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ARTHUR STRINGER

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"She turned with a start, though her loss of self-possession lasted but a moment." Frontispiece. *See* p. 99.

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PHANTOMS

A Novel

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

Author of "The Wire Tappers" "The Prospector" etc.

ILLUSTRATED

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1907

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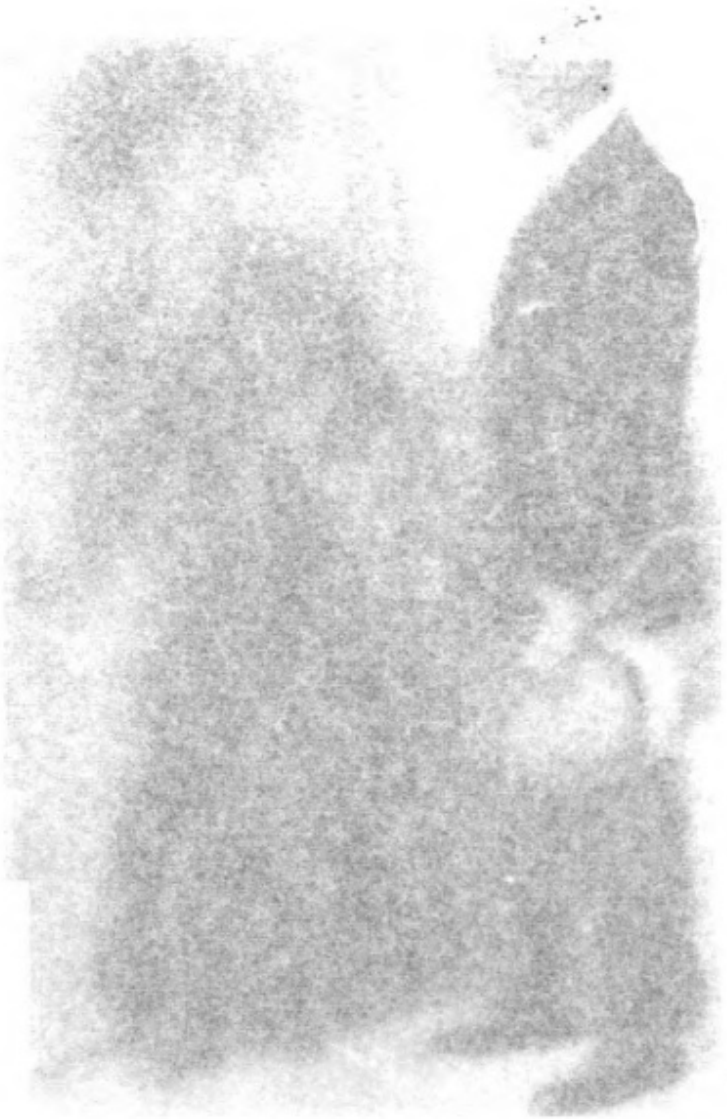

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A Novel

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

Author of "The Wire Tappers," "The Loom of Destiny," etc.

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I

It's the bad that's in the best of us
Leaves the saint so like the rest of us:
It's the good in the darkest curst of us
Redeems and saves the worst of us.

II

It's the muddle of hope and madness,
It's the tangle of good and badness,
It's the lunacy linked with sanity,
Makes up and mocks Humanity!

A. S.

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PHANTOM WIRES

CHAPTER I

THE END OF THE TETHER

Durkin folded the printed pages of the newspaper with no outward sign of excitement. Then he took out his money, quietly, and counted it, with meditative and pursed-up lips.

His eyes fell on a paltry handful of silver, with the dulled gold of one worn napoleon showing from its midst. He remembered, suddenly, that it was the third time he had counted that ever-lightening handful since partaking of his frugal coffee and rolls that morning. So he dropped the coins back into his pocket, dolefully, one by one, and took the deep breath of a man schooling himself to face the unfaceable.

Then he looked about the room, almost vacuously, as though the old-fashioned wooden bed and the faded curtains and the blank walls might hold some oracular answer to the riddle that lay before him. Then he went to the open window, and looked out, almost as vacuously, over the unbroken blue distance of the Mediterranean, tremb-

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ling into soft ribbons of silver where the wind rippled its surface, yellowing into a fluid gold towards the path of the lowering sun, deepening, again, into a brooding turquoise along the flat rim of the sea to the southward where the twin tranquilities of sky and water met.

It was the same unaltering Mediterranean, the same expanse of eternal sapphire that he had watched from the same Riviera window, day in and day out, with the same vague but unceasing terror of life and the same forlorn sense of helplessness before currents of destiny that week by week seemed to grow too strong for him. He turned away from the soft, exotic loveliness of the sea and sky before him, with a little gesture of impatience. The movement was strangely like that of a feverish invalid turning from the ache of an opened shutter.

