of that glory of her womanhood. Her old nigger "mammy" was almost the only one who had seen it in its full maturity. Her face had an indefinable irregularity of contour, and showed the southern blood in her veins. Her eyes were only large when she opened them under some strong emotion. They were not of that pertinacious, staring type, that are aggressively anxious to attract on all occasions. Her eyes were grey, and constructed for the purpose of normal sight and restrained emotion—but they were beautiful eyes.

The form of her lips had not been moulded into beauty by an assumed pout, nor were they distorted by youthful grimace. They were just wholesome lips, that helped her to talk, and laugh and sing. The rest of her face was in perfect harmony. It was not classical on the lines of a Grecian statue, nor an Italian Madonna. It was a modern, fascinating, yet dignified face.

A broken arm or a bandaged wound invariably attract attention and sympathy, especially from women. Raife's bandaged shoulder, which necessitated that the right sleeve should remain empty, attracted the attention of the women at Shepheard's Hotel. His Apollo-like appearance added to the effect when he arrived. In addition to the side glances in his direction, as he reclined on a long wicker chair, shaded from the hot sun which streamed from above, he had to endure the bold stares of the more brazen-faced. At this time, Raife had suffered from two women, and he was, for the present, at least, a woman-hater. He, therefore, refused to notice any of the glances that he received, whatever their nature might be. The balcony piazza and foyer of an hotel are very like the deck of an ocean steamer, and it is not possible for an invalid to resist the advances of those who wish to be polite and render aid.

Raife and Hilda Muirhead met in such a manner. The foyer was almost deserted, and Raife dropped his book just out of reach. Hilda Muirhead and her father were passing. Hilda darted forward and restored the book

to Raife, who thanked her.

Mr Muirhead remarked: "I hope your injury is not serious, sir?"

To which Raife replied: "Oh, no. It is just a slight dagger wound."

Hilda exclaimed, involuntarily: "A dagger!" Even in Egypt men are not frequently suffering from dagger wounds, and the word has a shudder in its sound.

Mr Muirhead said, smilingly: "There is generally romance surrounding a dagger wound, sir. If it would not bore or distress you, perhaps, some time later, you might feel inclined to tell us as much as you care."

Raife thought to himself: "Oh, hang these people. Why don't they go away? She's a charming girl, though."

As he thought, Mr Muirhead, with a promptitude characteristic of Americans, produced his card, and, proffering it, said: "Here is my card, sir. I am a very humble American citizen. My daughter and I occupy the suite on the first floor, facing north. I shall take it as a compliment, if you should have a dull few minutes to spare, that you should honour us with a visit. We shall be here, or hereabouts, for a week or two."

Even in Cairo the warmth of the old gentleman's invitation appeared rather sudden to Raife. However, he had not been in the United States, and had met few Americans. He certainly had not met one who combined so much courtliness of manner and dignity as Mr Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead, of the Fifth State Bank of Illinois, and father of a charming daughter with a musical voice.

Raife forgot he was a woman-hater. He replied, "I'm sorry I haven't got a card with me, and, if I had, I couldn't get at it with this confounded shoulder. My name is Remington, sir, and I'm an Englishman. I will try to avail myself of your very kind invitation."

As they departed, Raife, for the first time, saw those lips that helped Hilda Muirhead "to talk and laugh, and to sing." He also encountered her eyes that were for the purpose "of normal sight and restrained emotion." On this occasion it was a sympathetic emotion.

When they had gone out into the hot sun for one of those expeditions on donkeys, that are such an attraction to visitors to Egypt, Raife contemplated. In the end he had determined that he would not accept Mr Muirhead's invitation to visit them in his suite. He hated the sound of the word "suite," anyhow.

It is dull work for a strong young man to recline in a wicker chair, to smoke and to read all day in a hotel, whether it be in Cairo or elsewhere. To refuse the advances of a hundred eyes of every hue, and to maintain a stoical indifference to every one around, because one has suffered at the hands of two women was a brave endeavour. Raife confined himself to his own rooms and dined in solitary state for three days. At the end of that time his desire for companionship of some kind was uncontrollable.

Raife sat in the foyer once more, and Mr Muirhead came across to him with an air of urbanity. "Ah, Mr Remington! We have not seen you during the last few days. I hope your wound has not been troubling you."

Raife stood up and looking straight at the genial, old gentleman, said: "No, Mr Muirhead, not much; but the doctors have told me that if I don't keep quiet, I shall have complications, and I am already tired of 'keeping quiet,' as they call it."

"Well, Mr Remington, if you are tired of keeping quiet by yourself and you will dine with me to-night, in my room, I promise you quietude, and, at the same time, it may prove a relaxation to you."

Raife could not refuse the invitation offered so gracefully, and he accepted.

When Raife was announced that evening, in Mr Muirhead's suite of rooms, the first impression he received was that a very ordinary hotel room had been transformed into a bower of flowers and blossom, and that there were many evidences of home life around it in the shape of daintily-framed photographs and tiny ornaments representative of many countries. The arrangement of flowers on the dinner-table which awaited them, showed that an appreciative hand had tended them. Mr Muirhead received his guest, and after the ordinary interchange of greetings, sounded a gong which brought a dusky attendant.



“Mr Remington, may I have the privilege of mixing for you an American cocktail?” said his host. “There are many spurious editions of the cocktail throughout Europe, and, indeed, the world; but it is essentially an American drink, and, if you will allow me to play the part of ‘bar-tender,’ I think I may please you.”

Mr Muirhead’s cocktail, which he mixed from the ingredients handed to him by the attendant, was a superlative success.

Raife said: “Splendid! how do you do it?”

At this moment Hilda Muirhead entered.

The Oriental atmosphere at night-time is a thing apart. There is a subtle, undefinable charm about an Oriental apartment, which combines with it just sufficient of the modern to add to luxury. Mr Muirhead’s reception-room had been adapted as a dining-room for Raife’s benefit, and was sumptuous. There were rich oriental draperies and soft divans, with subdued lights; in the centre, a perfectly-appointed dinner-table for three, on which was cream-coloured napery, silver, cutlery and sparkling glass. The whole scene was a wealth of many colours, subdued and harmonised. The sombre black and white of the Western evening dress of men took its place in the soft light and deep shadows. This was the setting and background when Hilda Muirhead entered the room.

The introduction was both formal and informal. “Mr Remington, I present my daughter, my only daughter.” Then to Hilda he said: “Are you ready, my dear; shall dinner be served?”

They were, indeed, a handsome trio around the table in the rich apartment of a hundred colours, lights and shadows all welded.

Skilled were the movements of the attendants which brought the dishes—the *plats* which Mr Muirhead had ordered well, as a polished and travelled American.

Raife hated women less at that time than for many months past. Hilda Muirhead displayed the well-bred and experienced side of her character, and made a charming hostess. Her delicately-tinted, clinging gown revealed a neck and bust of daintily-tinted alabaster, with rounded arms.

A pearl necklace was the only article of jewellery that supplemented this confection, which adorned a simple American girl. The environment, the charm of Mr Muirhead's conversation, and the subdued grace of the fascinating girl who confronted him, presented to Raife an aspect of "Americanhood" that he had not conceived possible. There are many degrees of trippers from the United States and elsewhere. If these were trippers, then they possessed an exalted rank amongst trippers. No! they were not trippers. They were aristocrats of a type that Sir Raife Remington, Bart., had not previously encountered.

The dinner was finished and the coffee was served. Hilda had retired and the two men smoked cigarettes. Mr Muirhead, after a silence of a minute or two, said, "Mr Remington, I do not wish to intrude on any subject that may be unpleasant to you. Your allusion, the other day, to the fact that your wound was due to a blow from a dagger interested me very much at the time, and I have thought of it several times since. May I ask, I do not press the question, which may even appear impertinent—may I ask, was it—er—was it an accident?"

Raife smiled as he said: "No, there is no secret about it, although I am rather ashamed of the business. It made me appear such a fool, and has spoilt a big-game hunting expedition I had started on. I should be much further south by now, and probably mauled by some big beast I had failed to hit. So, perhaps, it's just as well."

Mr Muirhead was evidently interested. Big-game shooting is known mostly in America by the exploits of an ex-president, whose deeds were, at the same time, exploited and travestied by a Press peculiar to the country.

He interrupted: "Do you mind if I ask my daughter to join us again. I am sure the story will interest her so much. Do you mind? You are sure you don't mind?"

It was impossible for Raife "to mind," and he assented.

When Mr Muirhead returned, followed by Hilda Muirhead, every atom of Raife's hatred of women had vanished. She had changed her dinner-gown, and was now attired in a long, trailing robe of soft silk, clasped at

the waist by an antique metal belt studded with quaint stones. The conventional tight folds of her wonderful hair had been loosened and gave indication of the wealth of that glory of womanhood. Her arms were still half bare and some Egyptian bangles hung loosely around her wrists. She stood for a moment holding aside a *fortière* of the deepest *eau-de-nil* blue mingled with Indian reds. It was a complete picture of human loveliness in a background of Oriental splendour. As Raife rose from the divan, on which he had been reclining, to acknowledge her presence, he gasped with admiration.

In her well-modulated contralto tones she said, with evident earnestness: "Mr Remington, father tells me that you have consented that I should hear the story of your wound—that dagger wound." Then she shuddered.

"My dear Miss Muirhead, I am afraid it will make a very dull story, and will make me appear very foolish. However, I will willingly appear foolish before such an audience."

Raife told the story of the woman who was beaten by the Nubian in the back street of Khartoum; of her cries, and his attempt at rescue—and of the stab in the dark from behind. He told it in a characteristically English way—haltingly, and without embellishment.

With elbows on knees, and with dainty fingers entwined under her chin, Hilda Muirhead sat and gazed at this handsome young man—his nationality mattered not to her—as he told the story that "made him appear foolish." It was incredible to her that a man who boldly ran down a slum, in a hateful place like Khartoum, to hammer a great big ugly black man, who was beating a woman, should be considered foolish by any one, much more so by himself. The thought, a woman's thought, came to her—"he did it in the dark, too. What curious people these Englishmen are. How they love to ridicule themselves and one another. Fancy being considered foolish to risk his life for helping a woman."

Hilda Muirhead gazed with admiration, whilst Mr Muirhead rose, crossed the room, and, seizing Raife's hand, said: "Mr Remington, that's a fine story. We shouldn't call you a fool in the United States. We should call you a hero and give you the time of your life. I'm your friend, sir, if you will allow me that honour."

Raife stammered and blushed. Hilda Muirhead saw that blush and admired it, for there are not many men who blush in the United States.

In an effort to change the subject, which was tiresome to him, Raife said, "By the by, Mr Muirhead, I owe you an apology."

"Well, now, father," said Hilda, laughingly, "I wonder what Mr Remington will apologise for next?"

Raife continued, smiling: "Oh, this isn't so foolish as the other. Only I omitted to give you my card, when we met. I hadn't got one with me at the moment." He handed his card to Mr Muirhead, and, turning to Hilda, said: "May I present you with one also, Miss Muirhead?"

Father and daughter read the little neat piece of pasteboard:

Sir Raife Remington, Bart.,  
Aldborough Park,  
Tunbridge Wells.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### Mr Muirhead and Hilda Discover Raife's Identity.

When Raife had returned to his room after the pleasantest evening of his life, he meditated, as is the wont of impulsive young men after an event. The night was very hot and, in spite of the clear starlit sky overhead, it was sultry. He donned a light cashmere dressing-gown and walked out to the balcony which overlooked the old town. Seating himself in a wicker chair, he lit a cigar and talked to himself, a practice of elderly people and those who are mentally perturbed. He talked to himself softly, in short, disjointed sentences. He muttered, with a curl of his lips: "Gilda! Ha! ha! That was a passing fancy. I was a fool. I'm glad I got out of it as well as I did. It was good of that fellow, Herrion, to steer me out of the mess I was landing myself into. Fancy marrying a 'lady' burglar."

He yawned and relit his cigar which had gone out. Cigars make no allowance for meditative monologues. Continuing, he raised his voice slightly: "Woman-hater! Of course, I'm a woman-hater. Two women have landed me in a hole." Starting from his reverie, he thought he heard a cough. Yes, it was a woman's cough. He stood up and leant over the balcony. As he looked down, he saw a woman with a light shawl over her head. She was on the balcony immediately under his. He only caught a glance as the figure entered the window below, which corresponded with the one that led to his own room. He whispered now, lest he should be overheard: "I wonder who that woman was. Was it Miss Muirhead?—Hilda! I rather like the name. It rhymes with Gilda. But what a different type of girl. And, after all, I must have companionship of some sort."

Next morning the trio met again in the foyer. The ice was broken now. Hotel friendships are very warm whilst they last. Would this one last?

When Raife left, after his story of the wound he got on behalf of a strange woman in Khartoum, Mr Muirhead and Hilda, each holding the card in their hands, the card that Raife had given them, looked at one another with puzzled expressions. Then Mr Muirhead read aloud: "Sir Raife Remington, Bart., Aldborough Park, Tunbridge Wells."

Hilda asked: "Why didn't he tell us he was a baronet?"

Her father answered, reflectively: "Yes, these Englishmen certainly are curious. Now, if he'd been an American judge, or colonel, we should have known all about it in five minutes, and more than we wanted to know before the day was out, and before the dinner was over, we should have hated him for it."

Hilda, too, gazed reflectively, and said, "Yes, that's only too true. Then again, how strange that he should be ashamed of helping that poor woman in Khartoum, and after being stabbed, too."

It has been said of Americans and others that they dearly love a lord. Why shouldn't they? Especially if he is a nice lord. Raife was not a lord, but he was a baronet, and a very handsome and agreeable baronet. Mr Muirhead was an American business man, and it is the habit of such men to go to the "rock-bottom" of things, so he said to Hilda: "I wonder whether he's a new-fledged political baronet, or one of the old families. I expect they've got a Debrett or Burke's Peerage downstairs. I'll look it up in the morning."

When Mr Muirhead looked up Raife's ancestry in the morning, he was not sorry to learn that Raife was descended from the Tudor and Elizabethan Reymingtounes. He had just completed this operation when they met Raife in the foyer. They greeted one another with cordiality, and Mr Muirhead induced Raife, without much difficulty, to join them in an expedition. Hilda was divinely beautiful at the dinner of the previous night. On this morning, riding in the bright sunlight, she was radiant. The reserve of the previous evening was absent and she talked intellectually. At times, her conversation was brilliant, and interspersed with those quaint witticisms that seem only possible to Americans, and are doubly entertaining when they flow from the lips of a pretty American girl. As Raife sat opposite to her, listening to the pleasing flow of her talk, he wrestled with his inclinations, and his mind determined for him that he need not be altogether a woman-hater. There was no harm in enjoying the society of a pretty girl as long as he did not allow himself to become entangled. At the same time, he could not help contrasting this sunny, vivacious young girl, with the handsome, white-haired, courtly father, against the mysterious Gilda, admittedly a "lady" burglar, and her sinister

uncle with the displeasing eyes.

During a lull in the talk, which had been mostly between Hilda and Raife, Mr Muirhead said: "I notice from your card that you are Sir Raife Remington, a baronet. I've been wondering why you didn't mention that fact before."

Raife laughed, and replied: "Oh, I don't know. It didn't occur to me."

Mr Muirhead was characteristically American, a seeker after information or truth, so he added: "I am a very plain American and I am not familiar with the observances or etiquette of English society. I hazard the suggestion that we should address you as 'Sir Raife,' Is that correct?"

Raife was very charmed with these ingenuous people, and this time he laughed heartily until his shoulder reminded them all of the dagger wound. Recovering from the spasm of pain, which had caused Hilda to regard him with the real sympathy which brought the perfect beauty into her lustrous eyes, he said: "I hope, sir, you will call me Remington, just Remington. The intricacies of etiquette are far too tiresome for such pleasant occasions as these. If Miss Muirhead insists on calling me 'Sir Raife' I must submit, but the sooner she will forget the prefix the greater will be my happiness."

Hilda, with eyes that had changed from sympathy to merriment, and with fun that was not intended for flirtation, exclaimed: "Really, Sir Raife, do you mean that? If so, how soon may I call you just 'Raife' only?"

Mr Muirhead raised his eyebrows with a quizzical smile.

Raife replied: "I am not very familiar with your language as you always charmingly and frequently quaintly express it, but I dare to suggest 'right now!'"

Hilda had not imagined that an Englishman, especially an English aristocrat, could be so quick and graceful in repartee, and in spite of her natural self-possession she blushed.

Raife was playing his part as a woman-hater rather badly; but he, at the time, was very confident of himself. Raife was brave enough when they

had returned to the hotel, and he felt that the day's pleasure had, in no sense, altered his determination in the matter. His bravery came to his rescue in so far that he managed to avoid the incident of a dinner together. He pleaded the excuse of his wounded shoulder and retired to his rooms.

Alone, after dinner, he renewed his moralising. He sat again on the balcony, and tried to chase away the fever of love which was more to him than a mere stab of a dagger in the shoulder. He flattered himself that he was still a woman-hater, and that he had only played a game. This was a *divertissement* which should last until his shoulder was healed, and then he would rejoin Colonel Langton and renew his intention of big-game shooting. It did not occur to him that he was "big game," and that he stood to be shot at. It was yet another of those divine nights which are so frequent in Cairo, and Raife's mood was quite contented as he sat on the balcony and surveyed this fascinating city.

