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Anthony Cade Signs on

“Gentleman Joel!”

“Why, if it isn’t old Jimmy McGrath.”

Castle’s Select Tour, represented by seven depressed-looking females and three perspiring males, looked on with considerable interest. Evidently their Mr. Cade had met an old friend. They all admired Mr. Cade so much, his tall lean figure, his sun-tanned face, the light-hearted manner with which he settled disputes and cajoled them all into good temper. This friend of his now—surely rather a peculiar-looking man. About the same height as Mr. Cade, but thickset and not nearly so good-looking. The sort of man one read about in books, who probably kept a saloon. Interesting, though. After all, that was what one came abroad for—to see all these peculiar things one read about in books. Up to now, they had been rather bored with Bulawayo. The sun was unbearably hot, the hotel was uncomfortable, there seemed to be nowhere particular to go until the moment should arrive to motor to the Matoppos. Very fortunately, Mr. Cade had suggested picture postcards. There was an excellent supply of picture postcards.

Anthony Cade and his friend had stepped a little apart.

“What the hell are you doing with this pack of females?” demanded McGrath. “Starting a harem.”

“Not with this little lot,” grinned Anthony. “Have you taken a good look at them?”

“I have that. Thought maybe you were losing your eyesight.”

“My eyesight’s as good as ever it was. No, this is a Castle’s Select Tour. I’m Castle—the [Pg 2]
local Castle, I mean.”

“What the hell made you take on a job like that?”

“A regrettable necessity for cash. I can assure you it doesn’t suit my temperament.”

Jimmy grinned.

“Never a hog for regular work, were you?”

Anthony ignored this aspersion.

“However, something will turn up soon, I expect,” he remarked hopefully. “It usually does.”

Jimmy chuckled.

“If there’s any trouble brewing, Anthony Cade is sure to be in it sooner or later, I know that,” he said. “You’ve an absolute instinct for rows—*and* the nine lives of a cat. When can we have a yarn together?”

Anthony sighed.

“I’ve got to take these cackling hens to see Rhodes’s grave.”

“That’s the stuff,” said Jimmy approvingly. “They’ll come back bumped black and blue with the ruts in the road, and clamouring for bed to rest the bruises on. Then you and I will have a spot or two and exchange the news.”

“Right. So long, Jimmy.”

Anthony rejoined his flock of sheep. Miss Taylor, the youngest and most skittish of the party, instantly attacked him.

“Oh, Mr. Cade, was that an old friend of yours?”

“It was, Miss Taylor. One of the friends of my blameless youth.”

Miss Taylor giggled.

"I thought he was such an interesting-looking man."

"I'll tell him you said so."

"Oh, Mr. Cade, how can you be so naughty! The very idea! What was that name he called you?"

"Gentleman Joe?"

"Yes. Is your name Joe?"

"I thought you knew it was Anthony, Miss Taylor."

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"Oh, go on with you!" cried Miss Taylor coquettishly.

Anthony had by now well mastered his duties. In addition to making the necessary arrangements of travel, they included soothing down irritable old gentlemen when their dignity was ruffled, seeing that elderly matrons had ample opportunities to buy picture postcards, and flirting with everything under a catholic forty years of age. The last task was rendered easier for him by the extreme readiness of the ladies in question to read a tender meaning into his most innocent remarks.

Miss Taylor returned to the attack.

"Why does he call you Joe, then?"

"Oh, just because it isn't my name."

"And why Gentleman Joe?"

"The same kind of reason."

"Oh, Mr. Cade," protested Miss Taylor, much distressed, "I'm sure you shouldn't say that. Papa was only saying last night what gentlemanly manners you had."

"Very kind of your father, I'm sure, Miss Taylor."

"And we are all agreed that you are quite the gentleman."

"I'm overwhelmed."

"No, really, I mean it."

"Kind hearts are more than coronets," said Anthony vaguely, without a notion of what he meant by the remark, and wishing fervently it was lunch time.

"That's such a beautiful poem, I always think. Do you know much poetry, Mr. Cade?"

"I might recite 'The boy stood on the burning deck' at a pinch. 'The boy stood on the burning deck, whence all but he had fled.' That's all I know, but I can do that bit with action if you like. 'The boy stood on the burning deck'—whoosh—whoosh—whoosh—(the flames, you see) 'Whence all but he had fled'—for that bit I run to and fro like a dog."

Miss Taylor screamed with laughter.

"Oh, do look at Mr. Cade! Isn't he funny?"

"Time for morning tea," said Anthony briskly. "Come this way. There is an excellent café in the next street." [Pg 4]

"I presume," said Mrs. Caldicott, in her deep voice, "that the expense is included in the Tour?"

"Morning tea, Mrs. Caldicott," said Anthony, assuming his professional manner, "is an extra."

"Disgraceful."

"Life is full of trials, isn't it?" said Anthony cheerfully. Mrs. Caldicott's eyes gleamed, and she remarked with the air of one springing a mine:

"I suspected as much, and in anticipation I poured off some tea into a jug at breakfast this morning! I can heat that up on the spirit lamp. Come, father."

Mr. and Mrs. Caldicott sailed off triumphantly to the hotel, the lady's back complacent with successful forethought.

"Oh, Lord," muttered Anthony, "what a lot of funny people it does take to make a world."

He marshalled the rest of the party in the direction of the café. Miss Taylor kept by his side, and resumed her catechism.

"Is it a long time since you saw your friend?"

"Just over seven years."

"Was it in Africa you knew him?"

"Yes, not this part though. The first time I ever saw Jimmy McGrath, he was all trussed up ready for the cooking pot. Some of the tribes in the interior are cannibals, you know. We got there just in time."

"What happened?"

"Very nice little shindy. We potted some of the beggars, and the rest took to their heels."

"Oh, Mr. Cade, what an adventurous life you must have led!"

"Very peaceful, I assure you."

But it was clear that the lady did not believe him.

It was about ten o'clock that night when Anthony Cade walked into the small room where Jimmy McGrath was busy manipulating various bottles.

"Make it strong, James," he implored. "I can tell you, I need it."

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"I should think you did, my boy. I wouldn't take on that job of yours for anything."

"Show me another, and I'll jump out of it fast enough."

McGrath poured out his own drink, tossed it off with a practised hand and mixed a second one. Then he said slowly:

"Are you in earnest about that, old son?"

"About what?"

"Chucking this job of yours if you could get another?"

"Why? You don't mean to say that you've got a job going begging? Why don't you grab it yourself?"

"I have grabbed it—but I don't much fancy it, that's why I'm trying to pass it on to you."

Anthony became suspicious.

"What's wrong with it? They haven't engaged you to teach in a Sunday school, have they?"

"Do you think anyone would choose me to teach in a Sunday school?"

"Not if they knew you well, certainly."

"It's a perfectly good job—nothing wrong with it whatsoever."

"Not in South America by any lucky chance? I've rather got my eye on South America. There's a very tidy little revolution coming off in one of those little republics soon."

McGrath grinned.

"You always were keen on revolutions—anything to be mixed up in a really good row."

"I feel my talents might be appreciated out there. I tell you, Jimmy, I can be jolly useful in a revolution—to one side or the other. It's better than making an honest living any day."

"I think I've heard that sentiment from you before, my son. No, the job isn't in South America—it's in England."

"England? Return of hero to his native land after many long years. They can't dun you for bills after seven years, can they, Jimmy?" [Pg 6]

"I don't think so. Well, are you on for hearing more about it?"

"I'm on all right. The thing that worries me is why you're not taking it on yourself."

"I'll tell you. I'm after gold, Anthony—far up in the interior."

Anthony whistled and looked at him.

"You've always been after gold, Jimmy, ever since I knew you. It's your weak spot—your own particular little hobby. You've followed up more wild-cat trails than anyone I know."

"And in the end I'll strike it. You'll see."

"Well, every one his own hobby. Mine's rows, yours is gold."

"I'll tell you the whole story. I suppose you know all about Herzoslovakia?"

Anthony looked up sharply.

"Herzoslovakia?" he said, with a curious ring in his voice.

"Yes. Know anything about it?"

There was quite an appreciable pause before Anthony answered. Then he said slowly:

"Only what every one knows. It's one of the Balkan States, isn't it? Principal rivers, unknown. Principal mountains, also unknown, but fairly numerous. Capital, Ekarest. Population, chiefly brigands. Hobby, assassinating Kings and having Revolutions. Last King, Nicholas IV. Assassinated about seven years ago. Since then it's been a Republic. Altogether a very likely spot. You might have mentioned before that Herzoslovakia came into it."

"It doesn't except indirectly."

Anthony gazed at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"You ought to do something about this, James," he said. "Take a correspondence course, or something. If you'd told a story like this in the good old Eastern days, you'd have been hung up by the heels and bastinadoed or something equally unpleasant." [Pg 7]

Jimmy pursued his course quite unmoved by these strictures.

"Ever heard of Count Stylptitch?"

"Now you're talking," said Anthony. "Many people who have never heard of Herzoslovakia would brighten at the mention of Count Stylptitch. The Grand Old Man of the Balkans. The Greatest Statesman of Modern Times. The biggest Villain unhung. The point of view all depends on which newspaper you take in. But be sure of this, Count Stylptitch will be remembered long after you and I are dust and ashes, James. Every move and counter move in the Near East for the last twenty years has had Count Stylptitch at the bottom of it. He's been a dictator and a patriot and a statesman—and nobody knows exactly what he has been, except that he's been a perfect King of intrigue. Well, what about him?"

"He was Prime Minister of Herzoslovakia—that's why I mentioned it first."

"You've no sense of proportion, Jimmy. Herzoslovakia is of no importance at all compared to Stylptitch. It just provided him with a birthplace and a post in public affairs. But I thought he was dead?"

“So he is. He died in Paris about two months ago. What I’m telling you about happened some years ago.”

“The question is,” said Anthony, “what *are* you telling me about?”

Jimmy accepted the rebuke and hastened on.

“It was like this. I was in Paris—just four years ago, to be exact. I was walking along one night in rather a lonely part, when I saw half a dozen French toughs beating up a respectable-looking old gentleman. I hate a one-sided show, so I promptly butted in and proceeded to beat up the toughs. I guess they’d never been hit really hard before. They melted like snow!”

“Good for you, James,” said Anthony softly. “I’d like to have seen that scrap.”

“Oh, it was nothing much,” said Jimmy modestly. “But the old boy was no end grateful. [Pg 8] He’d had a couple, no doubt about that, but he was sober enough to get my name and address out of me, and he came along and thanked me next day. Did the thing in style too. It was then that I found out it was Count Stylptitch I’d rescued. He’d got a house up by the Bois.”

Anthony nodded.

“Yes, Stylptitch went to live in Paris after the assassination of King Nicholas. They wanted him to come back and be President later, but he wasn’t taking any. He remained sound to his Monarchical principals, though he was reported to have his finger in all the backstairs pies that went on in the Balkans. Very deep, the late Count Stylptitch.”

“Nicholas IV was the man who had a funny taste in wives, wasn’t he?” said Jimmy suddenly.

“Yes,” said Anthony. “And it did for him too, poor beggar. She was some little guttersnipe of a music hall artiste in Paris—not even suitable for a morganatic alliance. But Nicholas had a frightful crush on her, and she was all out for being a Queen. Sounds fantastic, but they managed it somehow. Called her the Countess Popoffsky, or something, and pretended she had Romanoff blood in her veins. Nicholas married her in the Cathedral at Ekarest with a couple of unwilling Arch-bishops to do the job, and she was crowned as Queen Varaga. Nicholas squared his Ministers, and I suppose he thought that was all that mattered—but he forgot to reckon with the populace. They’re very aristocratic and reactionary in Herzoslovakia. They like their Kings and Queens to be the genuine article. There were mutterings and discontent, and the usual ruthless suppressions, and the final uprising which stormed the Palace, murdered the King and Queen, and proclaimed a Republic. It’s been a Republic ever since—but things still manage to be pretty lively there, so I’ve heard. They’ve assassinated a President or two, just to keep their hand in. But *revenons à nos moutons*. You had got to where Count [Pg 9] Stylptitch was hailing you as his preserver.”

“Yes. Well, that was the end of that business. I came back to Africa and never thought of it again until about two weeks ago I got a queer-looking parcel which had been following me all over the place for the Lord knows how long. I’d seen in a paper that Count Stylptitch had recently died in Paris. Well, this parcel contained his Memoirs—or Reminiscences, or whatever you call the things. There was a note enclosed to the effect that if I delivered the manuscript at a certain firm of publishers in London on or before October 13 they were instructed to hand me a thousand pounds.”

“A thousand pounds? Did you say a thousand pounds, Jimmy?”

“I did, my son. I hope to God it’s not a hoax. Put not your trust in Princes or Politicians, as the saying goes. Well, there it is. Owing to the way the manuscript had been following me around, I had no time to lose. It was a pity, all the same. I’d just fixed up this trip to the interior, and I’d set my heart on going. I shan’t get such a good chance again.”

“You’re incurable, Jimmy. A thousand pounds in the hand is worth a lot of mythical gold.”

“And supposing it’s all a hoax? Anyway, here I am, passage booked and everything, on the way to Cape Town—and then you blow along!”

Anthony got up and lit a cigarette.

“I begin to perceive your drift, James. You go gold hunting as planned, and I collect the thousand pounds for you. How much do I get out of it?”

“What do you say to a quarter?”

“Two hundred and fifty pounds free of income tax, as the saying goes?”

“That’s it.”

“Done, and just to make you gnash your teeth I’ll tell you that I would have gone for a hundred! Let me tell you, James McGrath, *you* won’t die in your bed counting up your bank balance.” [Pg 10]

“Anyway, it’s a deal?”

“It’s a deal all right. I’m on. And confusion to Castle’s Select Tours.”

They drank the toast solemnly.

2

A Lady in Distress

“So that’s that,” said Anthony, finishing off his glass and replacing it on the table. “What boat were you going on?”

“*Granarth Castle*.”

“Passage booked in your name, I suppose, so I’d better travel as James McGrath. We’ve outgrown the passport business, haven’t we?”

“No odds either way. You and I are totally unlike, but we’d probably have the same description on one of those blinking things. Height 6 feet, hair brown, eyes blue, nose, ordinary, chin ordinary——”

“Not so much of this ‘ordinary’ stunt. Let me tell you that Castle’s selected me out of several applicants solely on account of my pleasing appearance and nice manners.”

Jimmy grinned.

“I noticed your manners this morning.”

“The devil you did.”

Anthony rose and paced up and down the room. His brow was slightly wrinkled, and it was some minutes before he spoke.

“Jimmy,” he said at last. “Stylptitch died in Paris. What’s the point of sending a manuscript from Paris to London via Africa?”

Jimmy shook his head helplessly.

“I don’t know.”

“Why not do it up in a nice little parcel and send it by post?”

“Sounds a damn sight more sensible, I agree.”

“Of course,” continued Anthony, “I know that Kings and Queens and Government officials are prevented by etiquette from doing anything in a simple, straightforward fashion. Hence King’s Messengers and all that. In medieval days you gave a fellow a signet ring as a sort of Open Sesame. ‘The King’s Ring! Pass, my Lord!’ And usually it was the other fellow who had stolen it. I always wonder why some bright lad never hit on the expedient of copying the ring—making a dozen or so, and selling them at a hundred ducats apiece. They seem to have had no initiative in the Middle Ages.” [Pg 12]

Jimmy yawned.

“My remarks on the Middle Ages don’t seem to amuse you. Let us get back to Count Stylptitch. From France to England via Africa seems a bit thick even for a diplomatic personage. If he merely wanted to ensure that you should get a thousand pounds he could have left it you in his will. Thank God neither you nor I are too proud to accept a legacy! Stylptitch must have been balmy.”

“You’d think so, wouldn’t you?”

Anthony frowned and continued his pacing.

“Have you read the thing at all?” he asked suddenly.

“Read what?”

“The manuscript.”

“Good Lord, no. What do you think I want to read a thing of that kind for?”

Anthony smiled.

"I just wondered, that's all. You know a lot of trouble has been caused by Memoirs. Indiscreet revelations, that sort of thing. People who have been closed as an oyster all their lives seem positively to relish causing trouble when they themselves shall be comfortably dead. It gives them a kind of malicious glee. Jimmy, what sort of a man was Count Stylptitch? You met him and talked to him, and you're a pretty good judge of raw human nature. Could you imagine him being a vindictive old devil?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"It's difficult to tell. You see, that first night he was distinctly canned, and the next day he was just a high-toned old boy with the most beautiful manners overwhelming me with compliments till I didn't know where to look." [Pg 13]

"And he didn't say anything interesting when he was drunk?"

Jimmy cast his mind back, wrinkling his brows as he did so.

"He said he knew where the Koh-i-noor was," he volunteered doubtfully.

"Oh, well," said Anthony, "we all know that. They keep it in the Tower, don't they? Behind thick plate glass and iron bars, with a lot of gentlemen in fancy dress standing round to see you don't pinch anything."