Durkin took up the newspaper once more, and unfolded it with listlessly febrile fingers. It was the Paris edition of "The Herald," four days old. Still again, and quite mechanically now, he read the familiar advertisement. It was the same message, word for word, that had first caught his eye as he had sipped his coffee in the little palm-grown garden of the Hotel Bristol, in Gibraltar, nearly three weeks before. "Presence of James L. Durkin, electrical expert, essential at office of Stephens & Streeter, patent solicitors, etc., Empire Build-

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ing, New York City, before contracts can be culminated. Urgent."

Only, at the first reading of those pregnant words, all the even and hopeless monotony, all the dull and barren plane of life had suddenly erupted into one towering and consuming passion for activity, for return to his old world with its gentle anæsthesia of ever-widening plans and its obliterating and absolving years of honest labor.

He would never forget that moment, no matter into what ways or moods life might lead him. The rhythmic pound and beat of a company of British infantry, swarthy and strange-looking in their neutral-tinted khaki, marched briskly by on the hard stone road, momentarily filling the garden quietnesses with a tumult of noise. A bugle had sounded from one of the fortified galleries high above him, had sounded clearly out across the huddled little town at the foot of the Rock, challenging, uncompromising, thrillingly penetrating, as the paper had fluttered and shaken in his fingers. He had accepted it, in that first moment of unreasoning emotionalism, as an auspicious omen, as the call of his own higher life across the engulfing abysses of the past. He had forgotten, for the time being, just where and what he was.

But that grim truth had been forced on him, bitterly, bafflingly, after he had climbed the narrow streets of that town which always seemed to him

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a patchwork of nationalities, a polyglot mosaic of outlandish tongues, climbed up through alien-looking lanes and courts, past Moorish bazaars and Turkish lace-stores and English tobacco-shops, in final and frenzied search of the American Consul.

He had found the Consulate, at last, on what seemed a back street of the Spanish quarter, a gloomy and shabby room or two, with the faded American flags over the doorway clutched in the carven claws of a still more faded eagle. And he had waited for two patient hours, enduring the suspicious scowls of a lean and hawk-like Spanish housekeeper, to discover, at the end, that the American Consul had been riding at hounds, with the garrison Hunt Club. And when the Consul, having duly chased a stunted little Spanish fox all the way from Legnia to Algeciras, returned to his official quarters, in English riding-breeches and irradiating good spirits, Durkin had seen his new-blown hopes wither in the blossom. The Consul greatly regretted that his visitor had been kept waiting, but infinitely greater was his regret that an official position like his own gave him such limited opportunity for forwarding impatient electrical inventors to their native shores. No doubt the case was imminent; he was glad his visitor felt so confident about the outcome of his invention; he had known a man at home who went in for that sort of thing — had fitted up the lights for his own

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country house on the Sound; but he himself had never dreamed such a thing as a transmitting camera, that could telegraph a picture all the way from Gibraltar to New York, for instance, was even a possibility! . . . The Department, by the way, was going to have a cruiser drop in at Mogador, to look into the looting of the Methodist Missionary stores at Fruga. There was a remote chance that this cruiser might call at the Rock, on the homeward journey. But it was problematical. . . . And that had been the end of it all, the ignominious end. And still again the despairing Durkin was being confronted and challenged and mocked by this call to him from half way round the world. It maddened and sickened him, the very thought of his helplessness, so Æschylean in its torturing complications, so ironic in its refinement of cruelty. It stung him into a spirit of blind revolt. It was unfair, too utterly unfair, he told himself, as he paced the faded carpet of his cheap hotel-room, and the mild Riviera sunlight crept in through the window-square and the serenely soft and alluring sea-air drifted in between the open shutters.

It meant that a new and purposeful path had been blazed through the tangled complexities of life for him, yet he could make no move to take advantage of it. It meant that the door of his delivery had been swung wide, with its mockery of open and

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honest sunlight, and yet his feet were to remain fettered in that underworld gloom he had grown to hate. He must still stay an unwilling prisoner in this garden of studied indolence, this playground of invalids and gamblers; he must still dawdle idly about these glittering, stagnating squares, fringing a crowd of meaningless foreigners, skulking half-fed and poorly housed about this opulent show-place of the world that set its appeasing theatricalities into motion only at the touch of ready gold.