Among the cities of the East, Cairo is counted one of the most enchanting. All that Europe has done to spoil the primitive grandeur of the older civilisation, which has existed centuries before us of the West, leaves Cairo a monument of the gorgeous and inscrutable past. Aladdin with the wonderful lamp and all the stories of the Arabian Nights seem to have emanated from such a place as Cairo.

Raife sat and contemplated the mysterious view which confronted him. It was dark, but it was early, and the lights of the crowded cafés flickered below in a serried row of all that counted for speculation. There, in every garb, every conceivable costume, was a mixture of nationalities from every corner of the globe Americans, Europeans, Egyptians, Turks, Arabs, Negroes, and the unfathomable Indians of the remote East. Raife thought of his first experience of the Americans, and it was a pleasing one. Hilda Muirhead was a novel type to him; for, in spite of the fact that fortune had been kind to him in the matter of wealth and family and inheritance, his experience was limited. A strange vein of adventure was his. He was descended from the Reymingtounes, who, in the days of Elizabeth, helped to found the British Empire, and saved our diminutive islands from invasion and conquest by the all-powerful Spaniard of the period. His mind did not travel in this direction. He was an English aristocrat, and possessed all the endowments of a lavish fortune. At the



moment, he was a very ordinary, human young man. He thought he was a woman-hater. Hilda Muirhead was to him an interesting specimen. At least, he flattered himself that was his view of the matter.

Hilda's opinion of Raife is rather hard to determine. She was bred, or, as they still sometimes say in the United States, "reared" in Cincinnati, which is on the border-line of south, and hers was an aristocratic lineage, dating, as far as that country is concerned, to the old colonial days when the present United States were peopled almost entirely by British. The British who fought against British before the Declaration of Independence, were, in a large number of instances, aristocrats. Hilda Muirhead was descended from such "stock."

Raife now gazed at the wonderful grouping of minarets and mosques which were silhouetted against the sparkling sky of deepest transparent blue. Cairo is not a noisy city at night-time, and from his wickered chair everything was seductively calm. This calm was suddenly made more pleasing by the strains of music. It was soft, restrained music, and a human voice predominated. "The Rosary" should, preferably, be sung by a subdued contralto voice to a low-pitched accompaniment. This was the song that completed the breaking of a responsive string in Raife's heart. Hilda Muirhead was singing to her father, but the song floated upwards and through the still, pure night air, reached him. Could it be an accident or was it design? No one shall ever know. It happened. The conquest, for a time, was complete, and Raife felt and knew that only one woman could have sung that song, that night, in that way.

The song was finished. No ragtime melody followed—nothing. The exquisite completeness of the situation and the incident left Raife very doubtful as to whether he really was a woman-hater.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### A Shadow on Raife's Courtship.

Under the pleasant conditions of Raife's life at Shepheard's Hotel, his dagger wound rapidly healed, and he was again able to resume an active life. Hilda Muirhead was trained to that freedom of action which belongs to the American bred. The excessive chaperonage which is customary in Europe does not belong to the United States. Mr Muirhead was an indulgent father, and he, feeling safe as to Raife's credentials, was not in the mood to spoil the sport of young people. He remembered the days of his own courting on the beautiful countryside outside the high cliffs which overshadow the city of Cincinnati. Raife did not even now realise that he was courting. He was perfectly satisfied that he was merely having a good time and amusing himself. He and Hilda made excursions together. They visited bazaars and purchased all sorts of trifles, some of which were cheap and some were not, for an American girl has expensive tastes.

Heluan is about half an hour's train ride from Cairo, and here, sitting in the shade outside the hotel, Raife and Hilda for the first time disclosed to themselves that their attraction for one another was not entirely platonic. The pretty little town pitched in the desert was singularly quiet. They had talked of many things and their conversation was rarely flippant, and they both possessed the faculty of enjoying silence when there was nothing of importance to say. In this remote little town, the silent spirit of the vast desert encouraged this mood.

After some minutes of such contemplation Hilda remarked to him "Raife, tell me what is a woman-hater?" She had accepted his invitation to call him "just Raife" right from the time when that invitation was extended.

Raife started, and his bronzed cheeks suffused with a scarlet tinge. Had she heard him talking to himself that night on the balcony? Was she the woman with the white shawl whom he caught a glimpse of on the balcony beneath? These thoughts crowded on him as he stammered an evasive reply. "I don't know. Why do you ask?"

Hilda, with characteristic candour, said: "I overheard some man talking one night and he said, 'I am a woman-hater.'"

Their conversations on many subjects had been singularly open and free, and Raife now felt that he must disclose some of his career, so with a responsive candour he said: "Hilda, it was I whom you must have heard that night. I felt that I hated a woman, and I had every reason to do so. I had fancied that I loved her, and she, with an abominable old uncle, was conspiring to ruin me. Yes. I was a woman-hater, and I came out here and started on my big-game expedition to get away from women."

Hilda's face wore a puzzled and pained expression, and for some time she made no reply. Then she spoke tremulously. "Raife, I am so sorry. To think I have been in your way all this time, and I thought that we had been such good friends."

He stopped her abruptly. "Hilda! Hilda! don't talk like that. The woman I hated is a wicked, harmful woman. You are the embodiment of all that is pure and beautiful in womanhood. Your sweet influence has softened my bitterness and restored my mind to its normal state!"

Then, archly, Hilda said: "Then I need not run away?"

Impetuously he exclaimed, striking the table with the palm of his hand: "Run away! If you do I shall follow you. Follow you? Yes, to the end of the world, for Hilda you have made me love you."

"Hush! don't talk like that, Raife. In America boys and girls, men and women, can be friends—just friends."

In spite of these brave words, her breast was heaving and her pulses throbbed. "Let us go back now," she added. "This has troubled me and I must think."

Mr Muirhead was waiting for them when they arrived at Shepherd's Hotel, and greeted them with his customary cordiality. As they ascended the stairway together he said: "Remington, I want you to dine with us to-night. Don't refuse. I have arranged for a special American dish, which I am going to prepare myself."

“Oh! What is that? If it’s as good as the cocktails you make, I can’t refuse,” said Raife, laughingly.

“It’s better, much better, my boy. It’s ‘lobster newburgh,’ and, if you don’t like it I shall count you an enemy of my country.”

“My dear Mr Muirhead, I could not be an enemy of the country that produced your genial self and your gracious daughter,” was Raife’s flattering retort.

The dinner that night was served with rather more ceremony than usual, and Mr Muirhead’s dish was a great success. Hilda did not participate so much as usual in the conversation, and her father rallied her on her quietude. At the close of dinner an attendant brought a telegram for Mr Muirhead. He opened it and having read it exclaimed, “Pshaw! that’s a nuisance. Remington, will you excuse me? This calls for attention. I must cable to the bank. I don’t suppose I shall be more than half an hour. Hilda will entertain you.”

When her father had gone, and they were alone, they sat, as was their wont, for some time in silence. Hilda poured out some coffee and handed it to Raife. In doing so she touched his hand. The momentary contact thrilled him and he broke the silence. “Hilda, perhaps I was wrong in speaking as I did this afternoon. Yet it is true. Let me tell you more of the buried incident, and of another tragedy in my life.”

Raife told of his father’s murder and those fateful dying words which warned his son to beware. He told some portion of his association with the mysterious Gilda Tempest. Then he added: “There must be a kink in my own character somewhere, which I have inherited from some of my filibustering ancestors. Or perhaps there is gipsy blood in me. Things seem to happen differently to me—than to other men. But everything appears to be in my favour. I am rich, and I am the head of a distinguished family. Yet I have a wandering spirit, and an uncontrollable desire for the unconventional. I am rudderless and cannot steer a straight course.”

He had looked straight at the carpet during his narration, and his tones had been agitated. He paused and, raising his head, met her eyes gazing

at him with a pained, sympathetic look. When their eyes met neither flinched, nor did they speak for some seconds.

At length Hilda placed her hand on his arm saying, "Raife, I'm so sorry. How I wish I could help you."

Raife sprang to his feet and, holding her hands apart, each in one of his, exclaimed passionately, "Hilda, dear, sweet Hilda! You can help me. I love you madly! Let me love you! Will you be my wife? Will you steer me to a better, a more useful life?"

She dropped her head and fell forward into his arms. He seized her and showered kisses, she yielding. When at length they spoke again she said, "Raife, I loved you from the moment you told us the story of your wound. I had not met such modesty and courage combined before. Raife, dear, I will strive to help you to a happy—yes, and, as you ask me, to a useful life."

When Mr Muirhead returned, Hilda was at the piano, singing Elizabeth Barrett Browning's tender song, "Love me sweet with all thou art."

Raife did not wait for a chance meeting. On the following morning he wrote a note and sent it to Mr Muirhead:

"Dear Mr Muirhead,—I have a matter of vital importance that I would like to discuss with you. Can I see you at once?—Yours very truly,—

"Raife Remington."

When the two men met and Raife had made a statement of his affairs and position, and had asked for Hilda's hand, the old gentleman was visibly affected, and, taking Raife's hand, said "Remington, I like you very much. I love my daughter with all the love of a father for his only daughter. She is more precious to me than my own life. I only had one other love. It was for her mother. She is dead. The man who breaks Hilda's heart kills me and commits a double murder. Remington, I trust you—take her."

Raife's happiness was now complete, and, if his complex temperament would allow him, a great future was before him. In addition to title and

wealth, he had inherited marked ability, allied to a wayward disposition. The future was fraught with possibilities for good or evil. In the battle of his life would the good or evil genius win?

On the night following his betrothal to Hilda, he was strolling among the bazaars seeking to purchase something worthy of his beloved. As is the custom among those picturesque, swarthy traders, who ensconce themselves in dark corners awaiting custom as a spider awaits a fly, Raife was haggling over the price of a trinket, when he became conscious of the presence of a figure watching him. Hastily dropping the trinket, he wheeled round. He was just in time to see a familiar figure slide rather than dart around a corner a few yards away. He was determined at all hazards to capture this uncanny person and demand of him his intentions. Raife chased him around the corner and searched every nook and cranny where he could possibly have hidden. He was too late, his quarry had escaped.

Raife muttered to himself: "Curse that infernal Apache fellow! He dogged me at Nice. He was 'killed' in a motor smash at Cuneo. He was 'drowned' in the Thames at Hammersmith, and now the brute haunts me in the Bazaar at Cairo. What does he want? Why does he shadow me?"

As he sauntered back to renew his haggling for the trinket, the white-bearded and turbaned old Arab was saying to himself, "He must be Ingleesi. All the Ingleesi are mad." It had served a useful financial purpose for Raife, however; for, fearing he might dart off again, this time not to return, he sold the trinket to Raife at his own price, which was just one-tenth of what the old man had asked. That is the way of the Oriental trader. On his way back to the hotel with his purchases, his father's dying words recurred to him, and he was more than ever puzzled by their mystic warning. These were the halcyon days of Raife's short life, and they had been disturbed by this hateful phantom Apache. Raife Remington might be wayward and impressionable, but he was brave and fearless, so he chased the incident from his mind, as he had chased the elusive phantom in the Bazaar.

The sight of Hilda, and the warmth of her affectionate greeting, entirely dispelled this ill-omened cloud. He had quite recovered from the dagger wound now, and the weeks passed by with joyous rapidity. He and Hilda

had made excursions together of many varieties. Into the desert, mounted on big white donkeys. To Memphis, the Pyramids of Sakkárah and the Serapeum, the tomb of Beni Hassan. By the luxuriously-appointed steamer, with its double decks and cool verandas, to Luxor, with its palatial modern hotels, contrasting strangely with the ancient ruins, temples, and monuments of a long-forgotten civilisation. Here was ideal ground for love-making among the whispering palm groves, with a turquoise sky above. Each scene so different from the Western ideal, yet so picturesque. The long lines or files of pelicans fishing on the sandy shore, with the flights of pink flamingoes hovering overhead. The line of native women gracefully swaying to and from the water's edge with their pitchers balanced on their heads. These and a thousand strange sights and scenes, and, over all, the wondrous sky of the East, with its gorgeous sunrises and sunsets, and its weird depths of night. In such an Elysium did Hilda and Raife run the first course of their love, and it ran smoothly. Could such happiness last?

Hilda's life until she met Raife had been happy, a life of sunshine untouched by shadow, save the loss of her mother. She had given her heart to this handsome young Englishman. She had no knowledge of Englishmen, except that gained by brief and flitting visits to London. The wise and practical side of her character prompted her to reflect often in the seclusion of her chamber. Were English husbands like American husbands? Would an ideal lover make an ideal husband? Raife had told her that he had loved another woman. Would that woman enter into his life again and destroy their happiness? Yes, there was misgiving in her mind at times. When Raife appeared and paid her gallant court, all doubts were dispelled, and she abandoned herself to his caresses.

In his spare moments Raife haunted the bazaars hunting for "that Apache fellow." He was determined, if possible, to probe the mystery to its depths, no matter how foul the consequences. Once, on a trip up the Nile, among a group of lascars, he had fancied he saw a man who was not of them, and his mind at the time being slightly distraught, he conceived the idea it might be his enemy. He made straightway for the group, but by the time he got there the fellow was gone.

It had become a frequent practice for Raife to dine with Mr Muirhead lately, and at the dinner-table he announced one night: "Oh, say!

Remington, I've had news from the bank and I'm afraid I must cut short my vacation. I mustn't grumble; I think I've done rather well. But I've worked hard for it."

"No doubt," replied Raife reflectively, and with a deprecatory smile. "You've worked hard for your holiday. My life's been all holiday and my work's to come. You are going to help me, aren't you, Hilda?"

Hilda laughed and retorted: "Surely, Raife, I'll help, but you must promise to obey."

Mr Muirhead joined in. "Ha! ha! I thought that was your part of the marriage contract, Hilda? Never mind, as long as you both obey perhaps it will be better all round. That brings me to what I was going to say. For the second time I have to apologise for being unfamiliar with English etiquette. I don't know quite what is the method of procedure in the matter of English marriages, especially when the bridegroom is an exalted person."

Raife said laughingly, "Pardon me, Mr Muirhead, but you mean I'm an 'exulting' person. I've captured the prize of the world, and I mean to preserve it. If you will accompany me to England, I will take you to Aldborough Park, and introduce you to my mother."

Hilda intervened: "That's just what I'm dreading. She'll hate me, and I feel, I know it. Then I shan't cry, I shall just stamp, and, for the first time in my life I'll shake my fist and say 'I told you so.'"

This assumed outburst produced the merriment that was intended. Raife proceeded. "You'll like my mother, Hilda, and she'll like you. If Hilda consents," he added, looking first at one and then the other, "we'll be married from our town house in Mayfair. We will have a 'real' proper marriage, ceremony, and it shall take place at St. George's, Hanover Square."

"Well! We'll leave all that until we get to Aldborough Park," intimated the prospective father-in-law. "I'm very anxious to meet your mother, and I trust we shall be friends. I believe you, my dear Raife, when you describe your mother's amiable disposition and charms, but I expect, with that modesty of yours, you have under-estimated the grandeur of that Tudor



mansion which is also yours. Ah well, then! It's agreed we start for England as soon as we can."



## Chapter Nineteen.

### Gilda Receives a Staggering Blow.

Gilda Tempest sat in her room in her uncle's well-appointed flat in Bloomsbury. Her face showed traces of great mental strain. There were no lines in her face, but a drawn expression, which her enemies would have called haggard. She held a copy of the *Morning Post*, and was reading it leisurely until her attention was attracted by a paragraph as follows:

"The engagement has been announced of Sir Raife Remington, Bart., of Aldborough Park, Tunbridge Wells, to Miss Hilda Muirhead, daughter of Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead, Esq., President of the Fifth National Bank of Illinois, U.S.A. We understand that the marriage will take place shortly at St. George's, Hanover Square."

Gilda read this announcement three times. The third time she threw the paper on the floor and stamped upon it. Then, clutching her head with her hands, she sank on to a lounge and sobbed violently, exclaiming:

"What have I done to deserve this? Raife! Raife! You were the only one who could have saved me from this hideous nightmare, called life. I have lost you!" Her sobs choked further utterance, and she collapsed, huddled into a tangled mass of broken-hearted, crumpled womanhood.

Good, bad, or indifferent, Gilda Tempest had one affection which had penetrated her heart. Her love for Raife was sincere and with all the temptestuous fury of a jealous woman she now hated Hilda Muirhead.

She hissed the words between her sobs, "Daughter of Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead, President of the Fifth National Bank of Illinois! Why must she rob me of the only hope I had in life?" With a desperate effort she rose from the lounge and, straightening herself to her full height, staggered across the room to a full-length mirror, where she stood rigidly glaring at her own presentment. The face that had been drawn before she had read the announcement in the *Morning Post*, was now distorted, and her beautiful hair was dishevelled. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Passion

was written on the face that now showed lines, lines of rage and rebellion. "I will not obey any more! My life has been a torture. I mutiny! I will win, or I will die!"

The door opened softly. Doctor Malsano stood there with folded arms, and in a still, soothing tone, he said, "Gilda, child. Come, tell me what is the meaning of this?"

Gilda turned on him with an expression fierce and defiant. For many seconds neither spoke. Then, urbanely, the doctor murmured soothingly: "Come, Gilda! Let me help you in your trouble. What is the reason of your distress?"

The girl stood erect, throbbing with intense emotion. Again there was a long silence. Then, bursting into sobs again, she pointed to the newspaper and said, "Read that. See! See what you have done. You have made me a robber, and now you have robbed me of the only desire I have on earth. I will rob you now, for I will kill myself."