"That's right," agreed Jimmy.

"Did Stylptitch say anything else of the same kind? That he knew which city the Wallace Collection was in, for instance?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"H'm!" said Anthony.

He lit another cigarette, and once more began pacing up and down the room.

"You never read the papers, I suppose, you heathen?" he threw out presently.

"Not very often," said McGrath simply. "They're not about anything that interests me as a rule."

"Thank Heaven I'm more civilized. There have been several mentions of Herzoslovakia lately. Hints at a Royalist restoration."

"Nicholas IV didn't leave a son," said Jimmy. "But I don't suppose for a minute that the Obolovitch dynasty is extinct. There are probably shoals of young 'uns knocking about, cousins and second cousins and third cousins once removed."

"So that there wouldn't be any difficulty in finding a King?"

"Not in the least, I should say," replied Jimmy. "You know, I don't wonder at their getting tired of Republican institutions. A full-blooded, virile people like that must find it awfully tame to pot at Presidents after being used to Kings. And talking of Kings, that reminds me of something else old Stylptitch let out that night. He said he knew the gang that was after him. They were King Victor's people, he said." [Pg 14]

"What?" Anthony wheeled round suddenly.

A slow grin widened on McGrath's face.

"Just a mite excited, aren't you, Gentleman Joe?" he drawled.

"Don't be an ass, Jimmy. You've just said something rather important."

He went over to the window and stood there looking out.

"Who is this King Victor, anyway?" demanded Jimmy. "Another Balkan Monarch?"

"No," said Anthony slowly. "He isn't that kind of a King."

"What is he, then?"

There was a pause, and then Anthony spoke.

“He’s a crook, Jimmy. The most notorious jewel thief in the world. A fantastic, daring fellow, not to be daunted by anything. King Victor was the nickname he was known by in Paris. Paris was the headquarters of his gang. They caught him there and put him away for seven years on a minor charge. They couldn’t prove the more important things against him. He’ll be out soon—or he may be out already.”

“Do you think Count Stylptitch had anything to do with putting him away? Was that why the gang went for him? Out of revenge?”

“I don’t know,” said Anthony. “It doesn’t seem likely on the face of it. King Victor never stole the Crown jewels of Herzoslovakia as far as I’ve heard. But the whole thing seems rather suggestive, doesn’t it? The death of Stylptitch, the Memoirs, and the rumours in the papers—all vague but interesting. And there’s a further rumour to the effect that they’ve found oil in Herzoslovakia. I’ve a feeling in my bones, James, that people are [Pg 15] getting ready to be interested in that unimportant little country.”

“What sort of people?”

“Financiers in City offices.”

“What are you driving at with all this?”

“Trying to make an easy job difficult, that’s all.”

“You can’t pretend there’s going to be any difficulty in handing over a simple manuscript at a publisher’s office?”

“No,” said Anthony regretfully. “I don’t suppose there’ll be anything difficult about that. But shall I tell you, James, where I propose to go with my £250?”

“South America?”

“No, my lad, Herzoslovakia. I shall stand in with the Republic, I think. Very probably I shall end up as President.”

“Why not announce yourself as the principal Obolovitch and be a King whilst you’re about it?”

“No, Jimmy. Kings are for life. Presidents only take on the job for four years or so. It would quite amuse me to govern a kingdom like Herzoslovakia for four years.”

“The average for Kings is even less, I should say,” interpolated Jimmy.

“It will probably be a serious temptation to me to embezzle your share of the thousand pounds. You won’t want it, you know, when you get back weighed down with nuggets. I’ll invest it for you in Herzoslovakian oil shares. You know, James, the more I think of it, the more pleased I am with this idea of yours. I should never have thought of Herzoslovakia if you hadn’t mentioned it. I shall spend one day in London, collecting the booty, and then away by the Balkan express!”

“You won’t get off quite as fast as that. I didn’t mention it before, but I’ve got another little commission for you.”

Anthony sank into a chair and eyed him severely.

“I knew all along that you were keeping something dark. This is where the catch comes in.”

“Not a bit. It’s just something that’s got to be done to help a lady.”

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“Once and for all, James, I refuse to be mixed up in your beastly love affairs.”

“It’s not a love affair. I’ve never seen the woman. I’ll tell you the whole story.”

“If I’ve got to listen to more of your long, rambling stories, I shall have to have another drink.”

His host complied hospitably with this demand, then began the tale.

“It was when I was up in Uganda. There was a Dago there whose life I had saved——”

"If I were you, Jimmy, I should write a short book entitled 'Lives I have Saved.' This is the second I've heard of this evening."

"Oh, well, I didn't really do anything this time. Just pulled the Dago out of the river. Like all Dagos, he couldn't swim."

"Wait a minute, has this story anything to do with the other business?"

"Nothing whatever, though, oddly enough, now I remember it, the man was a Herzoslovakian. We always called him Dutch Pedro though."

Anthony nodded indifferently.

"Any name's good enough for a Dago," he remarked. "Get on with the good work, James."

"Well, the fellow was sort of grateful about it. Hung around like a dog. About six months later he died of fever. I was with him. Last thing, just as he was pegging out, he beckoned me and whispered some excited jargon about a secret—a gold mine, I thought he said. Shoved an oilskin packet into my hand which he'd always worn next his skin. Well, I didn't think much of it at the time. It wasn't until a week afterwards that I opened the packet. Then I was curious, I must confess. I shouldn't have thought that Dutch Pedro would have had the sense to know a gold mine when he saw it—but there's no accounting for luck——"

"And at the mere thought of gold, your heart beat pitter-pat as always," interrupted [Pg 17] Anthony.

"I was never so disgusted in my life. Gold mine, indeed! I daresay it may have been a gold mine to him, the dirty dog. Do you know what it was? A woman's letters—yes, a woman's letters, and an Englishwoman at that. The skunk had been blackmailing her—and he had the impudence to pass on his dirty bag of tricks to me."

"I like to see your righteous heat, James, but let me point out to you that Dagos will be Dagos. He meant well. You had saved his life, he bequeathed to you a profitable source of raising money—your high-minded British ideals did not enter his horizon."

"Well, what the hell was I to do with the things? Burn 'em, that's what I thought at first. And then it occurred to me that there would be that poor dame, not knowing they'd be destroyed, and always living in a quake and a dread lest that Dago should turn up again one day."

"You've more imagination than I gave you credit for, Jimmy," observed Anthony, lighting a cigarette. "I admit that the case presented more difficulties than were at first apparent. What about just sending them to her by post?"

"Like all women, she'd put no date and no address on most of the letters. There was a kind of address on one—just one word. Chimneys."

Anthony paused in the act of blowing out his match, and he dropped it with a quick jerk of the wrist as it burned his finger.

"Chimneys?" he said. "That's rather extraordinary."

"Why, do you know it?"

"It's one of the stately homes of England, my dear James. A place where Kings and Queens go for weekends, and diplomatists forgather and diplome."

"That's one of the reasons why I'm so glad that you're going to England instead of me. You know all these things," said Jimmy simply. "A josser like myself from the backwoods of Canada would be making all sorts of bloomers. But some one like you [Pg 18] who's been to Eton and Harrow——"

"Only one of them," said Anthony modestly.

"Will be able to carry it through. Why didn't I send them to her, you say? Well, it seemed to me dangerous. From what I could make out, she seemed to have a jealous husband."

Suppose he opened the letter by mistake. Where would the poor dame be then? Or she might be dead—the letters looked as though they'd been written some time. As I figured it out, the only thing was for some one to take them to England and put them into her own hands."

Anthony threw away his cigarette, and coming across to his friend clapped him affectionately on the back.

"You're a real knight-errant, Jimmy," he said. "And the backwoods of Canada should be proud of you. I shan't do the job half as prettily as you would."

"You'll take it on then?"

"Of course."

McGrath rose, and going across to a drawer took out a bundle of letters and threw them on the table.

"Here you are. You'd better have a look at them."

"Is it necessary? On the whole, I'd rather not."

"Well, from what you say about this Chimneys place, she may have been staying there only. We'd better look through the letters and see if there's any clue as to where she really hangs out."

"I suppose you're right."

They went through the letters carefully, but without finding what they had hoped to find. Anthony gathered them up again thoughtfully.

"Poor little devil," he remarked. "She was scared stiff."

Jimmy nodded.

"Do you think you'll be able to find her all right?" he asked anxiously.

"I won't leave England till I have. You're very concerned about this unknown lady, [Pg 19] James?"

Jimmy ran his finger thoughtfully over the signature.

"It's a pretty name," he said apologetically. "*Virginia Revel*."

Anxiety in High Places

“Quite so, my dear fellow, quite so,” said Lord Caterham.

He had used the same words three times already, each time in the hope that they would end the interview and permit him to escape. He disliked very much being forced to stand on the steps of the exclusive London club to which he belonged and listen to the interminable eloquence of the Hon. George Lomax.

Clement Edward Alistair Brent, ninth Marquis of Caterham, was a small gentleman, shabbily dressed, and entirely unlike the popular conception of a Marquis. He had faded blue eyes, a thin melancholy nose, and a vague but courteous manner.

The principal misfortune of Lord Caterham’s life was to have succeeded his brother, the eighth Marquis, four years ago. For the previous Lord Caterham had been a man of mark, a household word all over England. At one time Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, he had always bulked largely in the counsels of the Empire, and his country seat, Chimneys, was famous for its hospitality. Ably seconded by his wife, a daughter of the Duke of Perth, history had been made and unmade at informal week-end parties at Chimneys, and there was hardly anyone of note in England—or indeed in Europe—who had not, at one time or another, stayed there.

That was all very well. The ninth Marquis of Caterham had the utmost respect and esteem for the memory of his brother. Henry had done that kind of thing magnificently. What Lord Caterham objected to was the assumption that he was bound to follow in his brother’s footsteps, and that Chimneys was a National possession rather than a private country house. There was nothing that bored Lord Caterham more than politics—unless it was politicians. Hence his impatience under the continued eloquence of George Lomax. A robust man, George Lomax, inclined to *embonpoint*, with a red face and protuberant eyes, and an immense sense of his own importance.

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“You see the point, Caterham? We can’t—we simply can’t afford a scandal of any kind just now. The position is one of the utmost delicacy.”

“It always is,” said Lord Caterham, with a flavour of irony.

“My dear fellow, I’m in a position to *know*!”

“Oh, quite so, quite so,” said Lord Caterham, falling back upon his previous line of defence.

“One slip over this Herzoslovakian business and we’re done. It is most important that the Oil concessions should be granted to a British company. You must see that?”

“Of course, of course.”

“Prince Michael Obolovitch arrives the end of the week, and the whole thing can be carried through at Chimneys under the guise of a shooting party.”

“I was thinking of going abroad this week,” said Lord Caterham.

“Nonsense, my dear Caterham, no one goes abroad in early October.”

“My doctor seems to think I’m in rather a bad way,” said Lord Caterham, eyeing a taxi that was crawling past with longing eyes.

He was quite unable to make a dash for liberty, however, since Lomax had the unpleasant habit of retaining a hold upon a person with whom he was engaged in serious conversation—doubtless the result of long experience. In this case, he had a firm grip of the lapel of Lord Caterham’s coat.

“My dear man, I put it to you imperially. In a moment of national crisis, such as is fast approaching——”

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Lord Caterham wriggled uneasily. He felt suddenly that he would rather give any number of house parties than listen to George Lomax quoting from one of his own speeches. He knew by experience that Lomax was quite capable of going on for twenty minutes without a stop.

"All right," he said hastily, "I'll do it. You'll arrange the whole thing, I suppose."

"My dear fellow, there's nothing to arrange. Chimneys, quite apart from its historic associations, is ideally situated. I shall be at the Abbey, less than seven miles away. It wouldn't do, of course, for me to be actually a member of the house party."

"Of course not," agreed Lord Caterham, who had no idea why it would not do, and was not interested to learn.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind having Bill Eversleigh, though. He'd be useful to run messages."

"Delighted," said Lord Caterham, with a shade more animation. "Bill's quite a decent shot, and Bundle likes him."

"The shooting, of course, is not really important. It's only the pretext, as it were."

Lord Caterham looked depressed again.

"That will be all, then. The Prince, his suite, Bill Eversleigh, Herman Isaacstein——"

"Who?"

"Herman Isaacstein. The representative of the syndicate I spoke to you about."

"The all British syndicate?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing—nothing—I only wondered, that's all. Curious names these people have."

"Then, of course, there ought to be one or two outsiders—just to give the thing a *bona fide* appearance. Lady Eileen could see to that—young people, uncritical, and with no idea of politics."

"Bundle would attend to that all right, I'm sure."

"I wonder now." Lomax seemed struck by an idea.

"You remember the matter I was speaking about just now?"

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"You've been speaking about so many things."

"No, no, I mean this unfortunate *contretemps*"—— he lowered his voice to a mysterious whisper——"the memoirs——Count Stylptitch's memoirs."

"I think you're wrong about that," said Lord Caterham, suppressing a yawn. "People *like* scandal. Damn it all, I read Reminiscences myself—and enjoy 'em too."

"The point is not whether people will read them or not—they'll read them fast enough—but their publication at this juncture might ruin everything—everything. The people of Herzoslovakia wish to restore the Monarchy, and are prepared to offer the Crown to Prince Michael who has the support and encouragement of His Majesty's Government——"

"And who is prepared to grant concessions to Mr. Ikey Hermanstein & Co. in return for the loan of a million or so to set him on the throne——"

"Caterham, Caterham," implored Lomax in an agonized whisper. "Discretion, I beg of you. Above all things, discretion."

"And the point is," continued Lord Caterham, with some relish, though he lowered his voice in obedience to the other's appeal, "that some of Stylptitch's Reminiscences may upset the apple cart. Tyranny and misbehaviour of the Obolovitch family generally, eh? Questions asked in the House. Why replace the present broad-minded and democratic

form of Government by an obsolete tyranny? Policy dictated by the blood-sucking Capitalists. Down with the Government. That kind of thing—eh?”

Lomax nodded.

“And there might be worse still,” he breathed. “Suppose—only suppose that some reference should be made to—to that unfortunate disappearance—you know what I mean.”

Lord Caterham stared at him.

“No, I don’t. What disappearance?”

[Pg 24]

“You must have heard of it? Why, it happened while they were at Chimneys. Henry was terribly upset about it. It almost ruined his career.”

“You interest me enormously,” said Lord Caterham. “Who or what disappeared?”

Lomax leant forward and put his mouth to Lord Caterham’s ear. The latter withdrew it hastily.

“For God’s sake, don’t hiss at me.”

“You heard what I said?”

“Yes, I did,” said Lord Caterham reluctantly. “I remember now hearing something about it at the time. Very curious affair. I wonder who did it. It was never recovered?”

“Never. Of course we had to go about the matter with the utmost discretion. No hint of the loss could be allowed to leak out. But Stylptitch was there at the time. He knew something. Not all, but something. We were at loggerheads with him once or twice over the Turkish question. Suppose that in sheer malice he has set the whole thing down for the world to read. Think of the scandal—of the far-reaching results. Every one would say—why was it hushed up?”

“Of course they would,” said Lord Caterham, with evident enjoyment.

Lomax, whose voice had risen to a high pitch, took a grip on himself.

“I must keep calm,” he murmured. “I must keep calm. But I ask you this, my dear fellow. If he didn’t mean mischief, why did he send the manuscript to London in this roundabout way?”

“It’s odd, certainly. You are sure of your facts?”

“Absolutely. We—er—had our agents in Paris. The Memoirs were conveyed away secretly some weeks before his death.”

“Yes, it looks as though there’s something in it,” said Lord Caterham, with the same relish he had displayed before.

“We have found out that they were sent to a man called Jimmy, or James, McGrath, a Canadian at present in Africa.”

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“Quite an Imperial affair, isn’t it?” said Lord Caterham cheerily.

“James McGrath is due to arrive by the *Granarth Castle* to-morrow—Thursday.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“We shall, of course, approach him at once, point out the possibly serious consequences, and beg him to defer publication of the Memoirs for at least a month, and in any case to permit them to be judiciously—er—edited.”

“Supposing that he says ‘No, sir,’ or ‘I’ll goddarned well see you in hell first,’ or something bright and breezy like that?” suggested Lord Caterham.

“That’s just what I’m afraid of,” said Lomax simply. “That’s why it suddenly occurred to me that it might be a good thing to ask him down to Chimneys as well. He’d be flattered, naturally, at being asked to meet Prince Michael, and it might be easier to handle him.”

"I'm not going to do it," said Lord Caterham hastily. "I don't get on with Canadians, never did—especially those that have lived much in Africa!"

"You'd probably find him a splendid fellow—a rough diamond, you know."

"No, Lomax. I put my foot down there absolutely. Somebody else has got to tackle him."