Durkin remembered, at that moment, that he was woefully hungry. He also remembered, more gratefully, that the young Chicagoan, the lonely and loquacious youth he had met the day before in the *café* of the "*Terrasse*," had asked him to take dinner with him, to view the splendor of "*Ciro's*" and a keeper of the *vestiaire* in scarlet breeches and silk stockings. Afterwards they were to go to the little bon-bon play-house up by the more pretentious bon-bon Casino. He was to watch the antics of a band of actors toying with some mimic fate, flippantly, to the sound of music, when his own destiny swung trembling on the last silken thread of tortured suspense! Yet it was better than moping alone, he told himself. He hated loneliness. And until the last few weeks he had scarcely known the meaning of the word! There had always been that other hand for which to reach, that other shoulder on which to lean! And suddenly, at the sting

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of the memories that surged over him, he went to the window that opened on its world of sea and sunlight, and looked out. His hands clutched the sill, and his unhappy eyes were intent and inquiring, as they swept the world before him in a slow and comprehensive gaze.

"Wherever you wait, wherever you are, in all this wide world, Frank, come here, to me, now, now, for I want you, need you!"

His lips scarcely murmured the vague invocation; it was more an inarticulate wish phrasing itself somewhere in the background of his clouded brain.

But as he awoke to the tumult of his emotions, to the intensity of his attitude, whilst he stood there projecting that vague call out into space, he turned abruptly away, with the abashment of a reticent man detected in an act of theatricality, and flung out of the room, down into the crowded streets of Monte Carlo.

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CHAPTER II

THE AZURE COAST

As Durkin and the young Chicagoan once more stepped out of the brilliantly lighted theatre, into the balmy night air, a seductive mingling of perfumes and music and murmuring voices blew in their hot faces, like a cooling wave. Durkin was wondering, a little wearily, just when he could be alone again.

A group of gay and laughing women, with their aphrodisiac rustle of silk and flutter of lace, floated carelessly past.

"Who are *they?*" asked the youth.

Durkin half-envied him his illusions and his ingenuousness of outlook; he was treading a veritable amphitheatre of orderly disordered passions with the gentle objective stare of a child looking for bright-colored flowers on a battleground. Durkin wondered if, after all, it was not the result of his mere quest of color, of his studying art in Paris for a year or two.

"I wonder who and what they are?" impersonally reiterated the younger man, as his gaze still followed the passing group to where it drifted and

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scattered through the lamp-strewn garden, like a cluster of golden butterflies.

"Those are the slaves who sand the arena!" retorted Durkin, studying the softly waving palms, and leaving the other a little in doubt as to the meaning of his figure.

The younger man sighed; he was beginning to feel, doubtless, from what different standpoints they looked out on life.

"Oh, well, you can say what you like, but this is the centre of the world, to *my* way of thinking!"

"The centre of — putrescence!" ejaculated Durkin. The younger man began to laugh, with conciliatory good-nature, as he glanced appreciatively back at the sweetmeat stateliness of the Casino front. But into the older man's mind crept the impression that they were merely passing, in going from crowded theatre to open garden and street, from one playhouse to another. It all seemed to him, indeed, nothing more than a transition of theatricalities. For that outer play-world which lay along Monaco's three short miles of marble stairway and villa and hillside garden appeared to him, in his mood of settled dejection, as artificial and unnatural and unrelated as the life which he had just seen pictured across the footlights of the over-pretty and meringue-like little theatre.

"Well, Monte Carlo's good enough for me, all right, all right!" persisted the young Chicagoan,

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as they made their way down the lamp-hung Promenade. And he laughed with a sort of luxurious contentment, holding out his cigarette-case as he did so.

The older man, catching a light from the proffered match, said nothing in reply. Something in the other's betrayingly boyish laugh grated on his nerves, though he paused, punctiliously, beside his chance-found companion, while together they gazed down at the twinkling lights of the bay, where the soft and violet Mediterranean lay under a soft and violet sky, and the boatlamps were languidly swaying dots of white and red, and the Promontory stood outlined in electric globes, like a woman's breast threaded with pearls, the young art-student expressed it, and the perennial, ever-cloying perfumes floated up from square and thicket and garden.

There was an eternal menace about it, Durkin concluded. There was something subversive and undermining and unnerving in its very atmosphere. It gave him the impression of being always under glass. It made him ache for the sting and bite of a New England north-easter. It screened and shut off the actualities and perpetuities of life as completely as the drop and wings of a playhouse might. Its sense of casual and careless calm, too, seemed to him only the rest of a spinning top. Its unrelated continuities of appeal, its incessant co-

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quetries of attire, its panoramic beauty of mountain and cape and sea-front, its parade of corporeal and egotistic pleasures, its primordial and undisguised appeal to the carnival spirit, its frank, exotic festivity, its volatile and almost too vital atmosphere, and, above all, its glowing and over-odorous gardens and flowerbeds, its overcrowded and grimly Dionysian Promenade, its murmurous and alluring restaurants on steep little boulevards — it was all a blind, Durkin argued with himself, to drape and smother the cynical misery of the place. Underneath all its flaunting and waving softnesses life ran grim and hard — as grim and hard as the solid rock that lay so close beneath its jonquils and violets and its masking verdure of mimosa and orange and palm.