The doctor smiled and, crossing the room, picked up the paper. Then he approached the girl and said suavely: "Show me, Gilda. What shall I read?"

The girl seized the paper and pointed to the paragraph. He read it, and his face momentarily lost its ingratiating expression, and he muttered, "Bah! that fool Lesigne." He recovered himself and led the girl to the lounge. Smoothing her hands and gazing earnestly into her eyes he talked. "Gilda! this is unfortunate, and that fool Lesigne is to blame. He is not worth his money. I shall dispose of him if he is not cleverer. He has bungled more than once. I sent him to Cairo. His report to me was incomplete. I did not know it was as bad as this. Gilda, I am your uncle, your guardian. We will alter this somehow. Child, go to sleep now. I will make my plans."

The mysterious power of this man had its influence. He left the room. Gilda, still sobbing but pacified, did the doctor's bidding and slept.

He went to his room and turned the key in the door. He flung himself into a chair and snatched a phial from a table at his side, drinking the full contents. Every indication of benevolence had left his face, and now it

showed signs of torture. He cursed violently, murmuring: "That fool Lesigne! How shall I dispose of him? He bungled at Nice—at Cuneo—at Hammersmith—now at Cairo. I must kill him somehow, for he knows too much." The drug now began to take effect and his features relaxed. Just before sleep overtook him he muttered:

"She must avenge her father's death. The feud must be carried on. I will see to it to-morrow." The doctor slept peacefully in the deep recess of the big arm-chair. The soft light of the solitary lamp reflected from a distance on his face. There was a smile on his face. A close observer would have noticed that it was cruel—sardonic, and that the breathing was stertorous.

When Raife, Mr Muirhead and Hilda arrived at Tunbridge Wells, they decided that they should stroll through the town before driving to Aldborough Park. It was morning-time. There was no hurry, and Hilda had never seen an old-world English town. They entered the motor-car which awaited them at the station and Raife ordered the chauffeur to drive to the "Blue Boar." On the way he said: "If you were English, I would not dare to do anything so unconventional as this, but I feel I know you will like it, and I want you to see one of our old-world posting-houses. It is a fine type of an English inn."

When they pulled into the stable-yard and had dismounted, Hilda was charmed with the quaintness of everything. Mr Twisegood had heard their arrival, and greeted them with all the pomp and ceremony at his command. With the inevitable "Lud a mussy!" which was a prelude to most of his speech, he said, "Why, Sir Raife, we've missed you this many a long day; I'm sure, sir, as 'ow we welcomes you 'ome, sir."

Hilda, after the manner of American girls, walked "right in," and Mr Twisegood had soon invited her to look over the house. Raife took Mr Muirhead into the parlour, saying: "Now, sir, you have mixed some delightful cocktails for me in Cairo; will you allow me to introduce to you an old English coaching drink in an old English coaching and posting-house? Mary!"

In response to his call a rosy-cheeked, buxom maid appeared.

“Bring two glasses of sloe gin and put them in two of those old ‘rummers.’ Bring me the bottle and I will pour them out,” were Raife’s instructions.

There was no time to contrast the merits of sloe gin with cocktails, for Hilda’s voice was heard from the top of the staircase. “Father, oh, do come! Here’s the sweetest old room I ever saw. It’s all white, and smells of lavender.”

They climbed the staircase and entered the room. Whilst they were admiring the whiteness and the quaintness of it, Raife’s mind was charged with the memory of the last occasion when he had been there, and of other curious occasions. He remembered his meeting there with Gilda Tempest, dressed as a hospital nurse; his mother outside the door and Gilda escaping by the secret staircase to the loose box in the stable below. Altogether he was sorry he had brought them to the “Blue Boar.” He crossed the room and looked through the latticed window into the stable-yard. Another car had arrived, and the chauffeur was just starting under the archway. The sight of that chauffeur was strangely reminiscent. His coat was open and betrayed a loose, flowing black necktie. Was it possible—could it be that infernal Apache fellow? What was he doing there? Was there no rest from this vigilant spectre who traced him everywhere?

Raife was maddened with the combination of incidents which had spoilt his return to Aldborough Park with his fiancée. Making an excuse to leave the room, he ran downstairs, and, hastily swallowing a full glass of the abandoned sloe gin, he went into the yard and asked the chauffeur: “Did you see the number of that car that was here just now?”

“No, sir,” came from the man.

He found the solitary ostler and asked him whether he knew the car or anything about it. The man had been feeding the horse in the loose box and had not seen the car.

Raife was a good-tempered man, but he was morose for a while. After the disconcerting incident of the stable-yard, and the somewhat mixed recollections caused by the visit to the white room, Raife decided that it was best to drive straight to Aldborough Park, and postpone the stroll

through the town. As they drove, the apparition of Gilda Tempest in the garb of a hospital nurse, yielding to his caresses in the white room, haunted his mind. He had waived aside the Apache spectre. He could fight him, but he could not fight this apparition.

Hilda Muirhead sat opposite to him. Presently she said: "You look troubled, Raife. Has anything real serious happened?"

Raife forced a smile, and answered cheerily: "No, my dear! I've got a bit of a headache. One isn't used to trains after the quietude of the desert."

Then anent nothing, which was not her wont, Hilda added. "Oh, say! Raife. After you had left the queer white room I discovered a little door behind a curtain. It wasn't a cupboard. I'm sure it led somewhere. It looked so cunning and mysterious. Do tell me where it leads to."

This was the door of the narrow staircase leading to the loose box in the stable, through which Gilda Tempest had escaped when Lady Remington was about to enter the room. Raife winced at the question. The sweet young face of his fiancée opposite contrasted strangely with the face of Gilda, whom he had taught himself to hate. He replied: "Yes. There is a staircase there. I'll show it to you some day, perhaps." The last word qualified the promise, for he had no intention of showing it to her.

The handsome and silent-running Rolls-Royce car sped merrily over the smooth roads up and down the Kentish hills—the roads of "the garden of England," and it was spring time. The sun of an English spring day is not as the sun of the Egyptian desert, but it is sufficient to reveal the tender buds and dainty blossom of the hedgerow. As they sped through the narrow roads that led to Aldborough Park, it made an exquisite picture. It was a picture that was entirely unfamiliar to Hilda. She may have read of a spring day in "the garden of England," but she had not seen one, and the sight of it thrilled her. She noticed the respectful greetings of the labourers, the women and children as they passed. Sir Raife Remington was a respected power in this land of his. He was not an owner of mines and mills in a disaffected area, to be met with scowls or curt nods. He was a landlord of ancient lineage, among tenants whom he and his ancestors had ruled generously, and with mutual sympathy. A downward sweep and a curve in the road brought them to the lodge gates. The

massive wrought-iron gates, surmounted by the Reymingtoune arms, were already open. The lodge-keeper and his family were grouped together, saluting and curtsying to the master of Aldborough on his return from “furrin” parts. Raife greeted them cheerily, as the car swept through and into the avenue with its long line of stately beeches. Hilda’s breast heaved, and her heart throbbed. “I am to be Lady Remington and the mistress of all this,” she said to herself. She thought of the soot-laden city of Cincinnati, in Ohio, where she had spent so much of her time. She compared the crudeness of an American landscape with the finished charm of this historical place, of which she was to be mistress. It seemed too good to be true. The phantom of “the other woman” flitted through her mind, and her pleasure was, for a time, less restrained.

As they emerged from the avenue, the mansion, in all its ancient grandeur, came into view. They passed through the shadow of a group of ancient pines and cedars of Lebanon, a graceful sweep around flower beds ablaze with blossoms brought them to the main entrance, where the stately old butler, Edgson, stood bareheaded to receive them. He was supported by a group of white-aproned and white-capped maids, and a pert little page-boy in livery, with a liberal display of bright buttons.

Mr Muirhead had not spoken much during the car ride, but his quick powers of perception had taken in, at a glance, the majesty of this old Tudor mansion. His keen eyes had observed the extended row of gables, the twisted chimneys, the oriel windows, the massive ivy-clad walls, and the added buttresses. The mind of a banker is trained to values, and as he surveyed, with his quick comprehensive glance, the extensive stabling and greenhouses, with a vista of beautiful gardens beyond, he was satisfied that he had not made a mistake in allowing his daughter to become mistress of Aldborough Park, and any of the estates and property that Raife might own.

He did not know of Raife’s story of “the other woman.” By common consent it had been agreed that it was not necessary to tell him. Youth, in love, revels in secrets, and this was the secret of these young lovers.



## Chapter Twenty.

### The Most Momentous Occasion of Hilda's Life.

Hilda was a fairly practical, self-reliant, American girl. She was face to face with the most momentous occasion of her life as she passed through that line of respectful servants. With a woman's knowledge she was fully conscious of the strict scrutiny to which she was being subjected from under all those apparently drooping eyelashes.

"Where is my mother, Edgson?" asked Raife.

"She is in the library, Sir Raife," answered the old butler.

"Will you announce us, please. No, don't trouble, I will go upstairs myself, if you good folk will wait here," and he ushered them into an old oak-panelled room, with gloomy old portraits that seemed to frown down upon them.

Raife's meeting with his mother was affectionate, and tears were in her eyes as she asked: "Have you brought her, Raife?"

He replied, cheerily: "Yes, mother dear, and I want you to like her and give her and her father a hearty welcome to Aldborough."

In somewhat anxious tones, she said: "I hope I shall, dear, and I promise to try. Of course, they shall have a hearty welcome. She is my son's choice, and I will do my duty." Then, in halting accents, she added: "You are your own master here. Forgive me, Raife, if I appear anxious. I love you very dearly, and with all a mother's love. You are all I have left in this world, and I fear for your happiness." Then, smiling, she again added: "I will not remind you that you were always a brave, darling, wayward boy."

Raife took his mother in his arms and reverently kissed her on the forehead, saying, with a happy laugh: "You dear, darling mother! Never fear for me. I will not forget that I am a Reymingtoune." As he left the room Lady Remington turned to the window and wiped away a tear.



Raife almost ran down the staircase, and, bursting into the room, called out cheerily to Hilda and her father: "Come along, good folks, and meet my dear old mother. She is upstairs and awaits you."

The close scrutiny of the servants was easy to bear. Hilda's heart fluttered as they climbed the wide old staircase and entered the library. Lady Remington was standing to receive them. Raife started to present them. "Mother, this is—"

He did not finish.

Hilda, with a charming impulse, had crossed the room with both hands extended, exclaiming: "You are Raife's mother. Oh, I'm so glad!"

The radiance of this beautiful young girl, the charm of her musical voice, and the evident spontaneity of the action, were magical. The stately Lady Remington took the two extended hands and kissed Hilda on both cheeks, saying: "Welcome, Hilda. I am sure I shall like you, and I hope you will like me. May you both be very happy."

Mr Muirhead stood by Raife's side, viewing this unconventional scene, where the newer West had conquered the stiffer conventions of the older West by a display of genuine frankness. His handsome face was made the more handsome by the pleased smile that it bore. Raife now presented him to his mother with more formality than Hilda had allowed in her case.

When Lady Remington and Mr Muirhead had left the room to stroll around the gardens, Hilda exclaimed: "Oh, Raife. This is all very wonderful. I did not believe such places existed outside storybooks. Your mother is a darling. I love her already. I'm glad I don't have to stamp my foot and shake my fist, as I told you I would in Cairo, if she didn't like me."

Raife kissed her again and again, and through the kisses said: "How do you know she likes you?"

Imitating Raife's accents, she said: "Woman's instinct, dear boy, woman's instinct. Besides, she wouldn't have kissed me so hard if she didn't like me."

The words were hardly finished when he seized her, exclaiming: "That settles it! Then I'll show you I more than like you, I love you!" And he kissed her until she pretended that it hurt.

Now, at last, were Raife's ideals realised, and complete happiness was nearly his. There could be no other spectres or phantoms to cast a shadow over their pure love. Hilda broke away and ran to the other side of the room. The window was open and she looked out, crying: "Oh, do come, Raife, look at that wonderful clump of rhododendrons."

She did not see it, but a pained expression crossed his face as he came to the window, and, placing an arm around her, they looked down together on the rhododendrons. Why could not happiness last? What was the curse that at every turn blighted his fondest hopes? The last time he had looked on those rhododendrons was on that fateful dark night, when Gilda Tempest, the burglar—the burglar whom he had fancied that he loved—slid down the silken rope from the window, and disappeared in their dark shadows. And now the hideous memory came to his mind, to destroy his brightest hopes, his dream of bliss. He turned away, leaving Hilda at the window. He stood lighting a cigarette, and again his gaze chanced in a tragic direction. In front of him was the safe, where his father had shot and killed the burglar, and there, the spot where his murdered father had, in his dying words, stammered out, in choking gulps to Edgson, the awful warning to Raife, his son, to "beware of the trap—she—that woman." Who was that woman and what was the trap? Again, that was the spot where he had nearly shot Gilda Tempest, the second burglar. Why, oh why, had his mother chosen this room in which to receive his beloved Hilda—his fiancée?

Calling to Hilda, he said: "Come, Hilda, let us go downstairs and find your father. They have gone into the grounds, and won't be far away."

They went downstairs, she on to the terrace, and he into a morning-room. He rang the bell and Edgson, the butler, entered. "Mix me a stiff whisky and soda, Edgson, please."

The old man eyed his master quizzically as he handed him the cool drink in a long, sparkling tumbler. "Aren't you feeling well, Sir Raife?"

Between gulps, Raife replied: "Oh, yes, Edgson, only a bit tired, thank you."

"I hope, Sir Raife, you've had a pleasant holiday, sir. We are all very glad to see you back again, sir."

"Thank you, Edgson. Yes, very pleasant indeed."

Then, with the licence of an old servant of the family, Edgson chatted on: "Pardon the liberty, Sir Raife, but we saw the announcement in the *Morning Post*, sir, Miss Muirhead who has just come to stay, sir. She's your 'fyancee,' isn't she, sir? She's a very beautiful young lady, sir, if I may take the liberty, sir. And if that's her father, sir, he's a very handsome old gentleman— Again asking your pardon, Sir Raife, we, in the servants' hall, wishes to offer you our hearty congratulations."

Raife was accustomed to the old butler's garrulity and smilingly replied: "Thank you, Edgson. And will you thank the others for me. If all goes well, we'll very soon be having gay times in the old house."

As he retired towards the door the old man talked to himself. "Ay! That we will, I warrant, if Master Raife has anything to do with it." He had barely closed the door when he knocked and entered again. "Excuse me, Sir Raife—"

Raife was worried and said, rather impatiently: "Yes, Edgson," then smiling a forced smile, added: "What is it this time?"

Closing the door, and looking around with an air of mystery, the old servant almost whispered: "Do you remember the night, sir, in last September, when I saw the light in the library, and I had the house surrounded?"

"Yes," interrupted Raife, irritably. "What about it?"

The old man, once started, was not to be waved aside: "Well, sir, one of the under-gardeners, Hodgson, it was. He was at work among the rhododendrons, and he picked up a long piece of silk rope."

Raife cut him short, saying: "Yes, I know, where is it?"

The old man stared at this outburst, and said: "He handed it to me, sir."

"Did he; and have you mentioned it to anyone, else?"

With a sly look, that bordered as nearly on a wink as his well-trained discretion would allow, the old man replied, "No, Sir Raife, I have the rope. I gave him half a crown and told him to mind that we didn't want no gabblers round Aldborough Park."

"Quite right, Edgson, you acted very wisely. I'll tell you all about it, perhaps, some day."

"Perhaps" is always useful, in qualifying a promise. Producing a sovereign-purse, he extracted two sovereigns and handing them to Edgson, said: "Do what you like with these, Edgson. I suggest you give the man, Hodgson, one."

Edgson bowed low. "Very good, Sir Raife, I'll carry out your instructions."

When the old man had finally gone, Raife mixed himself another whisky and soda, and cursed with a freedom that was not customary with him. This contretemps was more tangible than the others, and it was the fourth incident or train of unpleasant thoughts that had been forced on him, on this the joyful day, when he had brought Hilda to his home. He was not superstitious, but his nerves were affected by the sequence of events. Did they spell disaster?

The spring day had ended in an unusually warm moonlight night. After dinner they walked on to the terrace and sauntered up and down. Hilda's happiness was very great, and unmarred by doubt or foreboding. "The other woman" was not in her thoughts. She surveyed the ornamental flower beds which, even in this light, showed the wealth of blossom. She had already examined, at close quarters, the old sundial and the quaint-carved stone figures around the lily pond, with a fountain in the centre, with sleepy old carp gliding through the dark shadows of its waters. At length, they decided it was warm enough to sit in the chairs that had been brought from some mysterious corner where they had rested through the long winter time.

The silence that was customary among the trio, when conversation

appeared superfluous, was broken by the sound of bells from a church on a hillside some distance away. Softly at first, in irregular clangs of varying notes, they burst into a carillon, ending in crashes, known in some parts as firing. There was an evident intention of joy in the sounds that floated through the still night air until it reached the group seated in the moonlight on the terrace of old Aldborough Park.

Raife broke the silence. "Mother, why are the church bells ringing? This used not to be practice-night, for I've helped myself many a time to clang with those ropes in our old church tower. They wouldn't ring like that for an ordinary week-day service, besides, it's too late for a service. I'll call Edgson. Perhaps he'll know."

The duties of an old family butler are many and not well-defined. Speaking generally he does mostly what he pleases. He is always working in some way or another, and may be safely trusted to guard the interests of his master. It is his own chosen duty to know everything that transpires on his domain, and to know the reason for it. In response to Raife's call, Edgson appeared. "What are the church bells ringing for, Edgson?"