"It has occurred to me," said Lomax, "that a woman might be very useful here. Told enough and not too much, you understand. A woman could handle the whole thing delicately and with tact—put the position before him, as it were, without getting his back up. Not that I approve of women in politics—St. Stephen's is ruined, absolutely ruined, nowadays. But woman in her own sphere can do wonders. Look at Henry's wife and what she did for him. Marcia was magnificent, unique, a perfect political hostess."

"You don't want me to ask Marcia down for this party, do you?" asked Lord Caterham [Pg 26] faintly, turning a little pale at the mention of his redoubtable sister-in-law.

"No, no, you misunderstand me. I was speaking of the influence of women in general. No, I suggest a young woman, a woman of charm, beauty, intelligence?"

"Not Bundle? Bundle would be no use at all. She's a red-hot socialist if she's anything at all, and she'd simply scream with laughter at the suggestion."

"I was not thinking of Lady Eileen. Your daughter, Caterham, is charming, simply charming, but quite a child. We need some one with *savoir faire*, poise, knowledge of the world—— Ah, of course, the very person. My cousin Virginia."

"Mrs. Revel?" Lord Caterham brightened up. He began to feel that he might possibly enjoy the party after all. "A very good suggestion of yours, Lomax. The most charming woman in London."

"She is well up in Herzoslovakian affairs too. Her husband was at the Embassy there, you remember. And, as you say, a woman of great personal charm."

"A delightful creature," murmured Lord Caterham.

"That is settled, then."

Mr. Lomax relaxed his hold on Lord Caterham's lapel, and the latter was quick to avail himself of the chance.

"Bye-bye, Lomax, you'll make all the arrangements, won't you."

He dived into a taxi. As far as it is possible for one upright Christian gentleman to dislike another upright Christian gentleman, Lord Caterham disliked the Hon. George Lomax. He disliked his puffy red face, his heavy breathing, and his prominent blue eyes. He thought of the coming week and sighed. A nuisance, an abominable nuisance. Then he thought of Virginia Revel and cheered up a little.

"A delightful creature," he murmured to himself. "A most delightful creature."

Introducing a Very Charming Lady

George Lomax returned straightway to Whitehall. As he entered the sumptuous apartment in which he transacted affairs of State, there was a scuffling sound.

Mr. Bill Eversleigh was assiduously filing letters, but a large arm-chair near the window was still warm from contact with a human form.

A very likeable young man, Bill Eversleigh. Age at a guess, twenty-five, big and rather ungainly in his movements, a pleurably ugly face, a splendid set of white teeth and a pair of honest brown eyes.

“Richardson sent up that report yet?”

“No, sir. Shall I get on to him about it?”

“It doesn’t matter. Any telephone messages?”

“Miss Oscar is dealing with most of them. Mr. Isaacstein wants to know if you can dine with him at the Savoy to-morrow.”

“Tell Miss Oscar to look in my engagement-book. If I’m not engaged, she can ring up and accept.”

“Yes, sir.”

“By the way, Eversleigh, you might ring up a number for me now. Look it up in the book. Mrs. Revel, 487, Pont Street.”

“Yes, sir.”

Bill seized the telephone-book, ran an unseeing eye down a column of M’s, shut the book with a bang and moved to the instrument on the desk. With his hand upon it, he paused, as though in sudden recollection.

“Oh, I say, sir, I’ve just remembered. Her line’s out of order. Mrs. Revel’s, I mean. I was trying to ring her up just now.” [Pg 28]

George Lomax frowned.

“Annoying,” he said, “distinctly annoying.” He tapped the table undecidedly.

“If it’s anything important, sir, perhaps I might go round there now in a taxi. She’s sure to be in at this time in the morning.”

George Lomax hesitated, pondering the matter. Bill waited expectantly, poised for instant flight, should the reply be favourable.

“Perhaps that would be the best plan,” said Lomax at last. “Very well, then, take a taxi there, and ask Mrs. Revel if she will be at home this afternoon at four o’clock as I am very anxious to see her about an important matter.”

“Right, sir.”

Bill seized his hat and departed.

Ten minutes later, a taxi deposited him at 487, Pont Street. He rang the bell and executed a loud rat-tat on the knocker. The door was opened by a grave functionary to whom Bill nodded with the ease of long acquaintance.

“Morning, Chilvers, Mrs. Revel in?”

“I believe, sir, that she is just going out.”

“Is that you, Bill?” called a voice over the banisters. “I thought I recognized that muscular knock. Come up and talk to me.”

Bill looked up at the face that was laughing down on him, and which was always inclined to reduce him—and not him alone—to a state of babbling incoherency. He took the stairs two at a time and clasped Virginia Revel's out-stretched hands tightly in his.

"Hullo, Virginia!"

"Hullo, Bill!"

Charm is a very peculiar thing; hundreds of young women, some of them more beautiful than Virginia Revel, might have said "Hullo, Bill," with exactly the same intonation, and yet have produced no effect whatever. But those two simple words, uttered by Virginia, [Pg 29] had the most intoxicating effect upon Bill.

Virginia Revel was just twenty-seven. She was tall and of an exquisite slimness—indeed, a poem might have been written to her slimness, it was so exquisitely proportioned. Her hair was of real bronze, with the greenish tint in its gold; she had a determined little chin, a lovely nose, slanting blue eyes that showed a gleam of deepest cornflower between the half-closed lids, and a delicious and quite indescribable mouth that tilted ever so slightly at one corner in what is known as "the signature of Venus." It was a wonderfully expressive face, and there was a sort of radiant vitality about her that always challenged attention. It would have been quite impossible ever to ignore Virginia Revel.

She drew Bill into the small drawing-room which was all pale and mauve and green and yellow, like crocuses surprised in a meadow.

"Bill, darling," said Virginia, "isn't the Foreign Office missing you? I thought they couldn't get on without you."

"I've brought a message for you from Codders."

Thus irreverently did Bill allude to his chief.

"And by the way, Virginia, in case he asks, remember that your telephone was out of order this morning."

"But it hasn't been."

"I know that. But I said it was."

"Why? Enlighten me as to this Foreign Office touch."

Bill threw her a reproachful glance.

"So that I could get here and see you, of course."

"Oh, darling Bill, how dense of me! And how perfectly sweet of you!"

"Chilvers said you were going out."

"So I was—to Sloane Street. There's a place there where they've got a perfectly wonderful new hip band."

"A hip band?"

"Yes, Bill, H.I.P. hip, B.A.N.D. band. A band to confine the hips. You wear it next the skin."

"I blush for you, Virginia. You shouldn't describe your underwear to a young man to whom you are not related. It isn't delicate." [Pg 30]

"But, Bill dear, there's nothing indelicate about hips. We've all got hips—although we poor women are trying awfully hard to pretend we haven't. This hip band is made of red rubber and comes just to above the knee, and it's simply impossible to walk in it."

"How awful!" said Bill. "Why do you do it?"

"Oh, because it gives one such a noble feeling to suffer for one's silhouette. But don't let's talk about my hip band. Give me George's message."

"He wants to know whether you'll be in at four o'clock this afternoon."

"I shan't. I shall be at Ranelagh. Why this sort of formal call? Is he going to propose to me, do you think?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Because, if so, you can tell him that I much prefer men who propose on impulse."

"Like me?"

"It's not an impulse with you, Bill. It's habit."

"Virginia, won't you ever——"

"No, no, no, Bill. I won't have it in the morning before lunch. Do try and think of me as a nice motherly person approaching middle age who has your interests thoroughly at heart."

"Virginia, I do love you so."

"I know, Bill, I know. And I simply love being loved. Isn't it wicked and dreadful of me? I should like every nice man in the world to be in love with me."

"Most of them are, I expect," said Bill gloomily.

"But I hope George isn't in love with me. I don't think he can be. He's so wedded to his career. What else did he say?"

"Just that it was very important."

"Bill, I'm getting intrigued. The things that George thinks important are so awfully limited. I think I must chuck Ranelagh. After all, I can go to Ranelagh any day. Tell George that I shall be awaiting him meekly at four o'clock." [Pg 31]

Bill looked at his wrist watch.

"It seems hardly worth while to go back before lunch. Come out and chew something, Virginia."

"I'm going out to lunch somewhere or other."

"That doesn't matter. Make a day of it, and chuck everything all round."

"It would be rather nice," said Virginia, smiling at him.

"Virginia, you're a darling. Tell me, you do like me rather, don't you? Better than other people."

"Bill, I adore you. If I had to marry some one—simply had to—I mean if it was in a book and a wicked mandarin said to me 'Marry some one or die by slow torture,' I should choose you at once—I should indeed. I should say, 'Give me little Bill.'"

"Well, then——"

"Yes, but I haven't got to marry any one. I love being a wicked widow."

"You could do all the same things still. Go about, and all that. You'd hardly notice me about the house."

"Bill, you don't understand. I'm the kind of person who marries enthusiastically if they marry at all."

Bill gave a hollow groan.

"I shall shoot myself one of these days, I expect," he murmured gloomily.

"No, you won't, Bill darling. You'll take a pretty girl out to supper—like you did the night before last."

Mr. Eversleigh was momentarily confused.

"If you mean Dorothy Kirkpatrick, the girl who's in *Hooks and Eyes*, I—well, dash it all, she's a thoroughly nice girl, straight as they make 'em. There was no harm in it."

“Bill, darling, of course there wasn’t. I love you to enjoy yourself. But don’t pretend to be dying of a broken heart, that’s all.”

Mr. Eversleigh recovered his dignity.

“You don’t understand at all, Virginia,” he said severely. “Men——”

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“Are polygamous! I know they are. Sometimes I have a shrewd suspicion that I am polyandrous. If you really love me, Bill, take me out to lunch quickly.”

First Night in London

There is often a flaw in the best-laid plans. George Lomax had made one mistake—there was a weak spot in his preparations. The weak spot was Bill.

Bill Eversleigh was an extremely nice lad. He was a good cricketer and a scratch golfer, he had pleasant manners, and an amiable disposition, but his position in the Foreign Office had been gained, not by brains, but by good connections. For the work he had to do he was quite suitable. He was more or less George's dog. He did no responsible or brainy work. His part was to be constantly at George's elbow, to interview unimportant people whom George didn't want to see, to run errands, and generally to make himself useful. All this Bill carried out faithfully enough. When George was absent, Bill stretched himself out in the biggest chair and read the sporting news, and in so doing he was merely carrying out a time-honoured tradition.

Being accustomed to send Bill on errands, George had dispatched him to the Union Castle offices to find out when the *Granarth Castle* was due in. Now, in common with most well-educated young Englishmen, Bill had a pleasant, but quite inaudible voice. Any elocution master would have found fault with his pronunciation of the word Granarth. It might have been anything. The Clerk took it to be Carnfrae. The *Carnfrae Castle* was due in on the following Thursday. He said so. Bill thanked him and went out. George Lomax accepted the information and laid his plans accordingly. He knew nothing about Union Castle liners, and took it for granted that James McGrath would duly arrive on Thursday. [Pg 34]

Therefore, at the moment he was buttonholing Lord Caterham on the steps of the club on Wednesday morning, he would have been greatly surprised to learn that the *Granarth Castle* had docked at Southampton the preceding afternoon.

At two o'clock that afternoon Anthony Cade, travelling under the name of Jimmy McGrath, stepped out of the boat train at Waterloo, hailed a taxi, and after a moment's hesitation ordered the driver to proceed to the Blitz Hotel.

"One might as well be comfortable," said Anthony to himself, as he looked with some interest out of the taxi windows.

It was exactly fourteen years since he had been in London.

He arrived at the hotel, booked a room, and then went for a short stroll along the Embankment. It was rather pleasant to be back in London again. Everything was changed of course. There had been a little restaurant there—just past Blackfriars Bridge—where he had dined fairly often, in company with other earnest lads. He had been a Socialist then, and worn a flowing red tie. Young—very young.

He retraced his steps back to the Blitz. Just as he was crossing the road, a man jostled against him, nearly making him lose his balance. They both recovered themselves, and the man muttered an apology, his eyes scanning Anthony's face narrowly. He was a short, thickset man of the working classes, with something foreign in his appearance.

Anthony went on into the hotel, wondering, as he did so, what had inspired that searching glance. Nothing in it probably. The deep tan of his face was somewhat unusual looking amongst these pallid Londoners and it had attracted the fellow's attention. He went up to his room and, led by a sudden impulse, crossed to the looking-glass and stood studying his face in it. Of the few friends of the old days—just a chosen few—was it likely that any of them would recognize him now if they were to meet him face to face? He shook his head slowly. [Pg 35]

When he had left London he had been just eighteen—a fair, slightly chubby boy, with a misleading seraphic expression. Small chance that the boy would be recognized in the lean, brown-faced man with the quizzical expression.

The telephone beside the bed rang, and Anthony crossed to the receiver.

“Hullo!”

The voice of the desk clerk answered him.

“Mr. James McGrath?”

“Speaking.”

“A gentleman has called to see you.”

Anthony was rather astonished.

“To see *me*?”

“Yes, sir, a foreign gentleman.”

“What’s his name?”

There was a slight pause, and then the clerk said:

“I will send up a page boy with his card.”

Anthony replaced the receiver and waited. In a few minutes there was a knock on the door and a small page appeared bearing a card upon a salver.

Anthony took it. The following was the name engraved upon it:

BARON LOLOPRETJZYL.

He now fully appreciated the desk clerk’s pause.

For a moment or two he stood studying the card, and then made up his mind.

“Show the gentleman up.”

“Very good, sir.”

In a few minutes the Baron *Lolopretjzyl* was ushered into the room, a big man with an immense fan-like black beard and a high, bald forehead.

He brought his heels together with a click, and bowed.

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“Mr. McGrath,” he said.

Anthony imitated his movements as nearly as possible.

“Baron,” he said. Then, drawing forward a chair. “Pray sit down. I have not, I think, had the pleasure of meeting you before?”

“That is so,” agreed the Baron, seating himself. “It is my misfortune,” he added politely.

“And mine also,” responded Anthony, on the same note.

“Let us now to business come,” said the Baron. “I represent in London the Loyalist party of Herzoslovakia.”

“And represent it admirably, I am sure,” murmured Anthony.

The Baron bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

“You are too kind,” he said stiffly. “Mr. McGrath, I will not from you conceal anything. The moment has come for the Restoration of the Monarchy, in abeyance since the martyrdom of His Most Gracious Majesty King Nicolas IV of blessed memory.”

“Amen,” murmured Anthony. “I mean Hear, Hear.”

“On the throne will be placed His Highness Prince Michael who the support of the British Government has.”

“Splendid,” said Anthony. “It’s very kind of you to tell me all this.”

“Everything arranged is—when you come here to trouble make.”

The Baron fixed him with a stern eye.

"My dear Baron," protested Anthony.

"Yes, yes, I know what I am talking about. You have with you the Memoirs of the late Count Stylptitch."

He fixed Anthony with an accusing eye.

"And if I have? What have the Memoirs of Count Stylptitch to do with Prince Michael?"

"They will cause scandals."

"Most memoirs do that," said Anthony soothingly.

"Of many secrets he the knowledge had. Should he reveal but the quarter of them, [Pg 37] Europe into war plunged may be."

"Come, come," said Anthony. "It can't be as bad as all that."

"An unfavourable opinion of the Obolovitch will abroad be spread. So democratic is the English spirit."

"I can quite believe," said Anthony, "that the Obolovitch may have been a trifle high-handed now and again. It runs in the blood. But people in England expect that sort of thing from the Balkans. I don't know why they should, but they do."

"You do not understand," said the Baron. "You do not understand at all. And my lips sealed are." He sighed.

"What exactly are you afraid of?" asked Anthony.

"Until I have read the Memoirs I do not know," explained the Baron simply. "But there is sure to be something. These great diplomats are always indiscreet. The apple cart upset will be, as the saying goes."

"Look here," said Anthony kindly. "I'm sure you're taking altogether too pessimistic a view of the thing. I know all about publishers—they sit on manuscripts and hatch 'em like eggs. It will be at least a year before the thing is published."

"Either a very deceitful or a very simple young man you are. All is arranged for the Memoirs in a Sunday newspaper to come out immediately."

"Oh!" Anthony was somewhat taken aback. "But you can always deny everything," he said hopefully.

The Baron shook his head sadly.

"No, no, through the hat you talk. Let us to business come. One thousand pounds you are to have, is it not so? You see, I have the good information got."

"I certainly congratulate the Intelligence Department of the Loyalists."

"Then I to you offer fifteen hundred."

Anthony stared at him in amazement, then shook his head ruefully.

"I'm afraid it can't be done," he said, with regret.

"Good. I to you offer two thousand."

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"You tempt me, Baron, you tempt me. But I still say it can't be done."

"Your own price name, then."

"I'm afraid you don't understand the position. I'm perfectly willing to believe that you are on the side of the angels, and that these Memoirs may damage your cause. Nevertheless, I've undertaken the job, and I've got to carry it through. See? I can't allow myself to be bought off by the other side. That kind of thing isn't done."