He hated it, he told himself in his tragic and newborn austerity of spirit, as any right-minded and clean-living man should hate paper roses or painted faces. Every foot of it, that night, seemed a muffled and mediate insult to intelligence. The too open and illicit invitation of its confectionery-like halls, the insipidly emphatic pretentiousness of the Casino itself — Durkin could never quite decide whether it reminded him of a hurriedly finished exposition building or of a child's birthday cake duly iced and bedecked — the tinsel glory, the hackneyed magnificence, of its legitimatized and ever-orderly gaming dens, the eternal claws of greed beneath

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the voluptuous velvet of indolence — it all combined to fill his soul with a sense of hot revolt, as had so often before happened during the past long and lonely days, when he had looked up at the soft green of olive and eucalyptus and then down at the intense turquoise curve of the harbor fringed with white foam.

Always, at such times, he had marveled that man could turn one of earth's most beautiful gardens into one of crime's most crowded haunts. The ironic injustice of it embittered him; it left him floundering in a sea of moral indecision at a time when he most needed some forlorn belief in the beneficence of natural law. It outraged his incongruously persistent demand for fair play, just as the sight of the jauntily clad gunners shooting down pigeons on that tranquil and Edenic little grass-plot at the foot of the Promontory had done.

For underneath all the natural beauty of Monaco Durkin had been continuously haunted by the sense of something unclean and leprous and corroding. Under its rouge and roses, at every turn, he found the insidious taint.

And more than ever, tonight, he had a sense of witnessing Destiny stalking through those soft gardens, of Tragedy skulking about its regal stairways.

For it was there, in the midst of those unassisting and enervating surroundings, he dimly felt, that

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he himself was to choose one of two strangely divergent paths. Yet he knew, in a way, that his decision had already been forced upon him, that the dice had been cast and counted. He had been trying to sweep back the rising sea with a broom; he had been trying to fight down that tangled and tortuous past which still claimed him as its own. And now all that remained for him was to slip quietly and unprotestingly into the current which clawed and gnawed at his feet. He had been tried too long; the test, from the first, had been too crucial. He might, in time, even find some solacing thought in the fitness between the act and its environment — here he could fling himself into an obliterating Niagara, not of falling waters, but of falling men and women. Yes, it was a stage all prepared and set for the mean and sordid and ever recurring tragedy of which he was to be the puppet. For close about him seethed and boiled, as in no other place in the world, all the darker and more despicable passions of humanity. He inwardly recalled the types with which his stage was embellished; the fellow puppets of that gilded and arrogant and idle world, the curled and perfumed princes, the waxed and watching *boulevardiers* side by side with virginal and unconscious American girls, pallid and impoverished grand dukes in the wake of painted but wary Parisians, stiff-mustached and mysterious Austrian counts lowering at

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doughty and indignant Englishwomen; bejeweled beys and pashas brushing elbows with unperturbed New England school-teachers astray from Cook's; monocled thieves and gamblers and princelings, jaded tourists and skulking parasites — and always the disillusioned and waiting women.

"That play got on your nerves, didn't it?" suddenly asked the lazy, half-careless voice at his side. Durkin and the young Chicagoan were in the musky-smelling Promenade by this time, and up past the stands at the sea-front the breath of the Mediterranean blew in their faces, fresh, salty, virile.

"This whole place gets on my nerves!" said Durkin testily. Yes, he told himself, he was sick of it, sick of the monotony, of the idleness, of the sullen malevolence of it all. It was gay only to the eyes; and to him it would never seem gay again.

"Oh, that comes of not speaking the language, you know!" maintained the other stoutly, and, at the same time, comprehensively.

He was still very young, Durkin remembered. He had toyed with art for two winters in Paris, so scene by scene he had been able to translate the little drama that had appeared so farcical and Frenchy to his older countryman in exile.

Durkin's lip curled a little.

"No — it comes of knowing *life!*" he answered, with a touch of impatience. He felt the gulf that

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separated their two oddly diverse lives — the one the youth eager to dip into experience, the other a fugitive from a many-sided past that still shadowed and menaced him. He listened with only half an ear as the Chicagoan expounded some glib and ancient principle about the fairy tale being even truer than truth itself.