With a beaming countenance, the old man replied: "They are ringing for you, Sir Raife, and, begging your pardon, Sir Raife, they are ringing for the young lady, Miss Muirhead."

Hilda, in astonished tones, exclaimed: "What's that? Ringing for me? What are they ringing for me for?"

Edgson stammered, but failed to make a coherent reply.

"Thank you, Edgson. That'll do," intimated Raife.

The old man retired, chortling to himself: "She's a nice young lady for an American. But, lor', these Americans don't know as much as we do."

When Edgson had gone, Lady Remington explained how those church bells had rung for the birth and marriage of many generations of Reymingtounes during four centuries, and sadly, she added, they had tolled a knell at many a funeral of the family. Then, more cheerfully, smiling at Raife, she continued: "My son, I am glad to say, is very popular

with the bell-ringers, as well as all over the estate.”

Raife intervened. “Please leave that out, mother.”

His mother retorted: “It’s true, Raife, and I am glad of it. Well, Hilda, they are ringing those bells to welcome him back home, and to welcome you to Aldborough as the future Lady Remington.”

Hilda felt very glad and very proud. She had loved Raife for his own sake, before she had known of all these things so wonderful to her, and, indeed, before she knew he was a baronet. She had loved him for his modesty and courage in fighting the Nubian who was beating the woman in Khartoum.

Lady Remington presently said, graciously:

“Hilda, you have had a long and trying day; perhaps you would like to retire early?” Together they walked along the terrace, and Lady Remington took Hilda’s arm, and personally conducted her to her room. There the two women talked awhile. The elderly lady, so soon to be a “Dowager,” and the young American girl who was to hand down the traditions of the ancient family, and, perchance, become the mother of the future heir to the estate. Lady Remington spoke very kindly, but there was a sad note throughout. She told of her anxiety until they had met. She expressed, ungrudgingly, how Hilda’s manner had charmed her from the moment of their meeting. She alluded to the great responsibility she was undertaking. They talked for long, and at length, Lady Remington affectionately bade her good-night, and Hilda was left in privacy to her thoughts and sleep, if it would come.

A maid tapped discreetly at the door, and offered her services. Hilda’s needs were very slight that night, and she was glad when she had dismissed the maid. Attired in a loose dressing-gown she sat in a chair and wondered whether all could possibly be as well as it appeared. Her reverie lasted long. How long she did not know. Rousing herself she made preparation for sleep. Impulse prompted her to have a final look at the fine night and beautiful scene. To view those lovely gardens that were to be hers with Raife. As she approached the window, a slip of paper appeared underneath the door which opened on to a balcony. She

started, but Hilda was not the type of girl to scream or become panic-stricken. She opened the paper and read a typewritten message on a plain piece of paper:

“It is dangerous to rob another.”

What did it mean? Rob another of what? Was it her fancy that the paper had just been placed there, or had it lain there a long time? Perhaps it was a text, or something of that kind. If so, it was harmless and was, perhaps, a crazy fad of some one who had occupied the room before. She studied the fastenings of the window and went to bed without looking at the night as she intended. Then she thought of “the other woman” Raife had told her about. She decided to say nothing about it, as it might make her appear foolish. It was long before sleep overtook her, but her youthful nature asserted itself and she, being very tired, at length slept.

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## Chapter Twenty One.

### Raife's Jealousy Ends Disastrously.

They were happy days at Aldborough Park.

Each succeeding day seemed to complete the sum of Hilda Muirhead's hopes. In addition to motor-car rides to Southport, the scene of Raife's first meeting with "the other woman," Gilda Tempest, Hilda learnt the joys of riding behind good horses. Raife was an expert whip and drove a tandem as an expert. The countryside was again alive, now that the wayward young man had returned to reside among them. There were dinner-parties at the Park, and garden-parties, where Hilda was introduced to the county families, some of whom were amiable, and even affable, whilst others were not. It was a meeting of disappointment to many of the stately dames, and sometimes frigid daughters, that an American woman should have been selected to reign as queen at the beautiful old home, which, hitherto, had been regarded as a stronghold of English womanhood. These matters were, however, of slight consequence to Hilda, whose happiness was supreme in the possession of the love of the handsome and dashing young aristocrat, whom Fortune had thrown in her way.

She captured the hearts of all the men, and a large proportion of the women, with her frank and ingratiating manners. She over-ruled convention without destroying good taste; the tenants and townspeople were completely won over by her cordiality and good nature, which was frequently lavish. The old landlord, Twisegood, added to his evening custom by narrating the free and unconventional manner in which she made her first entry into his house. The old town of Tunbridge had not been so gay since the days of farthingales, frills and furbelows.

Hilda excelled in most sports. At tennis, golf, and every pastime, she led the way, and there was renewed life in clubs that had become, in a sense, rusty for want of what is generally called "fresh blood."

Raife Remington, the woman-hater of a few months ago, had become the most courtly of lovers, and it only needed the joy of marriage bells to



complete the symposium of human delight.

In human affairs, however, it is not to be supposed that Fate will not be fickle, and cast a cloud to destroy the perfection of desire. Jealousy has ever been an accompaniment to love, and it draws no distinction between the yokel and the aristocrat.

When Harold Brookman, in the competition flight from the Hendon aerodrome to Manchester, came to grief and descended rather hurriedly in the home-croft of Aldborough Park, it was Hilda who, by chance, extricated him from a tangled mass of machinery. With a sense of initiative and promptitude she obtained assistance, and Harold Brookman was installed in a room at the Park, pending his recovery from the crumpled state in which he found himself.

It has been customary to surround aeronauts with a halo of heroism, and Harold Brookman's exploits were the talk of the world of flying. It happened, unfortunately, that Harold possessed that form of good looks that belongs to flying men, indicating firm resolve and determination. Further, chance willed it that he should be an American.

Those who live under foreign flags are naturally attracted to their fellow-countrymen when they happen to meet. Hilda Muirhead was supremely happy in her love for Raife Remington, and he in turn, was satisfied in their mutual devotion. It was unfortunate, therefore, that Raife should have overheard Hilda's genuine and impulsive utterance as she and the injured man met for the first time on the terrace after his recovery from the accident.

"Well now, sakes alive, it's good to hear your voice, Mr Brookman. I've been away from home so long, it seemed I was never going to hear a good American voice again."

Raife, who came over on to the terrace at that moment, glared at Harold, and in response to Hilda's invitation: "Hullo, Raife, come and talk to us," he replied, rather gruffly, "I'm sorry, I'm busy just now. Besides, I haven't got a good American voice."

The incident should have been quite unimportant, but nothing is unimportant where jealousy is concerned.

Raife nursed his indignation, and, without announcing his intention, went to London that afternoon. Lady Remington, realising that it was natural that Hilda should be pleased to meet one of her countrymen, especially in such exceptional circumstances, urged Harold Brookman to prolong his stay. In spite of his daring aerial exploits, Harold was very human, and the prospect of enjoying the hospitality of this charming old lady, and the company of his attractive young countrywoman, was agreeable. So he stayed at Aldborough Park, and, when the slight repairs that were necessary had been effected to his aeroplane, he made some trial flights from the croft, which was admirably adapted for the purpose.

It was natural that he should invite Hilda to accompany him on a flight, and she accepted the invitation with enthusiasm. The delights of aviation have been described, and their fascination for the more courageous type of woman is a matter of surprise to many, but it is easily understood by the psychologist. Many days passed, and the wayward Raife sulked at his club in London.

Eventually he returned unannounced, as was his custom. He imagined that Harold Brookman had taken his departure. He chose to drive in a cab that attended at the station, and called on the old landlord, Twisegood, on his way home. The old man greeted him with his customary enthusiasm. The somewhat incongruous couple were really friends, in spite of the difference in their station in life. For a while, Raife's ill-humour subsided, and he greeted the landlord cheerily.

"Well, Twisegood, how are you, and what's the news?"

Without waiting for a reply, he smacked the old man on the back, saying:

"Come along, let's go up to the white room and have a chat. You have what you like, but bring me a bottle of your sparkling cider."

He ascended the stairs and entered the quaint white room. As he threw himself into a chair, and awaited the landlord with the refreshment, his mind, which was already perturbed, reverted to the occasions when he had met Gilda Tempest in that same room. It also brought to his memory the tragic death of his father, and the extraordinary encounter with Gilda in his library in the middle of the night. In spite of these episodes of crime,

this strange girl still exercised an extraordinary fascination over him. The fit of jealousy was still on him, and his prolonged fit of sulking in London had not alleviated it. He sprang from his chair, and paced the room angrily, muttering:

“It’s good to hear your American voice, Mr Brookman. Bah! She’ll call him Harold next.” Twisegood stood in the doorway, holding the silver tray of refreshments. The old man waited, wondering what could have disturbed the young master in this way. Turning on his angry stride, Raife said:

“Come in, Twisegood. Put the tray down and let’s sit and talk. I’m not quite myself to-day, so don’t take any notice of me, if I’m disagreeable.” He took a deep draught of the cider, and added: “What’s the news up at the Park? I’ve been away for a few days.”

Twisegood smacked his lips after a long pull at his favourite Kentish ale, and commenced:

“Well, Master Raife, there be fine times. That American gentleman, he be flying in his machine all over the place, and they do tell me that Miss Muirhead, she be a real plucked ’un, and she goes up along with him.”

Raife did not wait for any more. The demon of jealousy and hate possessed him. He rushed from the room and down the stairs, exclaiming in passionate tones: “I’ll murder the brute, in spite of his American voice.”

Old Twisegood stood mystified by this extraordinary outburst. He descended slowly, wagging his head.

Raife drove up to the main entrance of Aldborough Park, and, as he entered, met his mother, Lady Remington. In a fierce rage he approached her. “Mother! What’s that American fellow doing here? He’s got to go—and go at once.”

Lady Remington was alarmed at her son’s agitation, and endeavoured to pacify him, saying: “Raife, what’s the matter with you? You look positively deranged.”

They went up the staircase together, and the old lady endeavoured to

pacify her son. They entered the library, and, with all the tact and patience at her command, she tried to soothe his wounded feelings. It seemed to her that some terrible streak of ill-fortune had entered into her life, and that of her unfortunate son.

He rang the bell viciously for Edgson. No one else would have answered the noisy peal that indicated the master's rage. When he appeared, Raife demanded: "Where is Mr Brookman?"

The butler replied, with deference: "I think he's in the croft, Sir Raife, with his flying-machine."

In sharp tones, that were unfamiliar to the old servant, he rasped out: "Where is Miss Muirhead?"

The answer came back: "I think she is in the croft, too, Sir Raife."

Raife seized his hat, which he had flung upon the table, and descended with heavy tread to the hall. His powerful frame quivered with emotion. He slammed the door and, endeavouring to control himself, sauntered down the terraces, and entered the croft by way of the stable-yard. He was just in time to hear the buzz of a rapidly-revolving engine, and, looking upwards, he saw an aeroplane winging its way at lightning speed over the turrets and twisted chimneys of the Tudor mansion that was his. At the far end of the croft he descried Hilda, his fiancée, waving a handkerchief to the disappearing airman. His rage knew no bounds. He wanted a gun to take a parting shot at this American, who had intruded himself on his happiness. He waited with folded arms and scowling face, until Hilda had tripped across the soft grass of the croft. She ran straight up to him, and, before he had time to resist, threw her arms around his neck. Her sweet voice, in genuine tones, rang in his ears: "Raife, Raife, how we have missed you. You dear, wicked old thing to have run away from us."

The complete spontaneity of her action, and the earnestness of her conduct, immediately softened his rage. For a while he said nothing. She lingered with her arms still clinging to him, and appealed: "Raife, why, I verily believe you are angry with me. Don't, dear Raife. It will break my heart if you, my hero, my own true love, should be angry with me."

Then, as the cloud gradually removed from his stern countenance, she continued, pleadingly: "What have I done, Raife? Was it only that stupid talk about Mr Brookman's American voice? Why, we always talk that way over there. If you had been away for a long time, wouldn't you like to hear an English voice, even if it was only dear old Edgson's, or one of your grooms' or gardeners'?"

The conquest was nearly complete. Raife's smile was only half-hearted as yet, however, as he said, in a tone of remonstrance: "Yes, but they tell me you have been riding in that fellow's aeroplane."

Hilda laughed merrily as she said: "Of course I have. You dear heart, you don't have to be jealous about that. You great, big, brave darling. You go up in one, and you will find there's no time for courting when you are chug-chugging through the air at sixty to seventy miles an hour. You only want to court the sky, or else the clouds, then!"

He stopped and gazed into her eyes, and a gradual feeling of shame came over him, as it dawned upon him that his jealousy had savoured far more of the plebeian than the patrician. He was receiving a lesson from this pure-spirited, ingenuous American girl. She might be impulsive, but she was frank and pure-spirited. She had given up her love to her hero and she would be true to him.

He stooped lower and kissed her, saying: "Forgive me, Hilda. I was jealous, and I was a veritable fool. There seems to be a kink in my character somewhere, and you have made me ashamed of myself."

The reconciliation was nearly complete, and the first quarrel of the lovers had ended. Would there be any further rifts in the lute, or was there to be perfect peace after this ill-considered hurricane of jealousy?

Harold Brookman sailed through the clouds on his northward journey to Hendon aerodrome. He arrived without further mishap, and was received with acclamation by his comrades of the air. He was not aware of how imminent had been the quarrel between himself and his host, Sir Raife Remington. Nor was he aware of the unreasoning ferocity of the other man's jealousy.

The two lovers wandered, arm in arm, through the gardens. Their

happiness was apparently restored, but Hilda Muirhead had received the first shock to her ideals. The wound was there. Would it be allowed to heal for ever, or would the malignant curse of the long years ago enter into her young life also?

Their progress was slow, and there was little conversation between them. Here and there a gardener saluted them, and inwardly envied the young master and his bride "that was to be." Lady Remington watched them from the library window as, occasionally, they came into view. To her, also, happiness had, in part, returned after the distressing incidents of the morning. Her heart ached for her wayward son, and the future was fraught with danger. She loved Hilda already with a mother's love, and she was very anxious lest Raife's vagaries should destroy the peace of the young girl's life. She descended the broad staircase and met them as they sauntered along the terrace. She was the first to speak, with the intuitive knowledge that, by doing so, she might save embarrassment. She addressed herself to Raife:

"Wasn't it strange, Raife, that Mr Brookman should come from Cincinnati, and be married to Hilda's old college friend? What was her name, Hilda?"

Raife winced, blushed, and stammered: "You didn't tell me he was married."

Hilda replied, with some show of spirit: "No, Raife, you didn't give me a chance. In any case, I don't see that need make any difference. If Mr Brookman, or any other fellow countryman in distress, were unmarried, I should feel it my duty to be civil to them."

Every word, uttered with an accentuated intonation, was a stab to Raife, who cursed himself for his foolish impetuosity.

Hilda concluded: "Yes, Harold Brookman married my college chum, Lottie Devine. They've been married about four years. They have two children and are very happy. Lottie wouldn't be my chum if she were not a nice girl, and if Harold Brookman were not a nice man, he wouldn't have married Lottie. He's over here training for a Transatlantic air race, and I hope he'll win."

Raife Remington's discomfiture was complete.



## Chapter Twenty Two.

### Another Mysterious Visitor in the Night.

Long after Hilda had retired to bed one night, Raife and Mr Muirhead having put on their heavy motor coats, sat enjoying the moonlight, and chatting over the events of the day. There was much to talk of, for there were many questions of settlements, entailing long consultations with lawyers. No reference was made between the two men to Raife's jealousy of the last few days. An interview was arranged with Mr Kellaway, the family solicitor, and the late Sir Henry Remington's old friend. The services of Messrs Gordon and Gordon, the solicitors of Edinburgh, whom the late Sir Henry Remington had chosen to make his will, would have to be enlisted.

Mr Muirhead explained that, whereas, he did not own valuable estates like Aldborough Park, his financial interests in American securities were extensive and sound. He proposed to endow Hilda with enough of his worldly wealth to enable her to play the Lady Bountiful among Raife's peasantry and elsewhere, and, at the same time, support herself in those directions in which every independent-minded American girl is accustomed.

They were talking earnestly in this manner, when Mr Muirhead remarked, "Your servants are about late, to-night. I suppose that's a gamekeeper. I haven't much knowledge of such things. We don't preserve game in the United States—at least," he added, "not to the extent that you appear to do."

Raife glanced in the direction indicated, and he saw a figure creeping stealthily in the dark shadows of the clump of cedars and pines. "That is not a gamekeeper," he said.

He rose, followed by Mr Muirhead, and started in the direction of the retreating figure, which immediately commenced to run. Raife threw off his motor coat, exclaiming: "Heavens! I wish I had my revolver."

Mr Muirhead, as is the practice of many Americans, had his. It was an



old-fashioned Deringer. He handed it to Raife, saying: "Take mine."

Then began a chase, but the retreating figure had, by now, a good start. Down the beech avenue for a hundred yards, then through a gap into a croft, skirting a hedgerow and over a gate at the end, Raife arrived in time to see his quarry jump into a grey car. There were two shots, one at Raife as he clambered over the gate, and one from Raife as the car sped down a side lane that led to the main road. Raife was near enough to see that the figure he had hunted was the omnipresent phantom Apache, who had haunted him half-way over Europe and Egypt.