The Baron listened very attentively. At the end of Anthony's speech he nodded his head several times.

"I see. Your honour as an English gentleman it is?"

“Well, we don’t put it that way ourselves,” said Anthony. “But I dare say, allowing for a difference in vocabulary, that we both mean much the same thing.”

The Baron rose to his feet.

“For the English honour I much respect have,” he announced. “We must another way try. I wish you good morning.”

He drew his heels together, clicked, bowed and marched out of the room, holding himself stiffly erect.

“Now I wonder what he meant by that,” mused Anthony. “Was it a threat? Not that I’m in the least afraid of old Lollipop. Rather a good name for him, that, by the way. I shall call him Baron Lollipop.”

He took a turn or two up and down the room, undecided on his next course of action. The date stipulated upon for delivering the manuscript was a little over a week ahead. To-day was the 5th of October. Anthony had no intention of handing it over before the last moment. Truth to tell, he was by now feverishly anxious to read these Memoirs. He had meant to do so on the boat coming over, but had been laid low with a touch of fever, and not at all in the mood for deciphering crabbed and illegible handwriting, for none of the manuscript was typed. He was now more than ever determined to see what all the fuss was about.

There was the other job too.

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On an impulse, he picked up the telephone book and looked up the name of Revel. There were six Revels in the book: Edward Henry Revel, surgeon, of Harley Street; James Revel & Co., saddlers; Lennox Revel of Abbotbury Mansions, Hampstead; Miss Mary Revel with an address in Ealing; Hon. Mrs. Timothy Revel of 487, Pont Street; and Mrs. Willis Revel of 42, Cadogan Square. Eliminating the saddlers and Miss Mary Revel, that gave him four names to investigate—and there was no reason to suppose that the lady lived in London at all! He shut up the book with a short shake of the head.

“For the moment I’ll leave it to chance,” he said. “Something usually turns up.”

The luck of the Anthony Cades of this world is perhaps in some measure due to their own belief in it. Anthony found what he was after not half an hour later, when he was turning over the pages of an illustrated paper. It was a representation of some tableau organized by the Duchess of Perth. Below the central figure, a woman in Eastern dress, was the inscription:

“The Hon. Mrs. Timothy Revel as Cleopatra. Before her marriage, Mrs. Revel was the Hon. Virginia Cawthron, a daughter of Lord Edgbaston.”

Anthony looked at the picture some time, slowly pursing up his lips, as though to whistle. Then he tore out the whole page, folded it up and put it in his pocket. He went upstairs again, unlocked his suit-case and took out the packet of letters. He took out the folded page from his pocket and slipped it under the string that held them together.

Then, at a sudden sound behind him, he wheeled round sharply. A man was standing in the doorway, the kind of man whom Anthony had fondly imagined existed only in the chorus of a Comic Opera. A sinister-looking figure, with a squat brutal head and lips drawn back in an evil grin.

“What the devil are you doing here?” asked Anthony. “And who let you come up?”

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“I pass where I please,” said the stranger. His voice was guttural and foreign, though his English was idiomatic enough.

“Another Dago,” thought Anthony.

“Well, get out, do you hear?” he went on aloud.

The man’s eyes were fixed on the packet of letters which Anthony had caught up.

“I will get out when you have given me what I have come for.”

“And what’s that, may I ask?”

The man took a step nearer.

“The Memoirs of Count Stylptitch,” he hissed.

“It’s impossible to take you seriously,” said Anthony. “You’re so completely the stage villain. I like your get up very much. Who sent you here? Baron Lollipop?”

“Baron——?” The man jerked out a string of harsh-sounding consonants.

“So that’s how you pronounce it, is it? A cross between gargling and barking like a dog. I don’t think I could say it myself—my throat’s not made that way. I shall have to go on calling him Lollipop. So he sent you, did he?”

But he received a vehement negative. His visitor went so far as to spit upon the suggestion in a very realistic manner. Then he drew from his pocket a sheet of paper which he threw upon the table.

“Look,” he said. “Look and tremble, accursed Englishman.”

Anthony looked with some interest, not troubling to fulfil the latter part of the command. On the paper was traced the crude design of a human hand in red.

“It looks like a hand,” he remarked. “But, if you say so, I’m quite prepared to admit that it’s a cubist picture of Sunset at the North Pole.”

“It is the sign of the Comrades of the Red Hand. I am a Comrade of the Red Hand.”

“You don’t say so,” said Anthony, looking at him with much interest. “Are the others all like you? I don’t know what the Eugenic Society would have to say about it.” [Pg 41]

The man snarled angrily.

“Dog,” he said. “Worse than dog. Paid slave of an effete monarchy. Give me the Memoirs, and you shall go unscathed. Such is the clemency of the Brotherhood.”

“It’s very kind of them, I’m sure,” said Anthony, “but I’m afraid that both they and you are labouring under a misapprehension. My instructions are to deliver the manuscript—not to your amiable Society, but to a certain firm of publishers.”

“Pah!” laughed the other. “Do you think you will ever be permitted to reach that office alive? Enough of this fool’s talk. Hand over the papers, or I shoot.”

He drew a revolver from his pocket and brandished it in the air.

But there he misjudged his Anthony Cade. He was not used to men who could act as quickly—or quicker than they could think. Anthony did not wait to be covered by the revolver. Almost as soon as the other got it out of his pocket, Anthony had sprung forward and knocked it out of his hand. The force of the blow sent the man swinging round, so that he presented his back to his assailant.

The chance was too good to be missed. With one mighty, well-directed kick, Anthony sent the man flying through the doorway into the corridor, where he collapsed in a heap.

Anthony stepped out after him, but the doughty Comrade of the Red Hand had had enough. He got nimbly to his feet and fled down the passage. Anthony did not pursue him, but went back into his own room.

“So much for the Comrades of the Red Hand,” he remarked. “Picturesque appearance, but easily routed by direct action. How the hell did that fellow get in, I wonder? There’s one thing that stands out pretty clearly—this isn’t going to be quite such a soft job as I thought. I’ve already fallen foul of both the Loyalist and the Revolutionary parties. Soon, I suppose, the Nationalists and the Independent Liberals will be sending up a delegation. One thing’s fixed. I start on that manuscript to-night.” [Pg 42]

Looking at his watch, Anthony discovered that it was nearly nine o’clock, and he decided to dine where he was. He did not anticipate any more surprise visits, but he felt that it was up to him to be on his guard. He had no intention of allowing his suit-case to be

rifled whilst he was downstairs in the Grill Room. He rang the bell and asked for the Menu, selected a couple of dishes and ordered a bottle of Bordeaux. The waiter took the order and withdrew.

Whilst he was waiting for the meal to arrive, he got out the package of manuscript and put it on the table with the letters.

There was a knock at the door, and the waiter entered with a small table and the accessories of the meal. Anthony had strolled over to the mantelpiece. Standing there with his back to the room, he was directly facing the mirror, and idly glancing in it he noticed a curious thing.

The waiter's eyes were glued on the parcel of manuscript. Shooting little glances sideways at Anthony's immovable back, he moved softly round the table. His hands were twitching, and he kept passing his tongue over his dry lips. Anthony observed him more closely. He was a tall man, supple like all waiters, with a clean-shaven, mobile face. An Italian, Anthony thought, not a Frenchman.

At the critical moment Anthony wheeled round abruptly. The waiter started slightly, but pretended to be doing something with the salt cellar.

"What's your name?" asked Anthony abruptly.

"Giuseppe, Monsieur."

"Italian, eh?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

Anthony spoke to him in that language, and the man answered fluently enough. Finally Anthony dismissed him with a nod, but all the while he was eating the excellent meal which Giuseppe served to him, he was thinking rapidly. [Pg 43]

Had he been mistaken? Was Giuseppe's interest in the parcel just ordinary curiosity? It might be so, but remembering the feverish intensity of the man's excitement, Anthony decided against that theory. All the same, he was puzzled.

"Dash it all," said Anthony to himself, "every one can't be after the blasted manuscript. Perhaps I'm fancying things."

Dinner concluded and cleared away, he applied himself to the perusal of the Memoirs. Owing to the illegibility of the late Count's handwriting, the business was a slow one. Anthony's yawns succeeded one another with suspicious rapidity. At the end of the fourth chapter, he gave it up.

So far, he had found the Memoirs insufferably dull, with no hint of scandal of any kind.

He gathered up the letters and the wrapping of the manuscript which were lying in a heap together on the table and locked them up in the suit-case. Then he locked the door, and as an additional precaution put a chair against it. On the chair he placed the water-bottle from the bathroom.

Surveying these preparations with some pride, he undressed and got into bed. He had one more shot at the Count's Memoirs, but felt his eyelids drooping, and stuffing the manuscript under his pillow, he switched out the light and fell asleep almost immediately.

It must have been some four hours later that he awoke with a start. What had awakened him he did not know—perhaps a sound, perhaps only the consciousness of danger which in men who have led an adventurous life is very fully developed.

For a moment he lay quite still, trying to focus his impressions. He could hear a very stealthy rustle, and then he became aware of a denser blackness somewhere between him and the window—on the floor by the suit-case. [Pg 44]

With a sudden spring, Anthony jumped out of bed, switching the light on as he did so. A figure sprang up from where it had been kneeling by the suit-case.

It was the waiter, Giuseppe. In his right hand gleamed a long thin knife. He hurled himself straight upon Anthony, who was by now fully conscious of his own danger. He was unarmed and Giuseppe was evidently thoroughly at home with his own weapon.

Anthony sprang to one side, and Giuseppe missed him with the knife. The next minute the two men were rolling on the floor together, locked in a close embrace. The whole of Anthony's faculties were centred on keeping a close grip of Giuseppe's right arm so that he would be unable to use the knife. He bent it slowly back. At the same time he felt the Italian's other hand clutching at his windpipe, stifling him, choking. And still, desperately, he bent the right arm back.

There was a sharp tinkle as the knife fell on the floor. At the same time, the Italian extricated himself with a swift twist from Anthony's grasp. Anthony sprang up too, but made the mistake of moving towards the door to cut off the other's retreat. He saw, too late, that the chair and the water-bottle were just as he had arranged them.

Giuseppe had entered by the window, and it was the window he made for now. In the instant's respite given him by Anthony's move toward the door, he had sprung out on the balcony, leaped over to the adjoining balcony and had disappeared through the adjoining window.

Anthony knew well enough that it was of no use to pursue him. His way of retreat was doubtless fully assured. Anthony would merely get himself into trouble.

He walked over to the bed, thrusting his hand beneath the pillow and drawing out the Memoirs. Lucky that they had been there and not in the suit-case. He crossed over to the suit-case and looked inside, meaning to take out the letters. [Pg 45]

Then he swore softly under his breath.

The letters were gone.

The Gentle Art of Blackmail

It was exactly five minutes to four when Virginia Revel, rendered punctual by a healthy curiosity, returned to the house in Pont Street. She opened the door with her latchkey, and stepped into the hall to be immediately confronted by the impassive Chilvers.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but a—a person has called to see you——"

For the moment, Virginia did not pay attention to the subtle phraseology whereby Chilvers cloaked his meaning.

"Mr. Lomax? Where is he? In the drawing-room?"

"Oh, no, ma'am, not Mr. Lomax." Chilvers' tone was faintly reproachful. "A person—I was reluctant to let him in, but he said his business was most important—connected with the late Captain, I understood him to say. Thinking therefore that you might wish to see him, I put him—er—in the study."

Virginia stood thinking for a minute. She had been a widow now for some years, and the fact that she rarely spoke of her husband was taken by some to indicate that below her careless demeanour was a still aching wound. By others it was taken to mean the exact opposite, that Virginia had never really cared for Tim Revel, and that she found it insincere to profess a grief she did not feel.

"I should have mentioned, ma'am," continued Chilvers, "that the man appears to be some kind of foreigner."

Virginia's interest heightened a little. Her husband had been in the Diplomatic Service, and they had been together in Herzoslovakia just before the sensational murder of the King and Queen. This man might probably be a Herzoslovakian, some old servant who had fallen on evil days.

[Pg 47]

"You did quite right, Chilvers," she said with a quick, approving nod. "Where did you say you had put him? In the study?"

She crossed the hall with her light buoyant step, and opened the door of the small room that flanked the dining-room.

The visitor was sitting in a chair by the fireplace. He rose on her entrance and stood looking at her. Virginia had an excellent memory for faces, and she was at once quite sure that she had never seen the man before. He was tall and dark, supple in figure, and quite unmistakably a foreigner; but she did not think he was of Slavonic origin. She put him down as Italian or possibly Spanish.

"You wished to see me?" she asked. "I am Mrs. Revel."

The man did not answer for a minute or two. He was looking her slowly over, as though appraising her narrowly. There was a veiled insolence in his manner which she was quick to feel.

"Will you please state your business?" she said, with a touch of impatience.

"You are Mrs. Revel? Mrs. Timothy Revel?"

"Yes. I told you so just now."

"Quite so. It is a good thing that you consented to see me, Mrs. Revel. Otherwise, as I told your butler, I should have been compelled to do business with your husband."

Virginia looked at him in astonishment, but some impulse quelled the retort that sprang to her lips. She contented herself by remarking dryly:

"You might have found some difficulty in doing that."

"I think not. I am very persistent. But I will come to the point. Perhaps you recognize this?"

He flourished something in his hand. Virginia looked at it without much interest.

"Can you tell me what it is, madame?"

[Pg 48]

"It appears to be a letter," replied Virginia, who was by now convinced that she had to do with a man who was mentally unhinged.

"And perhaps you note to whom it is addressed," said the man significantly, holding it out to her.

"I can read," Virginia informed him pleasantly. "It is addressed to a Captain O'Neill at Rue de Quenelles No. 15, Paris."

The man seemed searching her face hungrily for something he did not find.

"Will you read it, please?"

Virginia took the envelope from him, drew out the enclosure and glanced at it; but almost immediately she stiffened and held it out to him again.

"This is a private letter—certainly not meant for my eyes."

The man laughed sardonically.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Revel, on your admirable acting. You play your part to perfection. Nevertheless, I think that you will hardly be able to deny the signature!"

"The signature?"

Virginia turned the letter over—and was struck dumb with astonishment. The signature, written in a delicate slanting hand, was Virginia Revel. Checking the exclamation of astonishment that rose to her lips, she turned again to the beginning of the letter and deliberately read the whole thing through. Then she stood a minute lost in thought. The nature of the letter made it clear enough what was in prospect.

"Well, madame?" said the man. "That is your name, is it not?"

"Oh, yes," said Virginia. "It's my name." "But not my handwriting," she might have added.

Instead she turned a dazzling smile upon her visitor.

"Supposing," she said sweetly, "we sit down and talk it over?"

He was puzzled. Not so had he expected her to behave. His instinct told him that she was not afraid of him. [Pg 49]

"First of all, I should like to know how you found me out?"

"That was easy."

He took from his pocket a page torn from an illustrated paper, and handed it to her. Anthony Cade would have recognized it.

She gave it back to him with a thoughtful little frown.

"I see," she said. "It was very easy."

"Of course you understand, Mrs. Revel, that that is not the only letter. There are others."

"Dear me," said Virginia, "I seem to have been frightfully indiscreet."

Again she could see that her light tone puzzled him. She was by now thoroughly enjoying herself.

"At any rate," she said, smiling sweetly at him, "it's very kind of you to call and give them back to me."

There was a pause as he cleared his throat.

"I am a poor man, Mrs. Revel," he said at last, with a good deal of significance in his manner.

"As such you will doubtless find it easier to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, or so I have always heard."

"I cannot afford to let you have these letters for nothing."

"I think you are under a misapprehension. Those letters are the property of the person who wrote them."

"That may be the law, madame, but in this country you have a saying 'Possession is nine points of the law.' And, in any case, are you prepared to invoke the aid of the law?"

"The law is a severe one for blackmailers," Virginia reminded him.

"Come, Mrs. Revel, I am not quite a fool. I have read these letters—the letters of a woman to her lover, one and all breathing dread of discovery by her husband. Do you want me to take them to your husband?"

"You have overlooked one possibility. Those letters were written some years ago. [Pg 50] Supposing that since then—I have become a widow."

He shook his head with confidence.

"In that case—if you had nothing to fear—you would not be sitting here making terms with me."

Virginia smiled.

"What is your price?" she asked in a business-like manner.

"For one thousand pounds I will hand the whole packet over to you. It is very little that I am asking there; but, you see, I do not like the business."

"I shouldn't dream of paying you a thousand pounds," said Virginia with decision.

"Madame, I never bargain. A thousand pounds, and I will place the letters in your hands."

Virginia reflected.

"You must give me a little time to think it over. It will not be easy for me to get such a sum together."

"A few pounds on account perhaps—say fifty—and I will call again."

Virginia looked up at the clock. It was five minutes past four, and she fancied that she had heard the bell.

"Very well," she said hurriedly. "Come back to-morrow, but later than this. About six."

She crossed over to a desk that stood against the wall, unlocked one of the drawers, and took out an untidy handful of notes.

"There is about forty pounds here. That will have to do for you."

He snatched at it eagerly.

"And now go at once, please," said Virginia.

He left the room obediently enough. Through the open door, Virginia caught a glimpse of George Lomax in the hall, just being ushered upstairs by Chilvers. As the front door closed, Virginia called to him.

"Come in here, George. Chilvers, bring us tea in here, will you please?"

She flung open both windows, and George Lomax came into the room to find her [Pg 51] standing erect with dancing eyes and wind-blown hair.

"I'll shut them in a minute, George, but I felt the room ought to be aired. Did you fall over the blackmailer in the hall?"

"The what?"

“Blackmailer, George. B.L.A.C.K.M.A.I.L.E.R? Blackmailer. One who blackmails.”

“My dear Virginia, you can’t be serious!”

“Oh, but I am, George.”

“But who did he come here to blackmail?”

“Me, George.”

“But, my dear Virginia, what have you been doing?”

“Well, just for once, as it happens, I hadn’t been doing anything. The good gentleman mistook me for someone else.”

“You rang up the police, I suppose?”

“No, I didn’t. I suppose you think I ought to have done so.”

“Well——” George considered weightily. “No, no, perhaps not—perhaps you acted wisely. You might be mixed up in some unpleasant publicity in connection with the case. You might even have had to give evidence——”

“I should have liked that,” said Virginia. “I would love to be summoned, and I should like to see if judges really do make all the rotten jokes you read about. It would be most exciting. I was at Vine Street the other day to see about a diamond brooch I had lost, and there was the most perfectly lovely inspector—the nicest man I ever met.”

George, as was his custom, let all irrelevancies pass.

“But what did you do about this scoundrel?”

“Well, George, I’m afraid I let him do it.”

“Do what?”

“Blackmail me.”

George’s face of horror was so poignant that Virginia had to bite her under lip.

“You mean—do I understand you to mean—that you did not correct the misapprehension [Pg 52] under which he was labouring?”

Virginia shook her head, shooting a sideways glance at him.

“Good heavens, Virginia, you must be mad.”

“I suppose it would seem that way to you.”

“But why? In God’s name, why?”

“Several reasons. To begin with he was doing it so beautifully—blackmailing me, I mean—I hate to interrupt an artist when he’s doing his job really well. And then, you see, I’d never been blackmailed——”

“I should hope not, indeed.”

“And I wanted to see what it felt like.”

“I am quite at a loss to comprehend you, Virginia.”

“I knew you wouldn’t understand.”

“You did not give him money, I hope?”

“Just a trifle,” said Virginia apologetically.

“How much?”

“Forty pounds.”

“Virginia!”

“My dear George, it’s only what I pay for an evening dress. It’s just as exciting to buy a new experience as it is to buy a new dress—more so, in fact.”

George Lomax merely shook his head, and Chilvers appearing at that moment with the tea urn, he was saved from having to express his outraged feelings. When tea had been brought in, and Virginia's deft fingers were manipulating the heavy silver teapot, she spoke again on the subject.

"I had another motive too, George—a brighter and better one. We women are usually supposed to be cats, but at any rate I'd done another woman a good turn this afternoon. This man isn't likely to go off looking for another Virginia Revel. He thinks he's found his bird all right. Poor little devil, she was in a blue funk when she wrote that letter. Mr. Blackmailer would have had the easiest job of his life there. Now, though he doesn't know it, he's up against a tough proposition. Starting with the great advantage of having led a blameless life, I shall toy with him to his undoing—as they say in books. Guile, George, lots of guile." [Pg 53]

George still shook his head.

"I don't like it," he persisted. "I don't like it."

"Well, never mind, George dear. You didn't come here to talk about blackmailers. What did you come here for, by the way? Correct answer: 'To see *you*!' Accent on the you, and press her hand with significance unless you happen to have been eating heavily buttered muffin, in which case it must all be done with the eyes."

"I did come to see you," replied George seriously. "And I am glad to find you alone."

"Oh, George, this is so sudden," says she, swallowing a currant.

"I wanted to ask a favour of you. I have always considered you, Virginia, as a woman of considerable charm."

"Oh, George!"

"And also a woman of intelligence!"

"Not really? How well the man knows me."

"My dear Virginia, there is a young fellow arriving in England to-morrow whom I should like you to meet."

"All right, George, but it's your party—let that be clearly understood."

"You could, I feel sure, if you chose, exercise your considerable charm."

Virginia cocked her head a little on one side.

"George, dear, I don't 'charm' as a profession, you know. Often I like people—and then, well, they like me. But I don't think I could set out in cold blood to fascinate a helpless stranger. That sort of thing isn't done, George, it really isn't. There are professional sirens who would do it much better than I should."

"That is out of the question, Virginia. This young man, he is a Canadian, by the way, of the name of McGrath——"

"A Canadian of Scotch descent," says she, deducing brilliantly. [Pg 54]

"Is probably quite unused to the higher walks of English society. I should like him to appreciate the charm and distinction of a real English gentlewoman."

"Meaning me?"

"Exactly."

"Why?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said why? You don't boom the real English gentlewoman with every stray Canadian who sets foot upon our shores. What is the deep idea, George? To put it vulgarly, what do *you* get out of it?"

"I cannot see that that concerns you, Virginia."

"I couldn't possibly go out for an evening and fascinate, unless I knew all the whys and wherefors."

"You have a most extraordinary way of putting things, Virginia. Anyone would think _____"

"Wouldn't they? Come on, George, part with a little more information."

"My dear Virginia, matters are likely to be a little strained shortly in a certain Central European nation. It is important, for reasons which are immaterial, that this—Mr.—er McGrath should be brought to realize that the restoring of the Monarchy in Herzoslovakia is imperative to the peace of Europe."

"The part about the peace of Europe is all bosh," said Virginia calmly, "but I'm all for Monarchies every time, especially for a picturesque people like the Herzoslovakians. So you're running a King in the Herzoslovakian States, are you? Who is he?"

George was reluctant to answer, but did not see his way to avoid the question. The interview was not going at all as he had planned. He had foreseen Virginia as a willing, docile tool, receiving his hints gratefully, and asking no awkward questions. This was far from being the case. She seemed determined to know all about it and this George, ever doubtful of female discretion, was determined at all costs to avoid. He had made a mistake. Virginia was not the woman for the part. She might, indeed, cause serious trouble. Her account of her interview with the blackmailer had caused him grave apprehension. A most undependable creature, with no idea of treating serious matters seriously.

[Pg 55]

"Prince Michael Obolovitch," he replied, as Virginia was obviously waiting for an answer to her question. "But please let that go no further."

"Don't be absurd, George. There are all sort of hints in the papers already, and articles cracking up the Obolovitch dynasty and talking about the murdered Nicholas IV as though he were a cross between a Saint and a hero instead of a stupid little man besotted by a third-rate actress."

George winced. He was more than ever convinced that he had made a mistake in enlisting Virginia's aid. He must stave her off quickly.

"You are right, my dear Virginia," he said hastily, as he rose to his feet to bid her farewell. "I should not have made the suggestion I did to you. But we are anxious for the Dominions to see eye to eye with us on this Herzoslovakian crisis, and McGrath has, I believe, influence in journalistic circles. As an ardent Monarchist, and with your knowledge of the country, I thought it a good plan for you to meet him."

"So that's the explanation, is it?"

"Yes, but I dare say you wouldn't have cared for him."

Virginia looked at him for a second and then she laughed.

"George," she said, "you're a rotten liar."

"Virginia!"

"Rotten, absolutely rotten! If I had had your training, I could have managed a better one than that—one that had a chance of being believed. But I shall find out all about it, my poor George. Rest assured of that. The Mystery of Mr. McGrath. I shouldn't wonder if I got a hint or two at Chimneys this week-end."

[Pg 56]

"At Chimneys? You are going to Chimneys?"

George could not conceal his perturbation. He had hoped to reach Lord Caterham in time for the invitation to remain unissued.

"Bundle rang up and asked me this morning."

George made a last effort.

"Rather a dull party, I believe," he said. "Hardly in your line, Virginia."

“My poor George, why didn’t you tell me the truth and trust me? It’s still not too late.”

George took her hand and dropped it again limply.

“I have told you the truth,” he said coldly, and he said it without a blush.

“That’s a better one,” said Virginia approvingly. “But it’s still not good enough. Cheer up, George, I shall be at Chimneys all right, exerting my considerable charm—as you put it. Life has become suddenly very much more amusing. First a blackmailer, and then George in diplomatic difficulties. Will he tell all to the beautiful woman who asks for his confidence so pathetically? No, he will reveal nothing until the last chapter. Good-bye, George. One last fond look before you go? No? Oh, George, dear, don’t be sulky about it!”

Virginia ran to the telephone as soon as George had departed with a heavy gait through the front door.

She obtained the number she required and asked to speak to Lady Eileen Brent.

“Is that you, Bundle? I’m coming to Chimneys all right to-morrow. What? Bore me? No, it won’t. Bundle, wild horses wouldn’t keep me away! So there!”

Mr. McGrath Refuses an Invitation

The letters were gone!

Having once made up his mind to the fact of their disappearance, there was nothing to do but accept it. Anthony realized very well that he could not pursue Giuseppe through the corridors of the Blitz Hotel. To do so was to court undesired publicity, and in all probability to fail in his object all the same.

He came to the conclusion that Giuseppe had mistaken the packet of letters, enclosed as they were in the other wrappings, for the Memoirs themselves. It was likely therefore that when he discovered his mistake he would make another attempt to get hold of the Memoirs. For this attempt Anthony intended to be fully prepared.

Another plan that occurred to him was to advertize discreetly for the return of the package of letters. Supposing Giuseppe to be an emissary of the Comrades of the Red Hand, or, which seemed to Anthony more probable, to be employed by the Loyalist party, the letters could have no possible interest for either employer and he would probably jump at the chance of obtaining a small sum of money for their return.

Having thought out all this, Anthony returned to bed and slept peacefully until morning. He did not fancy that Giuseppe would be anxious for a second encounter that night.

Anthony got up with his plan of campaign fully thought out. He had a good breakfast, glanced at the papers which were full of the new discoveries of oil in Herzoslovakia, and then demanded an interview with the manager, and, being Anthony Cade, with a gift for getting his own way by means of quiet determination, he obtained what he asked for. [Pg 58]

The manager, a Frenchman with an exquisitely suave manner, received him in his private office.

“You wished to see me, I understand, Mr.—er—McGrath?”

“I did. I arrived at your hotel yesterday afternoon, and I had dinner served to me in my own rooms by a waiter whose name was Giuseppe.”

He paused.

“I dare say we have a waiter of that name,” agreed the manager indifferently.

“I was struck by something unusual in the waiter’s manner, but thought nothing more of it at the time. Later, in the night, I was awakened by the sound of some one moving softly about the room. I switched on the light, and found this same Giuseppe in the act of rifling my leather suit-case.”

The manager’s indifference had completely disappeared now.

“But I have heard nothing of this,” he exclaimed. “Why was I not informed sooner?”

“The man and I had a brief struggle—he was armed with a knife by the way. In the end he succeeded in making off by way of the window.”

“What did you do then, Mr. McGrath?”

“I examined the contents of my suit-case.”

“Had anything been taken?”

“Nothing of—importance,” said Anthony slowly.

The manager leaned back with a sigh.

“I am glad of that,” he remarked. “But you will allow me to say, Mr. McGrath, that I do not quite understand your attitude in the matter. You made no attempt to arouse the hotel? To pursue the thief?”

Anthony shrugged his shoulders.

“Nothing of value had been taken, as I tell you. I am aware, of course, that strictly speaking it is a case for the police——” [Pg 59]

He paused, and the manager murmured without any particular enthusiasm:

“For the police—of course——”

“In any case, I was fairly certain that the man would manage to make good his escape, and since nothing was taken why bother with the police?”

The manager smiled a little.

“I see that you realize, Mr. McGrath, that I am not at all anxious to have the police called in. From my point of view it is always disastrous. If the newspapers can get hold of anything connected with a big fashionable hotel such as this, they always run it for all it is worth, no matter how insignificant the real subject matter may be.”

“Quite so,” agreed Anthony. “Now I told you that nothing of value had been taken, and that was perfectly true in a sense. Nothing of any value to the thief was taken, but he got hold of something which is of considerable value to me.”

“Ah?”

“Letters, you understand.”

An expression of superhuman discretion, only to be achieved by a Frenchman, settled down upon the manager’s face.

“I comprehend,” he murmured. “But perfectly. Naturally, it is not a matter for the police.”

“We are quite agreed upon that point. But you will understand that I have every intention of recovering these letters. In the part of the world where I come from, people are used to doing things for themselves. What I require from you therefore is the fullest possible information you can give me about this waiter, Giuseppe.”

“I see no objection to that,” said the manager after a moment or two’s pause. “I cannot give you the information offhand, of course, but if you will return in half an hour’s time I will have everything ready to lay before you.” [Pg 60]

“Thank you very much. That will suit me admirably.”

In half an hour’s time, Anthony returned to the office again to find that the manager had been as good as his word. Jotted down upon a piece of paper were all the relevant facts known about Giuseppe Manelli.

“He came to us, you see, about three months ago. A skilled and experienced waiter. Has given complete satisfaction. He has been in England about five years.”

Together the two men ran over a list of the hotels and restaurants where the Italian had worked. One fact struck Anthony as being possibly of significance. At two of the hotels in question there had been serious robberies during the time that Giuseppe was employed there, though no suspicion of any kind had attached to him in either case. Still, the fact was significant.

Was Giuseppe merely a clever hotel thief? Had his search of Anthony’s suit-case been merely part of his habitual professional tactics? He might just possibly have had the packet of letters in his hand at the moment when Anthony switched on the light, and have shoved it into his pocket mechanically so as to have his hands free. In that case, the thing was mere plain or garden robbery.

Against that, there was to be put the man’s excitement of the evening before when he had caught sight of the papers lying on the table. There had been no money or object of value there such as would excite the cupidity of an ordinary thief.

No, Anthony felt convinced that Giuseppe had been acting as a tool for some outside agency. With the information supplied to him by the manager, it might be possible to

learn something about Giuseppe's private life, and so finally track him down. He gathered up the sheet of paper and rose.

"Thank you very much indeed. It's quite unnecessary to ask, I suppose, whether Giuseppe is still in the hotel?"

The manager smiled.

"His bed was not slept in, and all his things have been left behind. He must have rushed straight out after his attack upon you. I don't think there is much chance of our seeing him again." [Pg 61]

"I imagine not. Well, thank you very much indeed. I shall be staying on here for the present."

"I hope you will be successful in your task, but I confess that I am rather doubtful."

"I always hope for the best."

One of Anthony's first proceedings was to question some of the other waiters who had been friendly with Giuseppe, but he obtained very little to go upon. He wrote out an advertisement on the lines he had planned, and had it sent to five of the most widely read newspapers. He was just about to go out and visit the restaurant at which Giuseppe had been previously employed when the telephone rang. Anthony took up the receiver.

"Hullo, what is it?"

A toneless voice replied.

"Am I speaking to Mr. McGrath?"

"You are. Who are you?"

"This is Messrs. Balderson and Hodgkins. Just a minute, please. I will put you through to Mr. Balderson."

"Our worthy publishers," thought Anthony. "So they are getting worried too, are they? They needn't. There's a week to run still."

A hearty voice struck suddenly upon his ear.

"Hullo! That Mr. McGrath?"

"Speaking."

"I'm Mr. Balderson of Balderson and Hodgkins. What about that manuscript, Mr. McGrath?"

"Well," said Anthony, "what about it?"

"Everything about it. I understand, Mr. McGrath, that you have just arrived in this country from South Africa. That being so, you can't possibly understand the position. There's going to be trouble about that manuscript, Mr. McGrath, big trouble. Sometimes I wish we'd never said we'd handle it."

"Indeed?"

[Pg 62]

"I assure you it's so. At present I'm anxious to get it into my possession as quickly as possible, so as to have a couple of copies made. Then, if the original is destroyed—well, no harm will be done."

"Dear me," said Anthony.

"Yes, I expect it sounds absurd to you, Mr. McGrath. But, I assure you, you don't appreciate the situation. There's a determined effort being made to prevent its ever reaching this office. I say to you quite frankly and without humbug that if you attempt to bring it yourself it's ten to one that you'll never get here."

"I doubt that," said Anthony. "When I want to get anywhere, I usually do."

“You’re up against a very dangerous lot of people. I wouldn’t have believed it myself a month ago. I tell you, Mr. McGrath, we’ve been bribed and threatened and cajoled by one lot and another until we don’t know whether we’re on our heads or our heels. My suggestion is that you do not attempt to bring the manuscript here. One of our people will call upon you at the hotel and take possession of it.”