In the morning Hilda appeared fresh and bright, garbed in a gown of grey tweed. She and Raife were strolling down a long, straight path, where nectarines and peaches were trained against a high, grey-red brick wall, buttressed and lichen-covered on top. On the other side were espalier apple-trees and all those things which go to make an old English garden. They passed through an arch in the wall into an orchard. The blossom of an orchard in springtime is the most inspiring sight that humanity can wish for. There is hope in every petal.

They had talked lightly of many things. Most of their conversation pertained to the beauty of everything around. Hilda had thrown away the paper that she had found under the window of her bedroom, but in spite of her determination to forget the incident, some strange impulse impelled her to allude to it now, although many days had passed. So she said: "Oh, I say, Raife! In my room, the first night I was here, I picked up a piece of paper. On it was typewritten something like this: 'It is dangerous to rob.' It was placed under the window that opens on to the balcony. I suppose some one who stayed there before me was fond of texts and that sort of thing, but it struck me as strange."

Raife's face clouded. The supreme happiness of that spring morning, with its exquisite environment, had vanished. He had practically forgotten his chase after the elusive Apache the night before. He had been happy for a brief period while among his own on a superb spring morning—and he now counted Hilda among his own. Why should he be persistently pursued by a malevolent fate? He laughed at the incident, and said: "Yes, I expect that is so. You see, I have been away so long. I expect mother has had some dear old lady staying here, and she dropped one of her

texts, and the maid did not notice it.”

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Doctor Malsano sat in his den. It might be called a studio, a library, a laboratory, for he was a master of many crafts. A maid knocked at his door and announced, “There is a man named Lesigne wishes to see you, sir.”

“Ask him in,” snapped the doctor.

A pale-faced young man, whose features resembled a combination of cunning and all that is decadent in human physiognomy, entered deferentially. The doctor glared at him.

“Have you bungled again?” the doctor asked.

“No, monsieur! I have not bungled. I left the note, as you told me, under the young lady’s window—the window of the young lady at Aldborough Park. Since then I visited the place again and the man, Sir Remington, he chased me across the park. I escaped and I fired at him. He fired at me. It was difficult. I enter the car. I get away. I am here. I await instructions. I am at your service, sir!” Doctor Malsano took this narration of an exciting incident, as he would have cracked an egg at breakfast-time. The young man stood deferentially, as the old man spoke. “Lesigne, you are a bungler, but you seem to have done this rather well. Go to your room and sleep. I may want you at any moment.”

The young man turned and left the room. He was completely under the control of this Machiavelli—the person whose evil influence controlled the fate of many, whilst he appeared indolent.

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They were merry days at Aldborough Park on the occasion of the wedding of Hilda Muirhead to Sir Raife Remington. Again the church bells pealed, and the tenants and retainers met for a feast, at which there was much rejoicing. Edgson, the old butler, was not there. It was his privilege to be at the house in Mayfair, and there he took his place, honoured in the rank of servitors, which had been swelled from those at Aldborough Park.

Mr Muirhead, with an aptitude which belongs to the aristocrats of the United States, took his part remarkably well. Lady Remington was gracious and kindly to all. These were Raife's happiest moments. His innate modesty made him the more attractive to every one, for there was the dominating personality of a strong, active man pervading the whole situation. Hilda had no doubts. There was no sense of perturbation. She was radiant, happy, and beautiful. She accepted everything. Lady Remington tendered every loving service to her, personally, and she was not allowed time to reflect on the "other woman." The "other woman" was only known to herself and Raife. The others knew not of her. Raife and herself did not speak of this dread apparition which had by some mysterious means crossed the path of their perfect love several times.

A wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, is frequently an impressive ceremony. On the day of Raife's wedding there was more than the usual crowd of bystanders. The church was filled with a smartly-dressed number of society women and men. There were no white horses, but a Rolls-Royce and a Mercedes car took their place. The pages, dressed in the Tudor costume of the period of Edward the Sixth, were there, and a throng of people who represented many grades of the peerage. Hilda was dressed as the best Court dressmakers of London, alone, can dress a woman for an occasion. Raife, with the help of a Cork Street tailor, was immaculate, and his best man was Edward Mutimer, his old college chum, who was with him on the front at Southport when he met Gilda Tempest for the first time.

The ceremony of marriage was complete. The choir had sung. The organist had played the Bridal March from "Lohengrin." It was not an occasion for Mendelssohn's Wedding March. The rice had been thrown and the gaping crowd of onlookers were satisfied. Raife and Hilda were alone, for a few moments, in the Rolls-Royce car. They were the briefest moments of his short lifetime. They did not talk, for there was too much cause for thought.

Smartest among the well-dressed women in St. George's, Hanover Square, was Gilda Tempest. It was not hard, with the confidence and skill which had served her on so many occasions, for Gilda to join the guests who were invited to the reception that followed the wedding. The occasion was quite conventional, and Hilda had left to prepare for

departure on the honeymoon. Every one was chatting merrily and Raife was leaving the room, when, to his intense surprise, he was confronted by Gilda.

“You here?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, Raife. I am here. I must talk to you, I am so sad—so alone. Let me talk to you. It will probably be the last time. Let me talk to you—”

Unobserved by the merry crowd of guests who were bandying commonplaces to the sipping of champagne and various wines, Raife led Gilda into a conservatory which overlooked a drab old London garden—or backyard, with a lilac bush in full blossom.

Raife spoke harshly: “What do you want? Why do you come here, to-day?—to-day of all days! Why do you come here?”

Gilda Tempest spoke. In short, staccato accents she said: “Raife! Raife, I must speak to you. You are the only person in this wide world, to whom I can speak. Let me speak to you. Raife! I must talk, just for the briefest while.”

All the old and strange fascination of this extraordinary girl returned. Raife stood entranced by this absorbing figure. The scene that followed was unparalleled in the history of a wedding-day. Her beauty had returned to her. She was no longer haggard, and there were no lines to mar her face. Her whole soul appealed to him, and, in spite of all the conventions, he responded.

Raife Remington fell—and fell in a most inconceivable manner.

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The time drew near for the departure of the wedded couple. Hilda, looking charming in her travelling-dress, was going round and saying good-bye to the guests. The last farewell spoken, she looked round for her husband. A sudden premonition of something disastrous, something awful, assailed her and communicated itself to the others. Where was Raife? A dozen voices cried out. There was a hurried search in every room where he could possibly be. A few moments of agonised suspense and wonder, and then the horrible truth was revealed.

The bridegroom had disappeared!

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On the cliffs of Cromer were a hat and coat. The local police had been duly informed of the event, and the inspector, with a sergeant, were investigating the circumstances.

“Looks like suicide,” said the inspector. “It’s a good coat, too. Well, let’s get to work. What’s in the pockets? We shall have the newspaper men round presently, and we must be ready for them when they get here. Curse the newspapers! Our job would be much easier if it were not for them. They smell out a tragedy like a fly finds treacle.”

First came a silver card-case, with coronet and initials in multi-coloured jewels, “R.R.” The cards were inscribed “Sir Raife Remington, Bart., Aldborough Park, Tunbridge Wells.” This was a card-case presented by Hilda Muirhead in the happy days of courtship, which ended in marriage.

A letter, in brief, rasping sentences, was the next discovery. “Kismet! Allah wills it. It was not to be. There is a curse in my life, and now I abandon my life.” The letter was not signed.

The inspector tossed the letter to the sergeant, who, having read it, remarked, laconically: “Ten to one, there’s a woman in the case.”

The newspapers were very busy for many days after Raife’s coat and hat had been found on the cliffs at Cromer.

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Again Doctor Malsano sat in his den, and there was an expression of triumph on his face. Gilda Tempest was there, and the doctor spoke soothingly.

“Gilda, we are approaching the end. You played your part very well the other day at the wedding ceremony.”

Gilda shuddered. The full force of the crime that she had been compelled to commit, confronted her.

Case-hardened, and soaked in the jaundiced atmosphere of criminality,

the doctor continued to smile.

“Ha! ha! Remington thought he would escape. Your father killed him and he killed your father. But I am here, and his son shall not escape. Gilda, you must complete the ruin of that young fool. The vendetta is not complete.”

Gilda writhed as the old man murmured these hateful words. She loved Raife, and, in her sane moments, would have given more than her life for him. The baneful influence of her uncle had led her to wield a fateful power over the man she loved.

The scene that followed the disappearance of the bridegroom on the wedding-day in Mayfair does not admit of description.

Lady Remington, chastened by a sequence of sad events, remained stately, and carried off the situation with a grace that softened the difficulties of those trying moments.

The pride of Hilda Muirhead—Lady Remington—had been sorely tried. Mr Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead would have, unhesitatingly, shot Raife Remington if they had met.

Easy is the Avernian descent, and Raife had yielded to the malignant control of Doctor Malsano.

A newspaper sensation does not last very long, and the disappearance of Sir Raife Remington no longer occupied the space that would be given to a Cabinet crisis.

The newspaper man on “a crime story” is not easily set aside. The intelligence of the police is far beyond that which they are paid for. There were certain discrepancies in the circumstantial evidence which went to show that Sir Raife Remington had committed suicide.

A paragraph appeared in the daily papers to the effect that: “It is reported that Sir Raife Remington, who so mysteriously disappeared on the day of his wedding, has been seen in Paris.”



## Chapter Twenty Three.

### On the Trail. The Finding of the Reticule.

In the few minutes that Raife talked with Gilda Tempest in the conservatory in Mayfair, he had made his plans. They were quite discreditable to him, but he was no longer a free agent. Gilda's influence had captured him completely, and it was an influence for evil. Gilda, in turn, was entirely controlled by Doctor Malsano. They met in Paris, and theirs was the *abandon* of a crazy infatuation, over which Doctor Malsano exercised his cunning. The wayward Raife Remington had fallen very low indeed. Hidden away in the Rue Lafayette was a small flat. It was the scene of many ugly situations; but, throughout all, the relationship of Raife and Gilda was purely platonic. He had left his wife on her wedding-day. He had abandoned himself to a scandalous life.

Doctor Malsano's gang of continental crooks worked in varying directions, and there was very little in the way of villainy that did not come within the scope of their operations, and Raife was entangled in them. Malsano, through Gilda, controlled Raife's actions. Only on one point was he firm. He refused to allow Gilda to remain the decoy, and his unconquerable firmness brought him into antagonism with the doctor, who vowed to complete the revenge that was being carried out on the son of the man who had offended forty years previously.

It seemed incredible that a young aristocrat of ancient lineage, endowed with high moral and intellectual courage, could be dragged down to such depths. A crazy infatuation for a woman, who carried trouble in her train, for a woman who had displayed all the traits of inherent criminality, had brought Raife to a moral standard beneath contempt. It is not to be supposed that Raife had surrendered to his downfall without long and bitter struggles. Time and again he endeavoured to emerge from this fearful debacle. On each occasion the pleading of this fascinating woman held him in a closer grip, and the triumph of Malsano was complete.

The Dowager Lady Remington and the new Lady Remington did not believe the newspaper paragraph that stated that Raife had been seen in Paris. In the midst of the overwhelming trouble, the crushing blow to their

pride, these two women solaced one another, and hoped against hope. Neither could believe that the man who possessed such amiable and loving qualities could have destroyed himself, or wantonly disappeared in such cruel circumstances.

A week or more after the disappearance, a maid brought to Raife's mother a reticule which had been picked up in the conservatory in Mayfair. It was very handsome, and contained some visiting-cards on which were engraved, "Miss Gilda Tempest." There was no address, nor did the reticule contain any indication of an address.

The old lady at once sent for Hilda and when she entered the room exclaimed, "Hilda! at last here is some news, although I fear it is not of the best." She then told of the finding of the reticule and the cards contained therein. She quickly added, "We met this young person at Nice, and she has an uncle, a rather evil-looking person. But he can be quite charming on occasions, in spite of an extraordinary swivel eye that produces a most mystifying effect. I always mistrusted them, and now I feel confident they are at the bottom of this mystery."

Hilda at once thought of "the other woman" that Raife had spoken about in Cairo—the woman that had made him a woman-hater. Had she returned and recaptured her lost fancy? It could not be love. Hilda was the only woman, in her own estimation, who could love Raife. The terrifying thoughts that haunted her made her courageous mind act very quickly. Her father's business had compelled his return to the United States, and she was alone in so far as initiative was concerned. Taking possession of the reticule, she left the room, and, in the next few minutes was talking on the telephone to Scotland Yard. It is not to be expected that a detective-inspector should be at the other end of a telephone every time he is wanted. Hilda had heard Raife speak of Herrion, and, with the extraordinary gift possessed by most Americans, she remembered his name and all about him.

"Is Detective-inspector Herrion there?" The reply came softly back, "No, he is not. Who is speaking?"

The title came strangely to Hilda's lips as she spoke into the receiver: "I am Lady Remington. You may remember something about the



disappearance of Sir Raife Remington some time ago.” Then she added, and again the title sounded strange: “Sir Raife Remington is my husband, you know. Well, I have got some news, what you call a clue, and I would like very much to see Mr Herrion, if possible. I shall be at the house in Green Street, Mayfair, all day. I wonder if he could call?” Then, as the receiver clicked into its position, she leant back and thought very hard.

It was late that evening when Mr Herrion was announced. Hilda received him in a small writing-room. The lithe, powerful little man was, for the occasion, immaculately clad, and there was more than a suggestion of the society lisp that deceived so many unsuspecting criminals. Hilda Remington was brief and business-like. She came to the point at once, producing the reticule and telling all she knew about “the other woman.” It was not much, but it was quite enough for Detective-Inspector Herrion. Too well he knew the full importance of that name, “Miss Gilda Tempest.”

Then, in a low tone, he spoke. “Lady Remington, you have, indeed, found a useful clue. I know altogether too much about this mysterious woman, who has entered so much into the life of Sir Raife. Her so-called uncle is one of the most desperate criminals in Europe! He is so clever, and veils his operations under the more active work of his dupes in such a manner that it is very hard to run him to earth. This unfortunate woman is completely under his control, and acts as a decoy in a score of directions. I have never been able to fathom the matter completely, but there seems to be some sort of a feud—a vendetta—between this arch-fiend Malsano and Sir Raife’s family. Malsano leaves no stone unturned to bring about his ruin. He seems to be afraid of murder, but he lays clever plans to entrap Sir Raife and smirch his name. You will excuse me saying so, Lady Remington, but I have a great admiration for Sir Raife. He is a magnificent man, and he holds a name respected in his country. I tried to help him some time ago, and thought I had succeeded when I persuaded him to go away on a big-game shooting expedition on the Blue Nile. Somehow, these fiendish people track him down and cause trouble.”

Hilda Remington had never met a detective-inspector before, and Herrion was in no sense the type of man she had expected to meet. His charming manner and graceful speech gave her confidence. This man—this dainty Scarlet Pimpernel—was a friend, not a policeman. She felt he should, at least, be an Attaché at a Court in Europe. She gazed at him with a

combination of admiration and appreciation. Herrion was human, and he could not fail to be influenced by the beauty of this stricken woman, who gazed at him, seeking sympathy and help in her trouble.

With her eloquent eyes she appealed to him as she spoke: "Mr Herrion. Somehow you inspire me with confidence. Do help me to find my husband." Herrion rose from his seat, saying: "Lady Remington, if that blackguard, Malsano, is to be found in Europe, I will find him. If I can trace your husband, I will do so for his sake, and for your sake, and for the sake of his mother. I will go now and, look up the last records of the gang. Will you give me the number of your telephone? It may save time. And please hold yourself in readiness, as one never knows how long or how soon it may take to unearth a criminal fox in his burrow." When Mr Herrion left Green Street, he took a taxicab to Scotland Yard, and promptly set in motion all the machinery that was possible, in order to find out the whereabouts of Doctor Malsano. His active mind was hard at work, and, under the influence of this beautiful, frank American girl with the pleading eyes and soft voice, he was determined to find Raife and restore him to his bride of a day or so. He was satisfied that Raife was not in his sound mind, or he could not have acted in so scandalous a manner. What ruse had been adopted to lure him away? What fresh devilment was this master of crime at? This should be a matter of international importance. Apart from all these considerations, the pride of his craft had been stirred, and that was not a light matter.

Hilda and Raife's mother sat late talking of the only subject possible to them in the trying circumstances. Hilda had narrated the gist of her interview with Detective-Inspector Herrion. For the first time Raife's mother learnt a very bare outline of Raife's intrigue with Gilda Tempest. It explained many of his moods that had appeared strange. It reminded her of the conversation she had thought she had overheard as she climbed the staircase to the old white room of the "Blue Boar" Inn at Tunbridge Wells. She recalled the fact that the room had appeared empty, yet she felt confident she had heard voices barely a moment before. A rumour had spread, somehow, from somewhere, concerning the silk rope that had been found under the library window, on the night when the old butler, with a fine sense of strategy, had arranged for the house to be surrounded. All these rumours and speculations were disturbing the old lady's mind. Now, there was something almost tangible in what Hilda had

learnt about Gilda Tempest, her uncle, and the reticule that had been picked up in the conservatory.

Now that there was a prospect of something definite being accomplished, Hilda's bravery redoubled, and she supported the old lady with her courage. Raife's mother had at length retired, and Hilda sat alone. It was late and she rang for her maid. When the girl appeared she rather startled her with a request for tea. Tea is an unconventional drink when it is nearly midnight, in an English household. All the conventions had been broken since Raife disappeared, and Hilda cared naught for convention. She was anxious for news that should at least help her to straighten out a situation that had become intolerable. It was impossible to return home to the United States and face the "sympathy" of friends. It was equally intolerable to endure the uncertainties of her present life.

At length the telephone rang. Hilda clutched the receiver. "Yes, this is Lady Remington. Who am I speaking to? Oh, yes, Mr Herrion! Any news? What's that? You think I'd better go to Paris, and you'll try and meet me there. Sure, I'll start right away, to-morrow. I have a house on the Champs Elysées! It won't be hard for you to find me, and I'll take Lady Remington, Sir Raife's mother, with me."

Here, at last, was action. There was hope in action, and she had suffered from inertia.

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## **Chapter Twenty Four.**

### **How the Grand Coup was Planned.**

Raife's flat in the Rue Lafayette, Paris, was, like most things in which Doctor Malsano was concerned, cunningly contrived. Two adjacent flats had been converted into one in such a manner that it was easy to enter by one door and leave by another, each out of view of the other. The people who foregathered there were not of the type that would have been welcome at Aldborough Park or Green Street, Mayfair. Here, for the first time, Raife met the Apache fellow at close quarters. His impulse was to thrash him, but Mr Lesigne had most ingratiating manners, and quickly assured Raife that he was on his side now, and, if it were necessary to do any spying, it would be in Raife's interests, and not on him. For diplomatic reasons, to avoid suspicion, Malsano lived by himself, and rarely appeared in public, as was his custom, preferring to direct operations rather than participate in them. For the same reason it was considered advisable that Gilda Tempest should occupy an apartment by herself.

Raife and Gilda found time to make many excursions together, to Versailles, and various rural spots where there was, relatively, a small chance of being recognised. On these occasions there was a certain charm in Gilda's companionship which enthralled the young man, and he was quite content to suffer the ill-effects of her pernicious society. At night, in varying disguises, they spent much time at cafés, sitting at the tables of the boulevards, sipping wine and liqueurs. That waywardness, that Raife's mother had been afraid of, asserted itself, and his love of adventure led him to participate in some of the minor divertissements that the doctor planned for his own profit. In no circumstances did Raife share in the plunder of these coups, nor would he allow Gilda to act as decoy, or take active part in them. What he did was with a sense of abandoned devilment. The restraint that Raife was exercising over Gilda was weakening the doctor's power over her, and he determined that it was time for him to bring about a still more complete downfall of his enemy.

Among the members of the gang who called at Raife's flat when occasion

required, was an ex-officer of dragoons, who had seen some service along the north coast of Africa. He was an extraordinary mixture of braggadocio, and a certain suavity of manner which had considerable charm until it was discovered that, whereas he could swear like a trooper, he did lie like a pickpocket. In the natural sequence of events he and Raife fell foul of one another. The quarrel culminated when Raife discovered him at the flat paying court to Gilda, who resented the attentions that were being forced upon her. The combat did not last long, for Monsieur Denoir was not versed in boxing, and his incompetence was soon made evident to him. It was a dangerous thing for Raife to quarrel with a man of this type, but the whole conditions of his recent life had made him quite reckless of consequences. Monsieur Denoir, with a fine exhibition of graciousness, made amends, and awaited time and opportunity. He did not have to wait long, for he found a ready ally in the doctor.

Gilda and Raife were seated at their favourite table at the Café Buonaventure, on a fine warm evening. Through a mirror Gilda's keen and practised eyes saw a little old gentleman with grey hair and spectacles surveying the tables. He was at the far end of the room. They were seated among a crowd of merry, talkative folk, outside the café.

"Quick, Raife, we must go at once," she said, suddenly. With an exhibition of that cat-like speed that she displayed when she slid down the silken rope from the library window at Aldborough Park, she threw a coin on the table, and slid around a corner, half dragging him with her.

"What's the matter, Gilda?" he asked.

"That little 'old gentleman' at the end of the room was Herrion, and I expect he's looking for you."

It had not occurred to Raife before, that he was being hunted, not by an "Apache fellow," but by the smartest detective on the Continent. His pride returned to him for a while, and he felt inclined to go and shake Herrion by the hand—if Herrion would let him. That was indeed a question. Who would shake him by the hand now?

By a devious route they returned to the flat. Raife was very silent. Gilda

played and sang to him, but it was of no avail, his moodiness lasted for the rest of the evening. She rallied him on his silence and, crossing the room to where he sat on a lounge, said: "Raife, tell me why you are so silent. Did that man Herrion upset you?"

He answered, wearily: "Yes, he did. It has set me thinking, Gilda. I fear I have not done the right thing. It is not right that I should be 'wanted' by a man like Herrion."

Then Gilda was alarmed. This man was all she wanted to atone for a life of misery. He must not be allowed to reflect. He was hers and must remain hers.

A knock at the door terminated the scene for a time. Lesigne entered and presented a note to Raife from Doctor Malsano. Whilst he was reading the note, which was lengthy and called for a reply, she beckoned Lesigne into another room. She spoke hurriedly, and with authority.

"Lesigne, you must get this notice into the *New York Herald*, Paris edition. I don't know how, but you must do it—pay for it—do it, somehow."

The little Lesigne bowed and smiled. "Mams'elle Gilda, what you tell me, that I will do, if it cost me—yes, if it cost me my life. I am devoted to your service."

Gilda was well aware of the little man's devotion. Whilst he was speaking, she was writing:

"Sir Raife Remington and party left Marseilles to-day, en route for the United States."

She smiled as she handed it to Lesigne, and gave him some money to meet any contingent expense. Herrion would not miss this announcement, and it would serve to put him on a wrong trail.

Doctor Malsano's letter was important. It planned a big coup at a house in the Avenue des Champs Elysées. Paris is a city of fine streets and avenues, and amongst the finest is the Avenue des Champs Elysées. With a clever mixture of flattery and badinage, Malsano lured his victim into taking a leading part in this crowning work of his folly. The houses of

the Champs Elysées are rich, and this brave stroke called for all the organisation and resource of the band. Malsano himself would direct operations. Denoir would be there, and to complete—Gilda would be there. It was difficult and called for agility, courage and daring. Raife, who possessed all these qualities, was to take the leading and more active part, but he would be well supported.

Detective-Inspector Herrion was in his room in the obscure little Hôtel Villon. He was reading the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*, and his face wore a puzzled expression. The notice that attracted his attention read as follows:

“Sir Raife Remington and party left Marseilles to-day, en route for the United States.”

He reflected: “It’s fifty to one Remington didn’t put that notice in. I wonder who did. It would take a lot of people in. It’s clever enough for that blackguard, Malsano. After that note on the cliffs, at Cromer, he isn’t going to tell us he’s alive, at least, not in that way.” He took the telephone and rang up the *New York Herald* office. He told them who he was. Then he read the notice and asked: “Where did you get that notice from?”

An American voice replied asking him to hold the wire. “The man who took it in is not on duty, but the office-boy describes him as a little man, dark, with a broad-brimmed hat, and a big, black necktie. He looked like an artist from the Quartier Latin.”

Herrion answered: “Thanks, that will do. I think I know the man.”

Replacing the receiver he smiled rather than spoke to himself. “I thought so. It’s Malsano’s work, and the man who took it was Lesigne. I must find an excuse to arrest that fellow Lesigne. Malsano’s been too clever for me, up to now.”

Mr Herrion took his hat, strolled along the boulevards, and made his way to the Prefecture of Police. Here he described Lesigne, and put it, tentatively, that he was a dangerous fellow, and that whereas he, Herrion, could not actually prove anything criminal against him, at the same time, he was satisfied that the man was an active agent among a bunch of criminals. His arrest would serve a useful purpose. The arrest was not

made, for Doctor Malsano had other uses for Lesigne, and he had left Paris.

The plans for the burglary in the Champs Elysées were progressing, but they formed no part of Raife's work in the matter. He was to supply the "agility, courage and daring" on the night, and he readily consented to act such a part. In his present mood he was prepared with all those qualities. In the meantime, he had leisure to enjoy Gilda's company. After the fright when Gilda had seen Detective-Inspector Herrion, in his disguise, at the Café Buonaventure, they avoided the boulevards, and took trips into the country. They preferred the country that has been made famous by the great French painters, Corot, Daubigny, and the other founders of the Barbison school. Here, among a simple peasantry, in wood and dale, they wandered together, this extraordinary couple, who, starting with all that beautiful man and womanhood could endow them with, were both involved in crime. The crime was not of their making, yet they were almost unconsciously made the active agents.

It was evening time on one of these happy days, and the sun had set, leaving the fierce glow of brilliant orange, merging into crimson and carmine, flecked with lilac clouds, until high in the heavens, the azure depth was tinged with emerald. Low in the foreground, subdued, yet vivid siennas, with scarlet poppy blossom here and there, welded into deep purples, silhouetted against the vivid sky. They sat on a knoll among the wild flowers, hand in hand, and, as is often the wont of lovers, they spoke little. Raife's past life was, for the present, a closed book. He thrust thought from him, and appeared content as long as he was in Gilda's company. She appeared to have no memory of the past as long as he was with her. A tiny cabaret was generally to be found conveniently near, and supplied all the refreshment they needed. The mystery of this handsome couple, who seemed to be in a semi-trance, caused speculation, as the worthy woman, or sometimes her husband, brought the simple food and wine that made their meal. Then, outside the cabaret, they would sit at a table, sipping coffee and liqueurs until the moon shed her silver light and wrapped the world in the subdued glow that has ever been the chosen accompaniment of lovers. Then, late back to the flat, where Gilda sang French love-songs, until the arrival of the braggadocio Denoir, or a missive from Malsano brought them back from the quiet delights of their prolonged love-dream.



At night, away from the influence of Gilda's fascinating presence, Raife's mind was subject to storms of emotion. Where was he trending? To what further depths was he descending? His thoughts sometimes led to Hilda—his wife whom he had deserted. His mother's dignified and beautiful face would appear to him as in a vision. His happy boyhood days at school, college, and Aldborough Park, crowded before him.

Then he remembered the fateful day when he had met Gilda, with his friend Edward Mutimer, on the front, at Southport. The unexpected reunion at Nice. Then the nightmare haunted him. The nightmare of that night when he had discovered Gilda as a burglar in the library at Aldborough Park. These and a score more of incidents rushed to his mind. Surely no man's life in so short a time had been crowded with so much incident. Through it all, he was compelled, by some fate, to act against his convictions. What was this evil genius that haunted him? He would break away whilst there yet was time.

On such a night he had retired early, and was restlessly tossing on his bed when he heard a familiar voice outside the front door of the flat. The concierge was talking to some one, who was enquiring for a Monsieur Désigné. The concierge said: "There is no one of that name living here, sir, and I do not remember seeing any one such as you describe."

"Who lives in this flat?" asked the voice.

The concierge replied: "Monsieur Vachelle, sir, a very quiet gentleman, sir. I think he is from Brittany, sir. He speaks French, but with a slight provincial accent."

Monsieur Henri Vachelle was the assumed name under which Raife was living in the Rue Lafayette.

Springing from his bed, he hastily pushed aside a sliding panel, by means of which he was able to see, through a combination of mirrors, who was in the passage. It was true. He was not mistaken. The concierge was talking to Detective-inspector Herrion.



## Chapter Twenty Five.

### The Beginning of the Revenge.

Raife's mind was already perturbed by the reflections it had undergone. The thought of Herrion searching for Lesigne outside his flat was more than he could tolerate. Hastily dressing, he let himself out of the door of the second flat, and, calling a taxi, drove to Doctor Malsano's rooms.

No one can, for long, be the associate of thieves without acquiring their cunning. To play eavesdropper is a common precaution on the part of thieves. Raife overheard the doctor talking to Denoir, and the words had a sinister sound in his ears. It was the doctor speaking. "You shall have your revenge all right. I will see to that."

Denoir's high-pitched voice responded. "Yes, doctor, that big brute of an Englishman hit me. Hit me with his fists. I would like to shoot him." Raife rang a bell, and the doctor opened the door. There was surprise on the face of the ex-officer when Raife confronted them. To show surprise was not part of the doctor's stock-in-trade. So, with urbanity, he greeted his guest. "Ah, Mr Vachelle! You are a late visitor. Come in. To what do I owe the honour?"

Rather curtly, Raife replied: "I must talk to you to-night, doctor. Something has occurred."

"Does it concern Mr Denoir?"

"No. It does not concern him."

"Very well, I bid you good-night, Mr Denoir," said the doctor, turning to that gentleman.

Mr Denoir retired, bowing low to both the other men.

"Come in, Mr Vachelle, or, as I may call you in here, Sir Raife," added the doctor.

Raife was not in the mood to be trifled with and snapped out: "I'm not so sure of that. I heard what you said to that fellow Denoir just now."

"*Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*" was the doctor's motto in business, and unctuously he replied: "Ah! that was nothing. The fellow was in a rage. You thrashed him and, naturally, he doesn't like it. I only said that to soothe him. He knows a good deal, and can be dangerous, you know. So I thought it best to soothe him. You quite understand, don't you, Sir Raife?"

Somehow, when the doctor undertook to explain a thing away, it all seemed so reasonable. Raife's anger vanished in a smile. When they were seated and some of the doctor's best cognac had been produced, Raife told how he had heard and seen the detective, Herrion, outside his door, and overheard him ask for Lesigne.

The doctor raised his eyebrows and smiled.

Raife continued: "I must give it up. I can't have that clever little fellow hounding me down. It will never do. You can bet he's been hunting for me all over Europe. He'll find me, too."

The doctor soothed the young man, as he would soothe a child. "Now, Sir Raife, don't you fear. They call him a Scarlet Pimpernel, don't they? He's been trying to catch me for a dozen years. He hasn't succeeded, and he won't. Ha! ha!" Raife left late and returned in a taxi to his flat. Once he was in his room his spirit returned to him, and he determined, at all costs, to abandon his hateful life and return to his own form of civilisation.

In the morning he was busy packing a bag, and the floor was strewn with articles of clothing, when Gilda entered, exclaiming: "Hullo, Raife! Packing up? Where are you going?"

His mood remained determined, and he almost snarled: "Going? I've gone, it seems to me. Gone clean to the devil! I'm going away."

Then came the appeal from Gilda. The appeal that he never could resist, and to which he had fallen so many times. She did not use many words. Her utter helplessness was the strong point of it all, and her complete love and trust in him. He sat in a huge chair with his head between his

hands gazing vacantly in front of him. She knelt and looked up into those eyes that could glare with the fierce hate of passion, or shed the soft lovelight. She looked for the lovelight she had met there before, and she did not look in vain.

What Doctor Malsano had, for once, failed to accomplish, Gilda had again achieved. Raife was again conquered by the mysterious influence of this beautiful girl. He sprang to his feet and caught her in his arms, showering kisses on her forehead. "Gilda! Gilda! It's got to be. Whilst you live I am yours. Yours to live and die for—to sink or swim for you."

Then, hysterically, he almost shouted: "To hell with Herrion! I have started, and I will finish." He slung each article of clothing back in its receptacle, and, turning to Gilda, said more restrainedly, "We will go into the country to-day, and revel in our flowers and trees, our sky and clouds. I am giving you my life. It is yours. My reason tells me that it can only end in trouble. I don't care. Life is only possible to me when you are around. Now let us hie into the country and 'make the most of what we yet may have to spend, before we, too'—"

Gilda threw herself into his arms and closed his lips with her hands—those clever, skilful hands, clever in crime, yet dainty as the hands of a queen of beauty. "Don't quote those lines. They make me sad, and I want to be so happy with you to-day, Raife. Where shall we go?"

Raife considered for a moment and then said: "It will be running a risk, but I feel like running risks to-day. Let us go to Versailles. Let us watch all the splendour of those glorious days when men and women were brave in love and war, and dared to fight for honour."

A pang went through him as he made this last allusion to "honour." What was honour to him now? He had surrendered to a code, that did not count for honour among his equals, or those even who once might have been his inferiors. Quick disguise was a part of the craft of the career he had entered upon. He felt that he was less a buccaneer than a privateer. He was plundering the enemy, less for his personal profit than from the spirit of sheer devilment and adventure. There was no profit to him outside Gilda's companionship.

On the brightest day of early summer they walked in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles. The most perfect palace of the days when regal prodigality made France at the same time the most luxurious and the most poverty-stricken country in Europe, displayed its splendour in the full flood of warm sunshine. The fountains played and sparkled in a torrent of spray that suggested myriads of tiny precious stones. The air was perfumed with thousands of blossoms from the ornamental flower beds. The groups of statuary stood in bold relief, here against the warm blue sky or silver cloud, there against a bank of stately trees, rich in luxuriant foliage. Gay throngs of smartly-dressed women and children, mingled with the more sombre-clad men, who promenaded with all "la joie de vivre" that belongs to the Parisian on his own happy hunting ground.

Raife and Gilda, safe in their skilled disguises, mixed with the crowd, and revelled in the beauty and movement around them.

The day of the grand coup was approaching, when the house in the Avenue des Champs Elysées was to be plundered. This was to be the day when Raife was to exhibit those qualities of "agility, courage and daring" for which, in the language of Malsano's insidious flattery, his countrymen were famous. Both Raife and Gilda felt that their next adventure was fraught with danger, and Raife had consented that Gilda on this occasion should assist in the operations. They therefore made the most of this joyous day at Versailles. It was evening when they decided to seek one of the more obscure little cabarets for their dinner. They were sauntering down an avenue with the long line of trees throwing shadows across the close-cropped grass, when a motor-car passed slowly by in the heavy rows of traffic. Raife looked at the occupant and recognised the Baroness von Sassnitz, his mother's friend, whose jewels Gilda almost succeeded in stealing from the safe in the library at Aldborough Park. The baroness looked hard at Raife, but apparently did not see through his disguise.