“And supposing the gang does him in?” asked Anthony.

“The responsibility would then be ours—not yours. You would have delivered it to our representative and obtained a written discharge. The cheque for—er—a thousand pounds which we are instructed to hand to you will not be available until Wednesday next by the terms of our agreement with the executors of the late—er—author—you know whom I mean, but if you insist I will send my own cheque for that amount by the messenger.”

Anthony reflected for a minute or two. He had intended to keep the Memoirs until the last day of grace, because he was anxious to see for himself what all the fuss was about. Nevertheless, he realized the force of the publisher’s arguments.

“All right,” he said, with a little sigh. “Have it your own way. Send your man along. And if you don’t mind sending that cheque as well I’d rather have it now, as I may be going out of England before next Wednesday.” [Pg 63]

“Certainly, Mr. McGrath. Our representative will call upon you first thing to-morrow morning. It will be wiser not to send anyone direct from the office. Our Mr. Holmes lives in South London. He will call in on his way to us, and will give you a receipt for the package. I suggest that to-night you should place a dummy packet in the manager’s safe. Your enemies will get to hear of this, and it will prevent any attack being made upon your apartments to-night.”

“Very well, I will do as you direct.”

Anthony hung up the receiver with a thoughtful face.

Then he went on with his interrupted plan of seeking news of the slippery Giuseppe. He drew a complete blank, however. Giuseppe had worked at the restaurant in question, but nobody seemed to know anything of his private life or associates.

“But I’ll get you, my lad,” murmured Anthony, between his teeth. “I’ll get you yet. It’s only a matter of time.”

His second night in London was entirely peaceful.

At nine o’clock the following morning, the card of Mr. Holmes from Messrs. Balderson and Hodgkins was sent up, and Mr. Holmes followed it. A small, fair man with a quiet manner. Anthony handed over the manuscript, and received in exchange a cheque for a thousand pounds. Mr. Holmes packed up the manuscript in the small brown bag he carried, wished Anthony good morning, and departed. The whole thing seemed very tame.

“But perhaps he’ll be murdered on the way there,” Anthony murmured aloud, as he stared idly out of the window. “I wonder now—I very much wonder.”

He put the cheque in an envelope, enclosed a few lines of writing with it, and sealed it up carefully. Jimmy, who had been more or less in funds at the time of his encounter with Anthony at Bulawayo, had advanced him a substantial sum of money which was, as yet, practically untouched. [Pg 64]

“If one’s job’s done with, the other isn’t,” said Anthony to himself. “Up to now, I’ve bungled it. But never say die. I think that, suitably disguised, I shall go and have a look at 487, Pont Street.”

He packed his belongings, went down and paid his bill, and ordered his luggage to be put on a taxi. Suitably rewarding those who stood in his path, most of whom had done nothing whatever materially to add to his comfort, he was on the point of being driven off, when a small boy rushed down the steps with a letter.

“Just come for you, this very minute, sir.”

With a sigh, Anthony produced yet another shilling. The taxi groaned heavily and jumped forward with a hideous crashing of gears, and Anthony opened the letter.

It was rather a curious document. He had to read it four times before he could be sure of what it was all about. Put in plain English (the letter was not in plain English, but in the peculiar involved style common to missives issued by Government officials) it presumed that Mr. McGrath was arriving in England from South Africa to-day—Thursday, it referred obliquely to the Memoirs of Count Stylptitch, and begged Mr. McGrath to do nothing in the matter until he had had a confidential conversation with Mr. George Lomax, and certain other parties whose magnificence was vaguely hinted at. It also contained a definite invitation to go down to Chimneys as the guest of Lord Caterham, on the following day, Friday.

A mysterious and thoroughly obscure communication. Anthony enjoyed it very much.

“Dear old England,” he murmured affectionately. “Two days behind the times, as usual. Rather a pity. Still, I can’t go down to Chimneys under false pretences. I wonder, though, if there’s an inn handy? Mr. Anthony Cade might stay at the inn without anyone being the wiser.”

He leaned out of the window, and gave new directions to the taxi driver, who [Pg 65] acknowledged them with a snort of contempt.

The taxi drew up before one of London’s more obscure hostelries. The fare, however, was paid on a scale befitting its point of departure.

Having booked a room in the name of Anthony Cade, Anthony passed into a dingy writing-room, took out a sheet of notepaper stamped with the legend Hotel Blitz, and wrote rapidly.

He explained that he had arrived on the preceding Tuesday, that he had handed over the manuscript in question to Messrs. Balderson and Hodgkins, and he regretfully declined the kind invitation of Lord Caterham as he was leaving England almost immediately. He signed the letter “Yours faithfully, James McGrath.”

“And now,” said Anthony, as he affixed the stamp to the envelope. “To business. Exit James McGrath, and Enter Anthony Cade.”

8

A Dead Man

[Pg 66]

On that same Thursday afternoon Virginia Revel had been playing tennis at Ranelagh. All the way back to Pont Street, as she lay back in the long, luxurious limousine, a little smile played upon her lips, as she rehearsed her part in the forthcoming interview. Of course it was within the bounds of possibility that the blackmailer might not reappear, but she felt pretty certain that he would. She had shown herself an easy prey. Well, perhaps this time there would be a little surprise for him!

When the car drew up at the house, she turned to speak to the chauffeur before going up the steps.

“How’s your wife, Walton? I forgot to ask.”

“Better I think, ma’am. The doctor said he’d look in and see her about half-past six. Will you be wanting the car again?”

Virginia reflected for a minute.

“I shall be away for the week-end. I’m going by the 6.40 from Paddington, but I shan’t need you again—a taxi will do for that. I’d rather you saw the doctor. If he thinks it would do your wife good to go away for the week-end, take her somewhere, Walton. I’ll stand the expense.”

Cutting short the man’s thanks with an impatient nod of the head, Virginia ran up the steps, delved into her bag in search of her latchkey, remembered she hadn’t got it with her, and hastily rang the bell.

It was not answered at once, but as she waited there a young man came up the steps. He was shabbily dressed, and carried in his hand a sheaf of leaflets. He held one out to Virginia with the legend on it plainly visible: “Why Did I Serve my Country?” In his left hand he held a collecting-box.

[Pg 67]

“I can’t buy two of those awful poems in one day,” said Virginia pleadingly. “I bought one this morning. I did, indeed, honour bright.”

The young man threw back his head and laughed. Virginia laughed with him. Running her eyes carelessly over him, she thought him a more pleasing specimen than usual of London’s unemployed. She liked his brown face, and the lean hardness of him. She went so far as to wish she had a job for him.

But at that moment the door opened, and immediately Virginia forgot all about the problem of the unemployed, for to her astonishment the door was opened by her own maid, Élise.

“Where’s Chilvers?” she demanded sharply, as she stepped into the hall.

“But he is gone, madame, with the others.”

“What others? Gone where?”

“But to Datchet, madame—to the cottage, as your telegram said.”

“My telegram?” said Virginia, utterly at sea.

“Did not madame send a telegram? Surely there can be no mistake. It came but an hour ago.”

“I never sent any telegram. What did it say?”

“I believe it is still on the table *là-bas*.”

Élise retired, pounced upon it, and brought it to her mistress in triumph.

“*Voilà*, madame!”

The telegram was addressed to Chilvers and ran as follows:

“Please take household down to cottage at once, and make preparations for week-end party there. Catch 5.49 train.”

There was nothing unusual about it, it was just the sort of message she herself had frequently sent before, when she had arranged a party at her riverside bungalow on the spur of the moment. She always took the whole household down, leaving an old woman as caretaker. Chilvers would not have seen anything wrong with the message, and like a good servant had carried out his orders faithfully enough. [Pg 68]

“Me, I remained,” explained Élise, “knowing that madame would wish me to pack for her.”

“It’s a silly hoax,” cried Virginia, flinging down the telegram angrily. “You know perfectly well, Élise, that I am going to Chimneys. I told you so this morning.”

“I thought madame had changed her mind. Sometimes that does happen, does it not, madame?”

Virginia admitted the truth of the accusation with a half smile. She was busy trying to find a reason for this extraordinary practical joke. Élise cut forward a suggestion.

“*Mon Dieu!*” she cried, clasping her hands. “If it should be the malefactors, the thieves! They send the bogus telegram and get the *domestiques* all out of the house, and then they rob it.”

“I suppose that might be it,” said Virginia doubtfully.

“Yes, yes, madame, that is it without a doubt. Every day you read in the papers of such things. Madame will ring up the police at once—at once—before they arrive and cut our throats.”

“Don’t get so excited, Élise. They won’t come and cut our throats at six o’clock in the afternoon.”

“Madame, I implore you, let me run out and fetch a policeman now, at once.”

“What on earth for? Don’t be silly, Élise. Go up and pack my things for Chimneys if you haven’t already done it. The new Cailleuax evening dress, and the white crêpe marocain, and—yes, the black velvet—black velvet is so political, is it not?”

“Madame looks ravishing in the eau de nil satin,” suggested Élise, her professional instincts reasserting themselves.

“No, I won’t take that. Hurry up, Élise, there’s a good girl. We’ve got very little time. I’ll send a wire to Chilvers at Datchet, and I’ll speak to the policeman on the beat as we go out and tell him to keep an eye on the place. Don’t start rolling your eyes again, Élise—if you get so frightened before anything has happened, what would you do if a man jumped out from some dark corner and stuck a knife into you?” [Pg 69]

Élise gave vent to a shrill squeak, and beat a speedy retreat up the stairs, darting nervous glances over each shoulder as she went.

Virginia made a face at her retreating back, and crossed the hall to the little study where the telephone was. Élise’s suggestion of ringing up the police station seemed to her a good one, and she intended to act upon it without any further delay.

She opened the study door and crossed to the telephone. Then, with her hand on the receiver, she stopped. A man was sitting in the big arm-chair, sitting in a curious huddled position. In the stress of the moment, she had forgotten all about her expected visitor. Apparently he had fallen asleep whilst waiting for her.

She came right up to the chair, a slightly mischievous smile upon her face. And then suddenly the smile faded.

The man was not asleep. *He was dead.*

She knew it at once, knew it instinctively even before her eyes had seen and noted the small shining pistol lying on the floor, the little-singed hole just above the heart with the dark stain round it, and the horrible dropped jaw.

She stood quite still, her hands pressed to her sides. In the silence she heard Élise running down the stairs.

“Madame! Madame!”

“Well, what is it?”

She moved quickly to the door. Her whole instinct was to conceal what had happened—for the moment anyway—from Élise. Élise would promptly go into hysterics, she knew that well enough, and she felt a great need for calm and quiet in which to think things out.

“Madame, would it not be better if I should draw the chain across the door? These malefactors, at any minute they may arrive.” [Pg 70]

“Yes, if you like. Anything you like.”

She heard the rattle of the chain, and then Élise running upstairs again, and drew a long breath of relief.

She looked at the man in the chair and then at the telephone. Her course was quite clear, she must ring up the police at once.

But still she did not do so. She stood quite still, paralysed with horror and with a host of conflicting ideas rushing through her brain. The bogus telegram. Had it something to do with this? Supposing Élise had not stayed behind? She would have let herself in—that is, presuming she had had her latchkey with her as usual, to find herself alone in the house with a murdered man—a man whom she had permitted to blackmail her on a former occasion. Of course she had an explanation of that; but thinking of that explanation she was not quite easy in her mind. She remembered how frankly incredible George had found it. Would other people think the same. Those letters now—of course she hadn’t written them, but would it be so easy to prove that?

She put her hands on her forehead, squeezing them tight together.

“I must think,” said Virginia. “I simply must think.”

Who had let the man in? Surely not Élise. If she had done so, she would have been sure to have mentioned the fact at once. The whole thing seemed more and more mysterious as she thought about it. There was really only one thing to be done—ring up the police.

She stretched out her hand to the telephone, and suddenly she thought of George. A man—that was what she wanted—an ordinary level-headed, unemotional man who would see things in their proper proportion and point out to her the best course to take.

Then she shook her head. Not George. The first thing George would think of would be his own position. He would hate being mixed up in this kind of business. George wouldn’t do at all. [Pg 71]

Then her face softened. Bill, of course! Without more ado, she rang up Bill.

She was informed that he had left half an hour ago for Chimneys.

“Oh, damn!” cried Virginia, jamming down the receiver. It was horrible to be shut up with a dead body and to have no one to speak to.

And at that minute the front-door bell rang.

Virginia jumped. In a few minutes it rang again. Élise, she knew, was upstairs packing and wouldn’t hear it.

Virginia went out in the hall, drew back the chain, and undid all the bolts that Élise had fastened in her zeal. Then, with a long breath, she threw open the door. On the steps was the unemployed young man.

Virginia plunged headlong with a relief born of overstrung nerves.

"Come in," she said. "I think that perhaps I've got a job for you."

She took him into the dining-room, pulled toward a chair for him, sat down herself facing him, and stared at him very attentively.

"Excuse me," she said, "but are you—I mean——"

"Eton and Oxford," said the young man. "That's what you wanted to ask me, wasn't it?"

"Something of the kind," admitted Virginia.

"Come down in the world entirely through my own incapacity to stick to regular work. This isn't regular work you're offering me, I hope?"

A smile hovered for a moment on her lips.

"It's very irregular."

"Good," said the young man in a tone of satisfaction.

Virginia noted his bronzed face and long lean body with approval.

"You see," she explained, "I'm in rather a hole, and most of my friends are—well, rather high up. They've all got something to lose."

"I've nothing whatever to lose. So go ahead. What's the trouble?"

[Pg 72]

"There's a dead man in the next room," said Virginia. "He's been murdered, and I don't know what to do about it."

She blurted out the words as simply as a child might have done. The young man went up enormously in her estimation by the way he accepted her statement. He might have been used to hearing a similar announcement made every day of his life.

"Excellent," he said, with a trace of enthusiasm. "I've always wanted to do a bit of amateur detective work. Shall we go and view the body, or will you give me the facts first?"

"I think I'd better give you the facts." She paused for a moment to consider how best to condense her story, and then began, speaking quietly and concisely.

"This man came to the house for the first time yesterday and asked to see me. He had certain letters with him—love letters, signed with my name——"

"But which weren't written by you," put in the young man quietly.

Virginia looked at him in some astonishment

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I deduced it. But go on."

"He wanted to blackmail me—and I—well, I don't know if you'll understand, but I—let him."

She looked at him appealingly, and he nodded his head reassuringly.

"Of course I understand. You wanted to see what it felt like."

"How frightfully clever of you! That's just what I did feel."

"I *am* clever," said the young man modestly. "But, mind you, very few people would understand that point of view. Most people, you see, haven't got any imagination."

"I suppose that's so. I told this man to come back to-day—at six o'clock. I arrived home from Ranelagh to find that a bogus telegram had got all the servants except my maid out of the house. Then I walked into the study and found the man shot."

[Pg 73]

"Who let him in?"

"I don't know. I think if my maid had done so she would have told me."

"Does she know what has happened?"

“I have told her nothing.”

The young man nodded, and rose to his feet.

“And now to view the body,” he said briskly. “But I’ll tell you this—on the whole it’s always best to tell the truth. One lie involves you in such a lot of lies—and continuous lying is so monotonous.”

“Then you advise me to ring up the police?”

“Probably. But we’ll just have a look at the fellow first.”

Virginia led the way out the room. On the threshold she paused, looking back at him.

“By the way,” she said, “you haven’t told me your name yet?”

“My name? My name’s Anthony Cade.”

Anthony Disposes of a Body

Anthony followed Virginia out of the room, smiling a little to himself. Events had taken quite an unexpected turn. But as he bent over the figure in the chair he grew grave again.

"He's still warm," he said sharply. "He was killed less than half an hour ago."

"Just before I came in?"

"Exactly."

He stood upright, drawing his brows together in a frown. Then he asked a question of which Virginia did not at once see the drift:

"Your maid's not been in this room, of course?"

"No."

"Does she know that you've been into it?"

"Why—yes. I came to the door to speak to her."

"After you'd found the body."

"Yes."

"And you said nothing?"

"Would it have been better if I had? I thought she would go into hysterics—she's French, you know, and easily upset—I wanted to think over the best thing to do."

Anthony nodded, but did not speak.

"You think it a pity, I can see?"

"Well, it was rather unfortunate, Mrs. Revel. If you and the maid had discovered the body together, immediately on your return, it would have simplified matters very much. The man would then definitely have been shot *before* your return to the house." [Pg 75]

"Whilst now they might say he was shot *after*—I see—"

He watched her taking in the idea, and was confirmed in his first impression of her formed when she had spoken to him on the steps outside. Besides beauty, she possessed courage and brains.

Virginia was so engrossed in the puzzle presented to her that it did not occur to her to wonder at this strange man's ready use of her name.

"Why didn't Élise hear the shot, I wonder?" she murmured.