The conflict of emotions which had disturbed him during the night and morning were now renewed. Gilda did not notice the car which carried the Baroness von Sassnitz, but, with the intuition of a lover, she did notice that Raife's manner had drifted into an abstracted mood. He was thinking of his own anomalous position. He was worshipping at the shrine

of a woman, whom he had detected in the act of “burgling” the jewels of his mother’s friend. This took place in his own house, and not only had he allowed her to escape, but he was here to-day with her expecting to participate with her in a crime of a similar nature. The situation was hideous, and all the glory of the day in Versailles had departed.

They walked along in silence for a while, until a passing taxicab arrested his attention, and he responded to the interrogative look of the driver by hailing it. They entered the taxi, and in response to the driver’s query, “Where shall I drive, monsieur?” he said: “Drive to the cabaret of ‘Le Sans Souci,’ at the end of the avenue, then to the left and about three miles along the main road. You will see it by a group of poplars, with a garden and a small lake in front.”

They had been to this little inn before, many times, and the blue-skirted and white-aproned old landlady was accustomed to their visits, and understood not only their simple requirements, but their desire for quietude. They sat in the simple, clean little room, with its dainty curtains, white napery and shining cutlery. The old lady fussed around for a while, chatting gaily, as is the wont of French landladies, whilst the bouillabaisse, cutlets, and superlative omelette were being prepared.

An old punt lay moored at the foot of some moss-covered steps leading to the lake. Pond lilies and chickweed covered the surface of the shallows that led from the steps to the deeper waters, which flickered in the moonlight. Clumps of willows and ash threw their shadows and reflected in the silent pool. Raife took the pole of this ancient, dilapidated punt and steered Gilda, who sat on a narrow seat of rough wood that constituted the only seat. Her neat, grey costume, rich in material but unobtrusive, contrasted with the ashen grey-greens of the old roughly-hewn punt. Thus, he standing up piloting the strange craft, took her over the warm waters, until reaching a deep pool which his pole failed to fathom they came to a rest. Here and there a ghostly bat, after the manner of a miniature vampire, flickered through the air, chasing the lesser night insects whose hum harmonised with the rest of that which was silence.

It was sylvan and, to an extent, idyllic, but it is dangerous to be associated with crime. The convert to crime, religion or politics, is ever

the more impressionable, and his actions are liable to outstrip the prudence of those who have inherited the traditions of their creed. The gloom of the situation and the memory of his lost hopes and ambitions attacked Raife, and, in a despairing mood, he perceived the ease with which all could be ended by a quick death in this silent pool. He and Gilda together could complete the tragedy of their lives. He had no doubt that she would consent to suicide, but why should he consult her in the matter? To overturn the punt would be easy, for it was a crazy old craft, and thus, entwined, they would sink to the depths, to oblivion.

A voice came across the water. It travelled clearly, as sound will travel across still water on a quiet night. "Monsieur, votre dîner! C'est servi!" It was a cheery, pleasant voice, and it announced that dinner was served.

Neither seemed to hear the call. Gilda was in one of her trance moods, and Raife was contemplating his last crime. Again the voice floated over the lake. "Sir, your dinner is served." Raife awakened from his own trance and leisurely paddled the punt from the deep pool to shallow water. From the depths of his determination to the shallows of the commonplace he was aroused by the old landlady of the cabaret, who was calling him back to life. His resonant voice responded, as he poled the punt vigorously to the moss and lichen-covered steps. "Eh bien, madame, nous arriverons au moment." His voice was quite cheery now, and he hailed her again. "All right, we shall be there in a moment." He moored the punt to the rusty iron ring attached to the steps. Gilda seemed to be still in a trance mood. Raife answered the old lady's pleasant railleries. The taxi-driver, who had been ordered to wait, peeped into the room unobserved from the kitchen. His wants had been served. To himself he reflected: "Queer couple. They're handsome enough, but there's some trouble, I wager."

Dinner was served, and death was forgotten.

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## Chapter Twenty Six.

### Sir Raife Remington, Baronet and Burglar.

The joy day of Versailles and all the phantom pleasures had passed. There was only one thing which confronted the gang. It was a momentous occasion. Raife had sold his soul, his very being, and a crime was to be committed. He was to take the leading part—although he did not really realise it—in the burglary in the Avenue des Champs Elysées. They were sitting in the flat in the Rue Lafayette. Gilda was at the piano. Raife was reading some English newspapers. Malsano was present, and Denoir occupied a chair. To-morrow was the day, or rather the night, that had been decided upon for the great event. To-morrow Raife was to descend to the depths of complete crime. It was idiotic. There was no reason for this thing; but he was impelled by a super-dominant fate, which led him to a doom that he could not avoid. They talked together and discussed all the details of the affair.

Gilda left the piano and sat silently in a chair. Her mind was not her own. Simply obedient to the will of Malsano, she sat there and looked at Raife, the one person who could carry her from the throes of her present situation. Raife was inert. He, in turn, was influenced by the environment that had dragged him down from a high position to that of a common criminal. Malsano smiled with the confidence of a practised criminal. He and Denoir had made their compact, which Raife had overheard at the doctor's rooms in the Rue Malmaison. With the completeness that accompanied all his plans, Raife Remington's sacrifice was assured. A paragraph in the newspaper arrested his attention. It read: "The mysterious disappearance of Sir Raife Remington, Bart., about a year ago has led to curious complications. It will be remembered that his hat and coat were found on the cliffs at Cromer. In a pocket was a letter apparently written by the demented man, from which it was inferred that Sir Raife Remington had committed suicide. A paragraph appeared in the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* some time ago to the effect that Sir Raife had left Marseilles for the United States. Detective-Inspector Herrion ascertained that this paragraph had been inserted by a member of a gang of continental thieves, and there seems little doubt that either



the baronet has committed suicide or had been made away with. His estates are extensive, and there are complications as to the disposition of affairs. It is rumoured that Aldborough Park, which has been the residence of the Remingtons—or Reymingtounes—since the days of the Tudors, will be placed on the market for sale, as the ancient baronetage becomes extinct with the death of Sir Raife Remington.”

This paragraph brought consternation to, his mind, and he realised, for a while, the madness of his present actions. Malsano’s presence was sufficient to alter the trend of his mind, and the result was a volte-face. He crossed the room, and, taking a number of liqueur glasses and a decanter from a sideboard, he filled the glasses. Having handed one to each person, he drank in a debonair manner, “Success to the crime to be committed.”

Malsano smiled, Denoir sneered, and Gilda winced. There were four rings of an electric bell in the room in which they sat. They were sudden, sharp, and in rapid succession. The three men leapt to their feet and made for the extra exit of the flat, which gave no indication from the outside as to the nature of the door. This danger signal had been well-planned by Malsano for emergencies, and all details of their actions had been rehearsed.

Gilda was left alone, and in the briefest while was transformed from a beautiful, smartly-clad girl into an aged old crony, wearing the blue cotton frock and white apron of female servitude. She had barely completed the transformation when the outside bell rang three times. Snatching up a broom she went to the door. Lesigne was there, breathless. In hurried accents he gasped: “Are they here, or have they gone? That fellow, Herrion, the English detective, has chased me. Let me get through and away quickly, Mams’elle. I hope I have not frightened you, but it is serious.”

Gilda had closed the door quickly and accompanied Lesigne to the second exit. As he went out, leaving Gilda alone again “to face the music,” he bowed gracefully, and, with his hand on his heart, whispered: “Mams’elle, your disguise is perfect. Even so you still look beautiful—charmante!”

'Twas thus that Gilda fascinated all whom she met. Alone in the flat, and with danger threatened and imminent, she remained cool. Quickly she disturbed the furniture and made it evident that she was sweeping and dusting the room. Within a minute there was a ring of the bell. It was the ring she had expected and prepared for. The "old crony" opened the door and was confronted by Detective-Inspector Herrion and another man.

The other man announced brusquely: "I am an agent of the police. You have a man here—a man named Lesigne. Never mind what his other names are. I must enter. Where is he? Tell me at once, or it will be the worse for you. Yes, understand me, for you!"

Gilda trembled with well-simulated apprehension, stammering: "Mais non, monsieur. There is no one here, sir. This is the flat, the apartment of Monsieur Vachelle. I am alone cleaning things up. But enter, sir, and you shall see."

The two police officers entered, and searched each room. In the front room Herrion noticed the four liqueur glasses and the decanter of cognac. Approaching the table on which they stood, he held one of the glasses in his hand and remarked: "So, so! Monsieur Vachelle has had company. Who has been visiting Monsieur Vachelle? Tell me."

Gilda protested. "Indeed, sir, I do not know. Monsieur Vachelle left early this morning. I think he has gone to the country, but I do not know for certain. Why should he tell me? I am only here to clean and tidy his rooms. Monsieur is a gentleman. I am only a servant."

Herrion stared hard at her, saying: "So, Monsieur Vachelle is a gentleman, is he, and you are only a servant?"

Gilda felt the force of that penetrating glance and stooped to dust a chair. The two police officers were eventually satisfied that Lesigne was not there, and as for Monsieur Vachelle, they knew nothing of him, good or evil. So they departed. When they were gone, Gilda collapsed and wept bitterly.

The pleasures of Paris continue through the day and night. London is almost a silent city at night, except for the traffic of Fleet Street, the Post Office, and the Markets. Paris is the pleasure city of the world, and it

does not attract notice that people should be wandering about in the small hours of the morning. There are not many dark hours in a June night in Paris. The Avenue of the Champs Elysées is wide, and well lit. On the night of the contemplated burglary there seemed to be more than the usual number of people about, and the four persons who sauntered up and down, awaiting opportunity, were kept on the tenterhooks of expectancy rather longer than they had expected. At length there was a lull in the traffic, and Raife entered the basement and prepared a scaling ladder that was to take him to the window immediately over the great front door of the mansion. It was a corner house, and Raife's objective point could only be reached by means of a gutter-pipe which would lead him to a second window around the corner. It was a dangerous undertaking and called for all those qualities that Doctor Malsano had flatteringly endowed Raife with. Hand over hand he crept, swaying to and fro from the insecure and creaking pipe, which threatened to give way under the weight of twelve stone of lithe and living humanity. As he progressed bit by bit, foot by foot, his mind reverted to Gilda's dexterous descent by the silk rope from the library at Aldborough Park into the shadow of the rhododendron bushes. Beneath him were spiked railings and stone pavement. The thought of Gilda, at that moment, unsteadied his nerve, and his grip of the pipe, loosened. He glanced round, and, across the road, he descried Gilda, with hands clasped and a look of terror which was plain to him under the flickering light, in spite of the disguise she wore. Almost at his feet were Malsano and Denoir, and the expression on their upturned faces was even more manifest. It was malevolent, a cynical sneer. With a final effort Raife reached the window and lowered himself to the balcony outside. By a well considered arrangement the window yielded easily. The bolt slid aside and he entered.

This, then, was the situation. The owner of Aldborough Park and 20,000 pounds a year, had entered the mansion in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, in the dead of night as a common burglar, impelled by the fascination of a woman who exercised a mysterious: and baneful influence over his career.

Always in the background was the malevolent figure of Doctor Malsano, that evil-omened person, who thrived on villainy and lived on crime.

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## Chapter Twenty Seven.

### The Origin of the Vendetta.

There are few institutions or customs more difficult for the Anglo-Saxon to understand than the vendetta, or blood feud. Southern blood and gipsy blood are hot, fierce, and passionate to an extent inconceivable to those of the north. The "dour" Scotchman may be vindictive, but he is not guilty of the vendetta, which pursues its revenge for an injury or insult through the generations, until one or other of the parties has completed the vengeance. The cause of the vendetta is frequently slight, and it is safe to assert that women are frequently the prime cause of the "blood feud."

That Raife Remington should have been pursued by the malevolent Malsano on account of an indiscretion of his father in his youthful days, would seem incredible to the northerner living in these enlightened days.

By an extraordinary coincidence, the causes that led to the series of calamities that destroyed the career of the handsome and otherwise brilliant young baronet, dated from a visit paid by his father to Egypt, the land of antiquity and mystery.

Raife's father, Sir Henry Remington, in the days of his youth, paid a visit, with his college friend, Mr Mountjoy, to Egypt. They were the wild, joyous days of youth, and adventure took them at night to a section of Alexandria, which, at that time, was dangerous to strangers. There remain to-day in most southern and eastern towns and cities, certain quarters where the hated "*feringhee*" or foreigner, can only intrude with grave risk to himself.

In a house of questionable repute, Sir Henry and Mr Mountjoy encountered an Oriental girl. With the impetuosity of youth, Sir Henry was immediately enamoured of this beautiful gipsy, with the large, oval, lustrous eyes, the olive skin tinged with a colour that alternated between a rosy pink, and a flush of scarlet.

Seated apart in the reeking apartment, lit by oil lamps, where a midnight entertainment was in full swing, this lovely gipsy and young Sir Henry

courted one another with the play of eyes instead of words, for neither could understand the language of the other. The sensuous beauty of the girl enthralled the young English aristocrat, and the blood in his veins, already heated by the unwonted liquors that he had consumed, coursed rapidly. The girl's responsive glances told him plainly that his advances were not unwelcome. Around the girl's neck was a silver chain of fine and delicate workmanship. Attached to the chain was a small Egyptian charm, in the form of a statuette of the goddess Isis, wearing on her head the royal sign, the orb of the sun, supported by cobras on either side. On the back, from head to foot, were inscribed the tiny hieroglyphics, which recorded certain cryptic words associated with the worship of that mythical deity of thousands of years ago. Sir Henry noticed the trinket, and, raising it in his hands, examined it. The gipsy snatched it away with angry gesture, a fierce light entering her large oval eyes, whilst the rosy pink that had suffused her olive cheeks swelled to the flush of scarlet that betrayed her savage nature.

The azure blue of a young, handsome Anglo-Saxon's eyes, that look steadfastly, fearlessly, yet passionately, into the dark and sparkling depths of an untutored gipsy girl, are a proper antidote to that girl's flash of anger. Sir Henry gazed at her, and the girl's eyes fell beneath his searching, passionate gaze.

With an impulse, as rapid as was her sudden rage, she took the chain and charm from her neck, and, with a motion signifying secrecy, handed it to him. Sir Henry kissed it, and, in doing so, kissed her hand.

At intervals around this central, circular apartment, were several doorways, covered by rich and heavy curtains, of that rare oriental colour, which our manufacturers strive, with mixed success, to imitate, at prices that suit the varying purses of a bank clerk or a greengrocer, a stockbroker or an art student.

Before each doorway stood two huge Nubian Arabs, robed in kaftans of yellow ochre-coloured silk, and wearing fezes of that deep, luscious red, the colour of which does not find a name in the student's paint box. The dark skins of their countenances were marked by the long slashes, which formed the cicatrices on each left cheek, and denoted their tribal marks. Scarlet slippers contrasted vividly with the dark brown of their huge

sinewy legs. Stolidly and impassively they stood sentinels at these doorways, which led to passages, open to the sky between high walls of mud and plaster, above which the stars twinkled brilliantly in the deep-blue unfathomable vault above. The illimitable space, and all that is unknown of eternity, suggested that these stars were a countless myriad of eyes, looking down on this weird collection of humanity.

Gambling in various forms was one of the allurements of the place, whilst music, more or less barbaric, and Oriental dancing added to the supposed attractions. The whole scene would appear as a page from the Arabian Nights, with the added incongruity of a few people in European costume.

At one of these doorways appeared a tall, swarthy woman, of lighter colour than any of these Arabs, yet betraying her southern blood. She was accompanied by a weak but good-looking young man, and a tall, dark man, with extraordinary eyes and a sinister appearance. The woman nudged the sinister man, and both saw Sir Henry kiss the girl's hand. The trio crossed the apartment, and the woman seized the gipsy girl roughly by the hair, and hauled her through one of the doorways, whilst the two dusky Nubians held the curtains aside. The hitherto impassive blacks momentarily relapsed, and their stolid faces were lightened by a broad smile, revealing glittering white teeth, and their yellowish white eyeballs rolled in a fiendish manner.

Who shall say what was the fate of the beautiful gipsy girl, who had lightly parted with the treasured talisman of the goddess Isis to the blue-eyed and fair-haired English aristocrat? The English were at that time, in Egypt, the most hated of all *feringhees*.

Thus, in a gay and innocent spirit of youthful courtship, commenced the feud, the vendetta, that was to lead to such a tragic influence on two generations of the "Reymingtounes."

From this apparently trivial incident there followed the events that led to the murder of Sir Henry, and the degradation of his son, pursued and attacked by the unrelenting hatred of the denizens of this Oriental inferno.

In harsh but cultured tones, with a slight foreign accent, the sinister man

said to Sir Henry:

“Return to me, at once, the charm that young woman handed to you.”

Sir Henry reclined on the richly-covered divan among the silken cushions, and leisurely surveyed the two men who confronted him. Slowly, and with the aggravated drawl of the period, he said: “By what right do you make that request?”

The retort came fiercely.

“Give me the charm at once, or it will be the worse for you, sir.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” and, rising from the divan, Sir Henry displayed the full six feet of his athletic frame, asking: “What do you propose to do?”

With an oath, the sinister man with the weird eyes, muttered: “Sacré! These Englishmen, with all their arrogant pride, are curs!”