Anthony pointed to the open window, as a loud backfire came from a passing car.

"There you are. London's not the place to notice a pistol shot."

Virginia turned with a little shudder to the body in the chair.

"He looks like an Italian," she remarked curiously.

"He is an Italian," said Anthony. "I should say that his regular profession was that of a waiter. He only did blackmailing in his spare time. His name might very possibly be Giuseppe."

"Good heavens!" cried Virginia. "Is this Sherlock Holmes?"

"No," said Anthony regretfully. "I'm afraid it's just plain or garden cheating. I'll tell you all about it presently. Now you say this man showed you some letters and asked you for money. Did you give him any?"

"Yes, I did."

“How much?”

“Forty pounds.”

“That’s bad,” said Anthony, but without manifesting any undue surprise. “Now let’s have a look at the telegram.”

Virginia picked it up from the table and gave it to him. She saw his face grow grave as he looked at it.

“What’s the matter?”

[Pg 76]

He held it out, pointing silently to the place of origin.

“Barnes,” he said. “And you were at Ranelagh this afternoon. What’s to prevent you having sent it off yourself?”

Virginia felt fascinated by his words. It was as though a net was closing tighter and tighter round her. He was forcing her to see all the things which she had felt dimly at the back of her mind.

Anthony took out his handkerchief and wound it round his hand, then he picked up the pistol.

“We criminals have to be so careful,” he said apologetically. “Fingerprints, you know.”

Suddenly she saw his whole figure stiffen. His voice, when he spoke, had altered. It was terse and curt.

“Mrs. Revel,” he said, “have you ever seen this pistol before?”

“No,” said Virginia wonderingly.

“Are you sure of that?”

“Quite sure.”

“Have you a pistol of your own?”

“No.”

“Have you ever had one?”

“No, never.”

“You are sure of that?”

“Quite sure.”

He stared at her steadily for a minute, and Virginia stared back in complete surprise at his tone.

Then, with a sigh, he relaxed.

“That’s odd,” he said. “How do you account for this?”

He held out the pistol. It was a small, dainty article, almost a toy—though capable of doing deadly work. Engraved on it was the name Virginia.

“Oh, it’s impossible!” cried Virginia.

Her astonishment was so genuine that Anthony could but believe in it.

“Sit down,” he said quietly. “There’s more in this than there seemed to be first go off. To begin with, what’s our hypothesis? There are only two possible ones. There is, of course, the real Virginia of the letters. She may have somehow or other tracked him down, shot him, dropped the pistol, stolen the letters, and taken herself off. That’s quite possible, isn’t it?”

[Pg 77]

“I suppose so,” said Virginia unwillingly.

“The other hypothesis is a good deal more interesting. Whoever wished to kill Giuseppe, wished also to incriminate you—in fact that may have been their main object. They could get *him* easily enough anywhere, but they took extraordinary pains and trouble to get him

here, and whoever they were they knew all about you, your cottage at Datchet, your usual household arrangements, and the fact that you were at Ranelagh this afternoon. It seems an absurd question, but have you any enemies, Mrs. Revel?"

"Of course I haven't—not that kind, anyway."

"The question is," said Anthony, "what are we going to do now? There are two courses open to us. A: Ring up the police, tell the whole story, and trust to your unassailable position in the world and your hitherto blameless life. B: An attempt on my part to dispose successfully of the body. Naturally my private inclinations urge me to B. I've always wanted to see if I couldn't conceal a crime with the necessary cunning, but have had a squeamish objection to shedding blood. On the whole, I expect A's the soundest. Then there's a sort of bowdlerized A. Ring up the police, etc., but suppress the pistol and the blackmailing letters—that is, if they are on him still."

Anthony ran rapidly through the dead man's pockets.

"He's been stripped clean," he announced. "There's not a thing on him. There'll be dirty work at the crossroads over those letters yet. Hullo, what's this? Hole in the lining—something got caught there, torn roughly out, and a scrap of paper left behind."

He drew out the scrap of paper as he spoke, and brought it over to the light. Virginia joined him.

"Pity we haven't got the rest of it," he muttered. "*Chimneys 11.45 Thursday—Sounds* [Pg 78] like an appointment."

"Chimneys?" cried Virginia. "How extraordinary!"

"Why extraordinary? Rather high toned for such a low fellow?"

"I'm going to Chimneys this evening. At least I was."

Anthony wheeled round on her.

"What's that? Say that again."

"I was going to Chimneys this evening," repeated Virginia.

Anthony stared at her.

"I begin to see. At least, I may be wrong—but it's an idea. Suppose some one wanted badly to prevent your going to Chimneys?"

"My cousin George Lomax does," said Virginia with a smile. "But I can't seriously suspect George of murder."

Anthony did not smile. He was lost in thought.

"If you ring up the police, it's good-bye to any idea of getting to Chimneys to-day—or even to-morrow. And I should like you to go to Chimneys. I fancy it will disconcert our unknown friends. Mrs. Revel, will you put yourself in my hands?"

"It's to be Plan B, then?"

"It's to be Plan B. The first thing is to get that maid of yours out of the house. Can you manage that?"

"Easily."

Virginia went out in the hall and called up the stairs.

"Élise. Élise."

"Madame?"

Anthony heard a rapid colloquy, and then the front door opened and shut. Virginia came back into the room.

"She's gone. I sent her for some special scent—told her the shop in question was open until eight. It won't be, of course. She's to follow after me by the next train without

coming back here.”

“Good,” said Anthony approvingly. “We can now proceed to the disposal of the body. It’s a time-worn method, but I’m afraid I shall have to ask you if there’s such a thing in the house as a trunk?” [Pg 79]

“Of course there is. Come down to the basement and take your choice.”

There was a variety of trunks in the basement. Anthony selected a solid affair of suitable size.

“I’ll attend to this part of it,” he said tactfully. “You go upstairs and get ready to start.”

Virginia obeyed. She slipped out of her tennis kit, put on a soft brown travelling dress and a delightful little orange hat, and came down to find Anthony waiting in the hall with a neatly strapped trunk beside him.

“I should like to tell you the story of my life,” he remarked, “but it’s going to be rather a busy evening. Now this is what you’ve got to do. Call a taxi, have your luggage put on it, including the trunk. Drive to Paddington. There have the trunk put in the Left Luggage Office. I shall be on the platform. As you pass me, drop the Cloak Room ticket. I will pick it up and pretend to return it to you, but in reality I shall keep it. Go on to Chimneys, and leave the rest to me.”

“It’s awfully good of you,” said Virginia. “It’s really dreadful of me saddling a perfect stranger with a dead body like this.”

“I like it,” returned Anthony nonchalantly. “If one of my friends, Jimmy McGrath, were here, he’d tell you that anything of this kind suits me down to the ground.”

Virginia was staring at him.

“What name did you say? Jimmy McGrath?”

Anthony returned her glance keenly.

“Yes. Why? Have you heard of him?”

“Yes—and quite lately.” She paused irresolutely, and then went on. “Mr. Cade, I must talk to you. Can’t you come down to Chimneys?”

“You’ll see me before very long, Mrs. Revel—I’ll tell you that. Now, exit Conspirator A by back door slinkingly. Exit Conspirator B in blaze of glory by front door to taxi.” [Pg 80]

The plan went through without a hitch. Anthony, having picked up a second taxi, was on the platform and duly retrieved the fallen ticket. He then departed in search of a somewhat battered second-hand Morris Cowley which he had acquired earlier in the day in case it should be necessary to his plans.

Returning to Paddington in this, he handed the ticket to the porter, who got the trunk out of the cloak room and wedged it securely at the back of the car. Anthony drove off.

His objective now was out of London. Through Notting Hill, Shepherd’s Bush, down Goldhawk Road, through Brentford and Hounslow till he came to the long stretch of road mid-way between Hounslow and Staines. It was a well-frequented road, with motors passing continually. No footmarks or tyre marks were likely to show. Anthony stopped the car at a certain spot. Getting down, he first obscured the number-plate with mud. Then, waiting until he heard no car coming in either direction, he opened the trunk, heaved out Giuseppe’s body, and laid it neatly down by the side of the road, on the inside of a curve, so that the headlights of passing motors would not strike on it.

Then he entered the car again and drove away. The whole business had occupied exactly one minute and a half. He made a détour to the right, returning to London by way of Burnham Beeches. There again he halted the car, and choosing a giant of the forest he deliberately climbed the huge tree. It was something of a feat, even for Anthony. To one of the topmost branches, he affixed a small brown-paper parcel, concealing it in a little niche close to the bole.

“A very clever way of disposing of the pistol,” said Anthony to himself with some approval. “Everybody hunts about on the ground, and drags ponds. But there are very few people in England who could climb that tree.” [Pg 81]

Next, back to London and Paddington Station. Here he left the trunk—at the other cloak room this time, the one on the Arrival side. He thought longingly of such things as good rumpsteaks, juicy chops, and large masses of fried potatoes. But he shook his head ruefully, glancing at his wrist watch. He fed the Morris with a fresh supply of petrol, and then took the road once more. North this time.

It was just after half-past eleven that he brought the car to rest in the road adjoining the park of Chimneys. Jumping out he scaled the wall easily enough, and set out towards the house. It took him longer than he thought, and presently he broke into a run. A great grey mass loomed up out of the darkness—the venerable pile of Chimneys. In the distance a stable clock chimed the three quarters.

11.45—the time mentioned on the scrap of paper. Anthony was on the terrace now, looking up at the house. Everything seemed dark and quiet.

“They go to bed early, these politicians,” he murmured to himself.

And suddenly a sound smote upon his ears—the sound of a shot. Anthony spun round quickly. The sound had come from within the house—he was sure of that. He waited a minute, but everything was still as death. Finally he went up to one of the long French windows from where he judged the sound that had startled him had come. He tried the handle. It was locked. He tried some of the other windows, listening intently all the while. But the silence remained unbroken.

In the end he told himself that he must have imagined the sound, or perhaps mistaken a stray shot coming from a poacher in the woods. He turned and retraced his steps across the park, vaguely dissatisfied and uneasy.

He looked back at the house, and whilst he looked a light sprang up in one of the windows on the first floor. In another minute it went out again, and the whole place was in darkness once more. [Pg 82]

10 Chimneys

[Pg 83]

Inspector Badgworthy in his office. Time, 8.30 A.M. A tall portly man, Inspector Badgworthy, with a heavy regulation tread. Inclined to breathe hard in moments of professional strain. In attendance Constable Johnson, very new to the Force, with a downy unfledged look about him, like a human chicken.

The telephone on the table rang sharply, and the inspector took it up with his usual portentous gravity of action.

“Yes. Police station Market Basing. Inspector Badgworthy speaking. What?”

Slight alteration in the inspector’s manner. As he is greater than Johnson, so others are greater than Inspector Badgworthy.

“Speaking, my lord. I beg your pardon, my lord? I didn’t quite hear what you said?”

Long pause, during which the inspector listens, quite a variety of expressions passing over his usually impassive countenance. Finally he lays down the receiver, after a brief “At once, my lord.”

He turned to Johnson, seeming visibly swelled with importance.

“From his lordship—at Chimneys—Murder.”

“Murder,” echoed Johnson, suitably impressed.

“Murder it is,” said the inspector, with great satisfaction.

“Why, there’s never been a murder here—not that I’ve ever heard of—except the time that Tom Pearse shot his sweetheart.” [Pg 84]

“And that, in a manner of speaking, wasn’t murder at all, but drink,” said the inspector, deprecatingly.

“He weren’t hanged for it,” agreed Johnson gloomily. “But this is the real thing, is it, sir?”

“It is, Johnson. One of his lordship’s guests, a foreign gentleman, discovered shot. Open window, and footprints outside.”

“I’m sorry it were a foreigner,” said Johnson, with some regret.

It made the murder seem less real. Foreigners, Johnson felt, were liable to be shot.

“His lordship’s in a rare taking,” continued the inspector. “We’ll get hold of Dr. Cartwright and take him up with us right away. I hope to goodness no one will get messing with those footprints.”

Badgworthy was in a seventh heaven. A murder! At Chimneys! Inspector Badgworthy in charge of the case. The police have a clue. Sensational arrest. Promotion and kudos for the aforementioned inspector.

“That is,” said Inspector Badgworthy to himself, “if Scotland Yard doesn’t come butting in.”

The thought damped him momentarily. It seemed so extremely likely to happen under the circumstances.

They stopped at Dr. Cartwright’s, and the doctor, who was a comparatively young man, displayed a keen interest. His attitude was almost exactly that of Johnson.

“Why, bless my soul,” he exclaimed. “We haven’t had a murder here since the time of Tom Pearse.”

All three of them got into the doctor’s little car, and started off briskly for Chimneys. As they passed the local inn, *The Jolly Cricketers*, the doctor noticed a man standing in the

doorway.

“Stranger,” he remarked. “Rather a nice-looking fellow. Wonder how long he’s been here, and what he’s doing staying at the *Cricketers*? I haven’t seen him about at all. He must have arrived last night.”

“He didn’t come by train,” said Johnson.

[Pg 85]

Johnson’s brother was the local railway porter, and Johnson was therefore always well up in arrivals and departures.

“Who was there for Chimneys yesterday?” asked the inspector.

“Lady Eileen, she come down by the 3.40, and two gentlemen with her, an American gent, and a young Army chap—neither of them with valets. His lordship come down with a foreign gentleman, the one that’s been shot as likely as not, by the 5.40, and the foreign gentleman’s valet. Mr. Eversleigh come by the same train. Mrs. Revel came by the 7.25, and another foreign-looking gentleman came by it too, one with a bald head and a hook nose. Mrs. Revel’s maid came by the 8.56.”

Johnson paused, out of breath.

“And there was no one for the *Cricketers*?”

Johnson shook his head.

“He must have come by car then,” said the inspector. “Johnson, make a note to institute inquiries at the *Cricketers* on your way back. We want to know all about any strangers. He was very sunburnt, that gentleman. Likely as not, he’s come from foreign parts too.”

The inspector nodded his head with great sagacity, as though to imply that that was the sort of wide-awake man he was—not to be caught napping under any consideration.

The car passed in through the Park gates of Chimneys. Descriptions of that historic place can be found in any guide book. It is also No. 3 in *Historic Homes of England*, price 21s. On Thursdays, charrs-à-bancs come over from Middlingham and view those portions of it which are open to the public. In view of all these facilities, to describe Chimneys would be superfluous.

They were received at the door by a white-headed butler whose demeanour was perfect.

“We are not accustomed,” it seemed to say, “to having murder committed within these walls. But these are evil days. Let us meet disaster with perfect calm, and pretend with our dying breath that nothing out of the usual has occurred.”

[Pg 86]

“His lordship,” said the butler, “is expecting you. This way, if you please.”

He led them to a small cosy room which was Lord Caterham’s refuge from the magnificence elsewhere, and announced them.

“The police, my lord, and Dr. Cartwright.”

Lord Caterham was pacing up and down in a visibly agitated state.

“Ha! inspector, you’ve turned up at last. I’m thankful for that. How are you, Cartwright? This is the very devil of a business, you know. The very devil of a business.”

And Lord Caterham, running his hands through his hair in a frenzied fashion until it stood upright in little tufts, looked even less like a peer of the realm than usual.

“Where’s the body?” asked the doctor, in curt business-like fashion.

Lord Caterham turned to him as though relieved at being asked a direct question.

“In the council chamber—just where it was found—I wouldn’t have it touched. I believed—er—that that was the correct thing to do.”

“Quite right, my lord,” said the inspector approvingly.

He produced a notebook and pencil.

“And who discovered the body? Did you?”

“Good Lord, no,” said Lord Caterham. “You don’t think I usually get up at this unearthly hour in the morning, do you? No, a housemaid found it. She screamed a good deal, I believe. I didn’t hear her myself. Then they came to me about it, and of course I got up and came down—and there it was, you know.”

“You recognized the body as that of one of your guests?”

“That’s right, inspector.”

“By name?”

This perfectly simple question seemed to upset Lord Caterham. He opened his mouth [Pg 87] once or twice, and then shut it again. Finally he asked feebly.

“Do you mean—do you mean—what was his name?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well,” said Lord Caterham, looking slowly round the room, as though hoping to gain inspiration. “His name was—I should say it was—yes, decidedly so—Count Stanislaus.”

There was something so odd about Lord Caterham’s manner, that the inspector ceased using his pencil and stared at him instead. But at that moment a diversion occurred which seemed highly welcome to the embarrassed peer.

The door opened and a girl came into the room. She was tall, slim and dark, with an attractive boyish face, and a very determined manner. This was Lady Eileen Brent, commonly known as Bundle, Lord Caterham’s eldest daughter. She nodded to the others, and addressed her father directly.

“I’ve got him,” she announced.

For a moment the inspector was on the point of starting forward under the impression that the young lady had captured the murderer red-handed, but almost immediately he realized that her meaning was quite different.

Lord Caterham uttered a sigh of relief.

“That’s a good job. What did he say?”

“He’s coming over at once. We are to ‘use the utmost discretion.’”

Her father made a sound of annoyance.

“That’s just the sort of idiotic thing George Lomax would say. However, once he comes, I shall wash my hands of the whole affair.”

He appeared to cheer up a little at the prospect.

“And the name of the murdered man was Count Stanislaus?” queried the doctor.

A lightning glance passed between father and daughter, and then the former said with some dignity:

“Certainly. I said so just now.”

“I asked because you didn’t seem quite sure about it before,” explained Cartwright. [Pg 88]

There was a faint twinkle in his eye, and Lord Caterham looked at him reproachfully.

“I’ll take you to the Council Chamber,” he said more briskly.

They followed him, the inspector bringing up the rear, and darting sharp glances all around him as he went, much as though he expected to find a clue in a picture frame, or behind a door.

Lord Caterham took a key from his pocket and unlocked a door, flinging it open. They all passed into a big room panelled in oak, with three long windows giving on the terrace. There was a long refectory table and a good many oak chests, and some beautiful old chairs. On the walls were various paintings of dead and gone Caterhams and others.

Near the left-hand wall, about half-way between the door and the window, a man was lying on his back, his arms flung wide.

Dr. Cartwright went over and knelt down by the body. The inspector strode across to the windows, and examined them in turn. The centre one was closed, but not fastened. On the steps outside were footprints leading up to the window, and a second set going away again.

“Clear enough,” said the inspector, with a nod. “But there ought to be footprints on the inside as well. They’d show up plain on this parquet floor.”

“I think I can explain that,” interposed Bundle. “The housemaid had polished half the floor this morning before she saw the body. You see, it was dark when she came in here. She went straight across to the windows, drew the curtains, and began on the floor, and naturally didn’t see the body which is hidden from that side of the room by the table. She didn’t see it until she came right on top of it.”

The inspector nodded.

“Well,” said Lord Caterham, eager to escape. “I’ll leave you here, inspector. You’ll be able to find me if you—er—want me. But Mr. George Lomax is coming over from Wyverne Abbey shortly, and he’ll be able to tell you far more than I could. It’s his business really. I can’t explain, but he will when he comes.” [Pg 89]

Lord Caterham beat a precipitate retreat without waiting for a reply.

“Too bad for Lomax,” he complained. “Letting me in for this. What’s the matter, Tredwell?”

The white-haired butler was hovering deferentially at his elbow.

“I have taken the liberty, my lord, of advancing the breakfast hour as far as you are concerned. Everything is ready in the dining-room.”

“I don’t suppose for a minute I can eat anything,” said Lord Caterham gloomily, turning his footsteps in that direction. “Not for a moment.”

Bundle slipped her hand through his arm, and they entered the dining-room together. On the sideboard were half a score of heavy silver dishes, ingeniously kept hot by patent arrangements.

“Omelet,” said Lord Caterham, lifting each lid in turn. “Eggs and bacon, kidneys, devilled bird, haddock, cold ham, cold pheasant. I don’t like any of these things, Tredwell, ask the cook to poach me an egg, will you?”

“Very good, my lord.”

Tredwell withdrew. Lord Caterham, in an absent-minded fashion, helped himself plentifully to kidneys and bacon, poured himself out a cup of coffee, and sat down at the long table. Bundle was already busy with a plateful of eggs and bacon.

“I’m damned hungry,” said Bundle with her mouth full. “It must be the excitement.”

“It’s all very well for you,” complained her father. “You young people like excitement. But I’m in a very delicate state of health. Avoid all worry, that’s what Sir Abner Willis said—avoid all worry. So easy for a man sitting in his consulting-room in Harley Street to say that. How can I avoid worry when that ass Lomax lands me with a thing like this? I ought to have been firm at the time. I ought to have put my foot down.” [Pg 90]

With a sad shake of the head, Lord Caterham rose and carved himself a plate of ham.

“Codders has certainly done it this time,” observed Bundle cheerfully. “He was almost incoherent over the telephone. He’ll be here in a minute or two, spluttering nineteen to the dozen about discretion and hushing it up.”

Lord Caterham groaned at the prospect.

“Was he up?” he asked.

“He told me,” replied Bundle, “that he had been up and dictating letters and memoranda ever since seven o’clock.”

“Proud of it, too,” remarked her father. “Extraordinarily selfish, these public men. They make their wretched secretaries get up at the most unearthly hours in order to dictate rubbish to them. If a law was passed compelling them to stop in bed until eleven, what a benefit it would be to the nation! I wouldn’t mind so much if they didn’t talk such balderdash. Lomax is always talking to me of my ‘position.’ As if I had any. Who wants to be a peer nowadays?”

“Nobody,” said Bundle. “They’d much rather keep a prosperous public house.”

Tredwell reappeared silently with two poached eggs in a little silver dish which he placed on the table in front of Lord Caterham.

“What’s that, Tredwell?” said the latter, looking at them with faint distaste.

“Poached eggs, my lord.”

“I hate poached eggs,” said Lord Caterham peevishly. “They’re so insipid. I don’t like to look at them even. Take them away, will you, Tredwell?”

“Very good, my lord.”

Tredwell and the poached eggs withdrew as silently as they came.

“Thank God no one gets up early in this house,” remarked Lord Caterham devoutly. “We [Pg 91] shall have to break this to them when they do, I suppose.”

He sighed.

“I wonder who murdered him,” said Bundle. “And why?”

“That’s not our business, thank goodness,” said Lord Caterham. “That’s for the police to find out. Not that Badgworthy will ever find out anything. On the whole I rather hope it was Nosystein.”

“Meaning——”

“The All British Syndicate.”

“Why should Mr. Isaacstein murder him when he’d come down here on purpose to meet him?”

“High finance,” said Lord Caterham vaguely. “And that reminds me, I shouldn’t be at all surprised if Isaacstein wasn’t an early riser. He may blow in upon us at any minute. It’s a habit in the city. I believe that, however rich you are, you always catch the 9.17.”

The sound of a motor being driven at great speed was heard through the open window.

“Coddors,” cried Bundle.

Father and daughter leaned out of the window and hailed the occupant of the car as it drew up before the entrance.

“In here, my dear fellow, in here,” cried Lord Caterham, hastily swallowing his mouthful of ham.

George had no intention of climbing in through the window. He disappeared through the front door, and reappeared ushered in by Tredwell, who withdrew at once.

“Have some breakfast,” said Lord Caterham, shaking him by the hand. “What about a kidney?”

George waved the kidney aside impatiently.

“This is a terrible calamity, terrible, terrible.”

“It is indeed. Some haddock?”

“No, no. It must be hushed up—at all costs it must be hushed up.”

As Bundle had prophesied, George began to splutter.

"I understand your feelings," said Lord Caterham sympathetically. "Try an egg and bacon, or some haddock." [Pg 92]

"A totally unforeseen contingency—national calamity—concessions jeopardized——"

"Take time," said Lord Caterham. "And take some food. What you need is some food, to pull you together. Poached eggs now? There were some poached eggs here a minute or two ago."

"I don't want any food," said George. "I've had breakfast, and even if I hadn't had any I shouldn't want it. We must think what is to be done. You have told no one as yet?"

"Well, there's Bundle and myself. And the local police. And Cartwright. And all the servants of course."

George groaned.

"Pull yourself together, my dear fellow," said Lord Caterham kindly. "(I wish you'd have some breakfast.) You don't seem to realize that you can't hush up a dead body. It's got to be buried and all that sort of thing. Very unfortunate, but there it is."

George became suddenly calm.

"You are right, Caterham. You have called in the local police, you say? That will not do. We must have Battle."

"Battle, murder and sudden death," inquired Lord Caterham, with a puzzled face.

"No, no, you misunderstand me. I referred to Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard. A man of the utmost discretion. He worked with us in that deplorable business of the Party Funds."

"What was that?" asked Lord Caterham, with some interest.

But George's eye had fallen upon Bundle, as she sat half in and half out of the window, and he remembered discretion just in time. He rose.

"We must waste no time. I must send off some wires at once."

"If you write them out, Bundle will send them through the telephone." [Pg 93]

George pulled out a fountain pen and began to write with incredible rapidity. He handed the first one to Bundle, who read it with a great deal of interest.

"God! what a name," she remarked. "Baron How Much?"

"Baron Lolopretjzyl."

Bundle blinked.

"I've got it, but it will take some conveying to the post office."

George continued to write. Then he handed his labours to Bundle and addressed the master of the house:

"The best thing that you can do, Caterham——"

"Yes," said Lord Caterham apprehensively.

"Is to leave everything in my hands."

"Certainly," said Lord Caterham, with alacrity. "Just what I was thinking myself. You'll find the police and Dr. Cartwright in the Council Chamber. With the—er—with the body, you know. My dear Lomax, I place Chimneys unreservedly at your disposal. Do anything you like."

"Thank you," said George. "If I should want to consult you——"

But Lord Caterham had faded unobtrusively through the farther door. Bundle had observed his retreat with a grim smile.

“I’ll send off those telegrams at once,” she said. “You know your way to the Council Chamber?”

“Thank you, Lady Eileen.”

George hurried from the room.

Superintendent Battle Arrives

So apprehensive was Lord Caterham of being consulted by George that he spent the whole morning making a tour of his estate. Only the pangs of hunger drew him homeward. He also reflected that by now the worst would surely be over.

He sneaked into the house quietly by a small side door. From there he slipped neatly into his sanctum. He flattered himself that his entrance had not been observed, but there he was mistaken. The watchful Tredwell let nothing escape him. He presented himself at the door.

“You’ll excuse me, my lord——”

“What is it, Tredwell?”

“Mr. Lomax, my lord, is anxious to see you in the library as soon as you return.”

By this delicate method Tredwell conveyed that Lord Caterham had not yet returned unless he chose to say so.

Lord Caterham sighed, and then rose.

“I suppose it will have to be done sooner or later. In the library, you say?”

“Yes, my lord.”

Sighing again, Lord Caterham crossed the wide spaces of his ancestral home, and reached the library door. The door was locked. As he rattled the handle, it was unlocked from inside, opened a little way, and the face of George Lomax appeared, peering out suspiciously.

His face changed when he saw who it was.

“Ah, Caterham, come in. We were just wondering what had become of you.”

Murmuring something vague about duties on the estate, repairs for tenants, Lord Caterham sidled in apologetically. There were two other men in the room. One was Colonel Melrose, the Chief Constable. The other was a squarely built middle-aged man with a face so singularly devoid of expression as to be quite remarkable. [Pg 95]

“Superintendent Battle arrived half an hour ago,” explained George. “He has been round with Inspector Badgworthy, and seen Dr. Cartwright. He now wants a few facts from us.”

They all sat down, after Lord Caterham had greeted Melrose and acknowledged his introduction to Superintendent Battle.

“I need hardly tell you, Battle,” said George, “that this is a case in which we must use the utmost discretion.”

The superintendent nodded in an offhand manner that rather took Lord Caterham’s fancy.

“That will be all right, Mr. Lomax. But no concealments from us. I understand that the dead gentleman was called Count Stanislaus—at least, that that is the name by which the household knew him. Now was that his real name?”

“It was not.”

“What was his real name?”

“Prince Michael of Herzoslovakia.”

Battle’s eyes opened just a trifle, otherwise he gave no sign.

“And what, if I may ask the question, was the purpose of his visit here? Just pleasure?”

“There was a further object, Battle. All this in the strictest confidence of course.”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Lomax.”

“Colonel Melrose?”

“Of course.”

“Well, then, Prince Michael was here for the express purpose of meeting Mr. Herman Isaacstein. A loan was to be arranged on certain terms.”

“Which were?”

“I do not know the exact details. Indeed, they had not yet been arranged. But in the event of coming to the throne, Prince Michael pledged himself to grant certain oil concessions to those companies in which Mr. Isaacstein is interested. The British Government was prepared to support the claim of Prince Michael to the throne in view of his pronounced British sympathies.” [Pg 96]

“Well,” said Superintendent Battle, “I don’t suppose I need go further into it than that. Prince Michael wanted the money, Mr. Isaacstein wanted oil, and the British Government was ready to do the heavy father. Just one question. Was anyone else after those concessions?”

“I believe an American group of financiers had made overtures to His Highness.”

“And been turned down, eh?”

But George refused to be drawn.

“Prince Michael’s sympathies were entirely pro-British,” he repeated.

Superintendent Battle did not press the point.

“Lord Caterham, I understand that this is what occurred yesterday. You met Prince Michael in town and journeyed down here in company with him. The Prince was accompanied by his valet, a Herzoslovakian named Boris Anchoukoff, but his equerry, Captain Andrassy, remained in town. The Prince, on arriving, declared himself greatly fatigued, and retired to the apartments set aside for him. Dinner was served to him there, and he did not meet the other members of the house party. Is that correct?”

“Quite correct.”

“This morning a housemaid discovered the body at approximately 7.45 A.M. Dr. Cartwright examined the dead man and found that death was the result of a bullet fired from a revolver. No revolver was found, and no one in the house seems to have heard the shot. On the other hand the dead man’s wrist watch was smashed by the fall, and marks the crime as having been committed at exactly a quarter to twelve. Now what time did you retire to bed last night?” [Pg 97]

“We went early. Somehow or other the party didn’t seem to ‘go’ if you know what I mean, superintendent. We went up about half-past ten, I should say.”

“Thank you. Now I will ask you, Lord Caterham, to give me a description of all the people staying in the house.”

“But, excuse me, I thought the fellow who did it came from outside?”

Superintendent Battle smiled.

“I dare say he did. I dare say he did. But all the same I’ve got to know who was in the house. Matter of routine, you know.”

“Well, there was Prince Michael and his valet and Mr. Herman Isaacstein. You know all about them. Then there was Mr. Eversleigh——”

“Who works in my department,” put in George condescendingly.

“And who was acquainted with the real reason of Prince Michael’s being here?”

“No, I should not say that,” replied George weightily. “Doubtless he realized that something was in the wind, but I did not think it necessary to take him fully into my confidence.”

"I see. Will you go on, Lord Caterham?"

"Let me see, there was Mr. Hiram Fish."

"Who is Mr. Hiram Fish?"

"Mr. Fish is an American. He brought over a letter of introduction from Mr. Lucius Gott—you've heard of Lucius Gott?"

Superintendent Battle smiled acknowledgment. Who had not heard of Lucius C. Gott, the multi-millionaire?

"He was specially anxious to see my first editions. Mr. Gott's collection is, of course, unequalled, but I've got several treasures myself. This Mr. Fish was an enthusiast. Mr. Lomax had suggested that I ask one or two extra people down here this week-end to make things seem more natural, so I took the opportunity of asking Mr. Fish. That finishes the men. As for the ladies, there is only Mrs. Revel—and I expect she brought a maid or something like that. Then there was my daughter, and of course the children and their nurses and governesses and all the servants." [Pg 98]

Lord Caterham paused and took a breath.

"Thank you," said the detective. "A mere matter of routine, but necessary as such."

"There is no doubt, I suppose," asked George ponderously, "that the murderer entered by the window?"

Battle paused for a minute before replying slowly.

"There were footsteps leading up to the window, and footsteps leading away from it. A car stopped outside the park at 11.40 last night. At twelve o'clock a young man arrived at the *Jolly Cricketers* in a car, and engaged a room. He put his boots outside to be cleaned—they were very wet and muddy, as though he had been walking through the long grass in the park."

George leant forward eagerly.

"Could not the boots be compared with the footprints?"

"They were."

"Well?"

"They exactly correspond."

"That settles it," cried George. "We have the murderer. The young man—what is his name, by the way?"

"At the inn he gave the name of Anthony Cade."

"This Anthony Cade must be pursued at once, and arrested."

"You won't need to pursue him," said Superintendent Battle.

"Why?"

"Because he's still there."

"What?"

"Curious, isn't it?"

Colonel Melrose eyed him keenly.

"What's in your mind, Battle? Out with it."

"I just say it's curious, that's all. Here's a young man who ought to cut and run, but he doesn't cut and run. He stays here, and gives us every facility for comparing footmarks." [Pg 99]

"What do you think, then?"

"I don't know what to think. And that's a very disturbing state of mind."

“Do you imagine——” began Colonel Melrose, but broke off as a discreet knock came at the door.

George rose and went to it. Tredwell, inwardly suffering from having to knock at doors in this low fashion, stood dignified upon the threshold, and addressed his master.

“Excuse me, my lord, but a gentleman wishes to see you on urgent and important business, connected, I understand, with this morning’s tragedy.”

“What’s his name?” asked Battle suddenly.

“His name, sir, is Mr. Anthony Cade, but he said it wouldn’t convey anything to anybody.”

It seemed to convey something to the four men present. They all sat up in varying degrees of astonishment.

Lord Caterham began to chuckle.

“I’m really beginning to enjoy myself. Show him in, Tredwell. Show him in at once.”