He said no more for a while, for Sir Henry’s straight left shot between those mysterious eyes and the sinister man fell back on the floor senseless. The debauched but still good-looking Englishman exclaimed weakly: “Oh, I say! That won’t do, you know.”

Two of the Nubians rushed from their sentinel posts, and a white-bearded old Arab, who appeared to spring from nowhere, gesticulated wildly. Sir Henry was seized from behind—but for the briefest while.

The art of boxing may be world-wide in its present application, but the English taught the world this and many other sports. At the period under consideration offence and defence were mostly conducted with lethal weapons. The rapidity of a straight left, followed by a swift upper cut, therefore had its advantage at the outset of a contest. Two burly Nubians lay sprawling, from the process, over the body of the sinister white man. The debauched Englishman, knowing more of the game, and realising his own incapacity against this young giant, skirmished at a safe distance in the rear.

The game was too hot to last long, for “the English arrogant pride” to

which the sinister white man had alluded, would not allow Sir Henry to run away. Instead, he drawled: "Are there any more?"

Yes, indeed, there were many more, and this time he was more securely seized, and the struggle appeared hopeless. These Orientals and debauched Europeans hunted in packs. An Englishman on a spree needs only a companion to join in the fun, and does not want a bodyguard.

Sir Henry was tiring, and almost overpowered, when the thought of his chum, Mountjoy, flashed through the brain that lay behind his bruised and half-battered head. For the first time in that inferno, there rose from lusty lungs, a hearty "Yoicks! Tally ho?" the musical call of the English hunting field.

The effect was immediate. Through one of those curtained doorways, past a Nubian who had been left in charge by those more actively engaged in the fray, there rushed a whirling ball of lithe humanity, charging for his goal as he had never charged before on the Rugby football field.

It was Mountjoy, late half-back of his school—Marlborough.

Staggered by the impetus of this fierce and sudden onslaught, the Nubians relaxed their hold on Sir Henry for a moment. "Back to back, Harry," called Mountjoy. "Now, then, both together! There may be some more of our fellows here!"

Then their two voices rose in approximate unison, "Yoicks! Tally ho!" and the unequal fight began again.

At this period the tactics of boxing were unfamiliar and quite disconcerting for a while.

"Make for the door, Harry," shouted Mountjoy, and bit by bit they reached the exit, as, in response to a "view hallo" two more Englishmen rushed through to the rescue.

The mixed gang of Arabs, Nubians, and European scallawags did not want to kill at first, but these reinforcements of hated "Ingleesi" struck



panic into them, and, in a flash, four or five knives were buried into these last two men, who had so bravely responded to the call of their countrymen in these hideous surroundings.

During the lull, Sir Henry and Mountjoy staggered through the exit, and fell to the ground unconscious, some distance away from the scene, to which they had been lured from their hotel by a wily denizen of the quarter—"to see some fun." As they lay there, safe from further molestation from the satellites of the "casino," for these people did not pursue their victims beyond their own portals, a lithe figure crept stealthily up to them. It was Thomas Tempest, the father of Gilda, the man who had skirmished safely in the rear during the fierce fight. Bending over Sir Henry, he felt in his pockets and extracted the talisman of the goddess Isis. He would have taken more, but footsteps on the plank walk scared him, and he faded away into the darkness.

The man with the weird eyes, whom Sir Henry had knocked senseless, was Doctor Malsano, then in early middle age. The gipsy girl was his daughter, and the gipsy woman was his wife. Gilda Tempest had no relationship to him. Her father, Thomas Tempest, had fallen low in the social scale, and was entirely under the influence and control of Malsano, who utilised his services for his own ends and profit. He proved to be the means of carrying out the first portion of the vendetta, by shooting Sir Henry at the time of the burglary at Aldborough Park. The bitterness of the feud was increased by the youthful folly of Sir Henry, who, in a spirit of devilment, and with the aid of a native, succeeded in meeting the gipsy girl again. The gipsy mother discovered them, and there was a frenzied scene of rage, the woman cursing the young man with all the fierceness of her race.

Sir Henry treated the matter lightly, until, years afterwards, he was made aware of the fact that the incident had not closed, and that vengeance was on his track. The woman, on her death-bed, had extracted a willing vow from her husband, Malsano, that he would continue the vendetta to the bitter end.

The tortuous workings of the mind of this abnormal man led him to carry out his purpose in his own strange way. In his fiendish efforts, he had dragged down a girl, Gilda Tempest, the daughter of another victim of his

criminal nature. Noble by nature, and beautiful by disposition, this handsome young woman was doomed to a life of degradation and crime. Her last act was to sacrifice her life for the man she loved with the strange passion of a warm nature.



## Chapter Twenty Eight.

### Conclusion.

Malsano's revenge was nearly complete. Raife was now hopelessly compromised. Creeping stealthily along a wide corridor, he entered the library, and, with all the skill of a practised hand, proceeded to rifle a bureau, from which he extracted notes and gold. Revelling in the weird excitement of the debasing act, he ascended the staircase and opened the door of a bedroom. It was a large room, and he was confronted by a subtle perfume which was familiar to him. Where had he met that perfume before? He stood on the threshold and hesitated to perpetrate a further dastardly deed by entering the room. It was evidently a woman's room. Raife was not acting of his own volition. A strange impulse controlled him, and he was not master of his actions. There was a soft light diffused, revealing a large, four-poster bed, curtained in pale-tinted dimity. He would have thrashed another man to the point of death for such an action as he was now guilty of. He approached the bed, and pulling aside the curtain, was stricken with horror to behold his wife—Hilda—sleeping peacefully. He stood spellbound, unable to move. A ghastly look of terror and remorse spread over his face. His handsome features were distorted, and his athletic frame convulsed with emotion. The events of the last year crowded his mind in a tornado of shame. Each second was an eternity of mental suffering. Hilda lay there sleeping, her beautiful cheeks suffused with a delicate glow. Her soft brown hair fell in clusters, enhancing the charm of this picture of exquisite innocence. Raife's mind was in a state of hideous torture. Slowly and softly he withdrew from the room, and descended the staircase to the library. He approached the bureau—his wife's bureau—that he had ransacked and restored the stolen money. With bowed head he crossed the big hall, dazed and scarcely realising his actions. Softly he opened the front door and passed out into the night.

Before Mr Reginald Pomeroy Muirhead returned to the United States he fulfilled his compact, and Hilda was endowed with a substantial fortune. The stress of events had told heavily on her and Raife's mother, and, yielding to Hilda's persuasion, she had rented the furnished mansion in

the Avenue des Champs Elysées. She had hoped by means of such a distraction to take their minds off the great trouble.

Detective-Inspector Herrion was a forceful man, and he had set himself the task of finding Sir Raife, the missing baronet, and he had determined to run Malsano to earth. On the day when he had let Lesigne slip through his fingers at Raife's flat in the Rue Lafayette, Herrion had a suspicion that he had been tricked by the innocent-looking old lady, who appeared to be so busy dusting out the apartment. The flat of Monsieur Henri Vachelle was, therefore, kept under observation, but Malsano was far too wily a criminal to be trapped easily, and the flat was deserted, and the gang found fresh quarters. Herrion was sitting in his room at the obscure little hotel that he affected, when the telephone bell rang, and, removing the receiver, he took a message to the effect that, if he would call at the prefecture, there was important news awaiting him.

Hastily seizing his cap he started off. He was met at the entrance by a sergeant, who said: "Quick, Mr Herrion, I think we have found your missing 'Baron.' Will you come with me to the Avenue des Champs Elysées?"

A taxi was in waiting, and they entered together. As the car sped towards the famous avenue, the sergeant told Herrion: "We have received a letter, an anonymous letter, saying that a burglary will be committed to-night. The house is surrounded, and it is believed that it is the gang of that old scoundrel, Malsano. The gang is in force, and the cunning old reprobate has chosen the house of the Lady Remington, who is the wife of your missing 'Baron.'"

Herrion was agitated, a weakness the astute detective-inspector seldom allowed himself to indulge in. With a smile of satisfaction the little man remarked: "If that man Malsano is in this affair, for heaven's sake don't let him escape. It looks as if we are in for a breezy time. I have no power here, and I can only look on. Mind, the men of Malsano's gang do not hesitate to shoot. Shoot on the least suspicion. Shoot first, not to kill, only to maim."

The gendarme looked at Herrion, raising his eyebrows as he said: "Monsieur Herrion, we shall not be unprepared, and we are not so tender

with our criminals as you gentlemen across the Channel. We, too, have a score to settle with this Malsano. And there is that mysterious woman, who seems to be all over Europe at the same time. I have seen her. *Ma foi!* She is clever and beautiful, too.”

Herrion replied: “Yes, that is the woman who is responsible for Sir Raife Remington’s downfall. She is dangerous, but she is the decoy and the tool of that doctor fellow Malsano.”

The taxi stopped at a corner of a street, and they alighted. Seven or eight men were secreted in doorways, and the sergeant approached each one separately and gave them whispered instructions. Herrion’s position was quite unofficial, but his popularity with the police of Paris had made it possible for him to be present and to participate in the “round-up,” or coup.

The author of the anonymous letter to the Paris police was Doctor Malsano. Raife had ceased to be useful, and his influence over Gilda was conflicting with the doctor’s plans, and he must be sacrificed. Murder was only resorted to by this criminal scoundrel when all else failed. It would be a triumph to secure Raife’s conviction and sentence to a long term of imprisonment. The terms of the vendetta would be carried out when this hated British aristocrat was a convicted felon.

In a dazed state Raife left the mansion and walked into the night. Gilda, from her point of vantage, had watched and waited in a state of anxiety from the time when her lover had made his perilous climb along the gutter-pipe to the window through which he had effected his entry. She had felt, during the long wait until he reappeared, that she would willingly have changed places. She was accustomed to these hazardous undertakings, and was inured to the disgrace of it.

Malsano and Denoir watched at a distance, each malignantly confident of their revenge.

A green light flickered in the Avenue, and two cars from opposite directions dashed up to the house that Raife had just left. Four gendarmes alighted from each car. At the same time the front door of the mansion was opened, and two men-servants *en deshabille* appeared.

Raife was called to his senses, alert after the dazed condition which followed the sight of his wife, lying asleep on the bed in the room which he had entered as a common burglar. Two gendarmes made a dash at him. He drew his revolver, but hesitated to fire. He was a burglar, but some sense that remained in him prevented him from shooting a gendarme who was only doing his duty. A piercing shriek rang through the night. The gendarme, who felt he was threatened and in danger, fired at Raife. From a doorway where Gilda had watched the commotion, she rushed with an astounding swiftness, and was in front of Raife before that shot was fired. Two gendarmes had thrown themselves upon Raife, but, with a violent effort, he threw them off and flung his revolver far into the roadway. He dashed to Gilda and caught her in his arms, kissing her with a fierce passion. "Gilda! Speak to me, Gilda! Why did you try to save me? My life is of no account and yours is so precious."

The police stood around, inert, as the dying girl, in short sentences, gasped her last message. She told him of the doctor's treachery. How he had betrayed Raife to the police, and that she had only learnt of the plot when it was too late to stave off the disaster. "They did not tell me until you had entered the house. It was then too late."

Gilda's last words were: "Raife, I—I was not altogether bad. I loved you dearly, Raife. Your father killed my father. There was the feud—the vendetta, and we were made to suffer. I should have made you a good and honest wife if we could have escaped the evil influence. God has willed it otherwise. Good-bye, dearest. Kiss me. Then, then—go to Hilda. Forget me. Go—go to Hilda and be happy. If you think of me, Raife—pity me!" Gilda Tempest, the mysterious, beautiful girl, trained to crime, with the nature of an angel, collapsed and died in the arms of the man into whose life she had entered with such disastrous effect.

In the presence of this pathetic scene the agents of police stood in silence, and with what appeared to be respect. At length the sergeant approached Raife, saying: "This is indeed a tragedy, monsieur, but it remains my duty to arrest you. Monsieur Vachelle, you are under arrest."

Three gendarmes approached. Raife bowed. A silent figure had been an onlooker at this scene until now. Detective-Inspector Herrion approached the group and, speaking to the sergeant, said: "This gentleman is Sir

Raife Remington, the missing baronet of whom I have spoken to you. This is the house of his wife, Lady Remington. I don't think there can be any charge. A man is not a burglar in his own house. With deference may I suggest that we enter the house. Lady Remington will make the necessary explanations."

The scared men-servants were still there and, acting on Herrion's instructions, they carried the lifeless form of Gilda Tempest into the hall that was now brilliantly-lit. Raife re-entered the house where, a short while before, he had stealthily entered as a burglar. The crowd of people which had collected outside in answer to the revolver shot and general commotion, were dispersed, and the Avenue des Champs Elysées resumed a more normal aspect.

Detective-inspector Herrion approached the sergeant and whispered: "I will be responsible for Sir Raife Remington. You may trust me. Don't let that fellow Malsano escape you. He is not far away you may be sure."

The sergeant smote his chest, exclaiming: "That will be all right, Mr Herrion. I have arranged for that. You may be sure he is safely with us by now."

The arrest of Doctor Malsano was not effected without trouble. He and Denoir, when they heard the revolver shot and Gilda's piercing shriek, made their way down the side street to the motor-car that was waiting for them. They were too late, however, for the doctor was, in a sense, hoist with his own petard. In his anxiety to complete the downfall of Raife and secure his arrest, he had given the police such warning that their plans had been skilfully laid with a view to capturing a gang, not an individual. There was a fight before the two desperadoes were secured, and the old man fought with the fury of a wild cat. Denoir was more easily overcome. Malsano was at last secured, but his resource almost served him to the end. Producing a phial he nearly succeeded in swallowing its contents of poison. A quick upward blow sent it flying in the air. It fell to the pavement and broke in a hundred pieces. The long life of crime had told on the man. Wanted in half the cities of Europe, his conviction was assured. He did not long survive. The life of a gaol broke his nerve, and within a few months he was dead, but before he breathed his last he confessed the story of the vendetta. Soon after the tragic events that led to his return to

normal life, for which his distinguished lineage had intended him, Sir Raife heard in silence the account of Malsano's extraordinary villainy. By instinct a criminal, Malsano had exerted all his talents in the direction of grievous harm to every one with whom he came in contact.

Unforgivable, unforgettable, was the crime of sacrificing the life of a beautiful, sweet-dispositioned girl to his cruel desire for ill-gotten gain. Equally cruel was the malignant spirit in which he carried on the brutal vendetta against a man who had not harmed anybody, and was not born at the time when the crazy curse was made.

Hilda had been disturbed by the commotion in the house. She donned a dressing-gown and descended the staircase with all the courage of her highly-strung, self-reliant nature. The scene that confronted her was calculated to try the nerves of the strongest. The dead girl, Gilda Tempest, was lying on a lounge in the centre of the brilliantly-lit hall. Her upturned face was of marble whiteness, and its beauty was intensified by an expression of perfect peace. Raife, Hilda's husband, knelt before the lifeless figure. Two gendarmes stood silently by. Herrion crossed the hall and advanced to receive Lady Remington and addressed her.

"Lady Remington, there has been a terrible tragedy. Will you allow me to talk to you somewhere, and explain matters to you? I think I can make a difficult situation more easy."

Hilda was quite calm and, addressing one of the men-servants, said: "Turn on the lights in this room. Come in, Mr Herrion, and tell me."

With all the grace of manner that belonged to this wonderful detective, Herrion told the story, as he had unearthed it. He pleaded for Raife, and told of the extraordinary influence of the man Malsano. He explained that Raife had not been responsible for his actions, and that a mad, uncontrollable passion had led him into the most dangerous situations. He added: "Lady Remington, in the interests of all, let me most earnestly beg of you to try and overlook these distressing occurrences. Sir Raife has not been conscious of the happenings of the past year. He will be very ill. Slowly he will recover, and let me hope that the sadness of these events will be forgotten. If you will leave it to me I think I can hush matters, and smooth things over. The woman, Gilda Tempest, gave her



life for Sir Raife. I hope, Lady Remington, you will not think I exceed my privilege, when I beg of you to forget the past.”

Lady Remington looked at this extraordinary little man. Then she held out her hand to him, saying: “Yes, Mr Herrion, I will do as you suggest. You have done me a great service, and I will never forget.”

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Seated on the terrace at Aldborough Park were two people, Raife’s mother and Hilda. Playing on the lawn was a flaxen-haired little boy, with three puppy dogs. They were rolling over one another after the manner of puppy dogs and children, with that complete *abandon* and understanding that belong to them. A tall, handsome man, with white hair and slightly bent shoulders, surveyed the scene with a satisfied smile, smoking a pipe the while. The events of that terrible year when Raife Remington was dragged from his high estate to that of a common criminal were forgotten. The fever that followed the last scene of the tragedy had left him white-haired and slightly bent, but he was still a fine and aristocratic figure. The child who played with the puppies on the lawn was the heir to the baronetcy and Aldborough Park.

Detective-inspector Herrion had displayed all his tact and cleverness in preventing a renewal of the scandal that followed Raife’s disappearance and, in the moments of his leisure, he was a welcome guest at Aldborough Park.

Raife’s mother, the Dowager Lady Remington, had recovered much of health with the return of the normal conditions of life.

The brave American girl, Hilda, who had borne her troubles with courage and resource, was happy.

When she knew the terrible conditions of Gilda Tempest’s life, she felt sorry for her dead rival, but, she would have been more than human if she had not a sense of relief that the shadow of “the other woman” no longer cast a gloom on her husband’s life.

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The End.

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