"Why," he continued argumentatively, "everything that happened in that play might happen here, tonight, to you or me!"

"Rubbish!" ejaculated Durkin, brusquely, remembering how lonely he must indeed have been thus to attach himself to this youth of the studios. But he added, as a matter of form: "You think, then, that life today *is* as romantic as it once was?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the other. "Look at Monte Carlo here! Of course it is. It's more crowded, more rapid; it holds *more* romance. We didn't put it all off, you know, with doublet and hose!"

"No, of course not," answered Durkin absently. Life, at that moment, was confronting him so grimly, so flat and sterile and uncompromising in its secret exactions, that he had no heart to theorize about it.

"And a thing isn't romantic just because it's moss-grown!" continued the child of the studios, warming to his subject. "It's romantic when we've emotionalized it, when we've *felt* it, when it's hit home with us, as it were!"

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"If it doesn't hit too hard!" qualified the older man.

"For instance," maintained the young Chicagoan, once more proffering his cigarette-case to Durkin, "for instance, take that big Mercedes touring-car with the canopy top, coming down through the crowd there. You'll agree, at first sight, that such things mean good-bye to the mounted knight, to chivalry, and all that romantic old horseman business."

"I suppose so."

"But, don't you see, the horse and armor was only a frame, an accidental setting, for the romance itself! It's up to date and practical and sordid and commonplace, you'd say, that puffing thing with a gasoline engine hidden away in its bowels. It's what we call machinery. But, supposing, now, instead of holding Monsieur le Duc Somebody, or Milord So-and-So, or Signor Comte Somebody-Else, with his wife or his mistress — I say, supposing it held — well, my young sister Alice, whom I left so sedately contented at Brighton! Supposing it held my young sister, running away with an Indian rajah!"

"And you would call that romance?"

"Exactly!"

Durkin turned and looked at the approaching car.

"While, as a matter of fact," he continued, with

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his exasperatingly smooth smile, "it seems to be holding a very much overdressed young lady, presumably from the Folies-Bergère or the Olympia."

The younger man, looking back from his place beside him, turned to listen, confronted by the sudden excited comments of a middle-aged woman, obviously Parisian, on the arm of a lean and solemn man with dyed and waxed mustachios.

"You're quite wrong," cried the young Chicagoan, excitedly. "It's young Lady Boxspur — the new English beauty. See, they're crowding out to get a glimpse of her!"

"Who's Lady Boxspur?" asked Durkin, hanging stolidly back. He had seen quite enough of Riviera beauty on parade.

"She's simply ripping. I got a glimpse of her this afternoon in front of the *Terrasse*, after she'd first motored over from Nice with old Szapary!" He lowered his voice, more confidentially. "This Frenchman here has just been telling his wife that she's the loveliest woman on the Riviera today. Come on!"

Durkin stood indifferently, under the white glare of the electric lamp, watching the younger man push through to the centre of the roadway. The slowly-moving touring-car, hemmed in by the languid midnight movement of the street, came to a full stop almost before where he stood. It shuddered and panted there, leviathan-like, and Durkin

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saw the sea breeze sway back the canopy drapery.

He followed the direction of the excited young Chicagoan's gaze, smilingly, now, and with a singularly disengaged mind.

He saw the woman's clear profile outlined against the floating purple curtain, the quiet and shadowy eyes of violet, the glint of the chestnut hair that showed through the back-thrust folds of the white silk automobile veil swathing the small head, and the nervous, bird-like movement of the head itself.

He did not move; there was no involuntary, galvanic reaction; no sudden gasp and flame of wonder. He simply held his cigarette still poised in his fingers, half-way to his lips, with the minutest relaxing of the smile that still hovered about them, while a dull and ashen grayness crept into his face, second by waiting second.

It was not until his eyes met hers that he took three wavering and undecided steps toward her.

With a silent movement — more of warning than of fright, he afterward told himself — she pressed her gloved fingers to her lips. What her intent eyes meant to say to him, in that wordless, telepathic message, Durkin could not guess; all thought was beyond him. But in a moment or two the roadway cleared, the car shook and plunged forward, the floating curtains fluttered and trailed behind.

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Durkin turned blindly, and pushed and ran and dodged through the languidly amazed promenaders, following after that sudden and bewildering vision, as after his last hope in life. But the fine, white, limestone Riviera dust from the fading car's tire-heels, and the burnt gases from its engines, were all the road held for him, as it undulated off into hillside quietnesses.

He heard the young Chicagoan calling after him, breathless and anxious. But he ran on until he came to a side street, shadowed with garden walls and villas and greenery. Slipping into this, he immured himself in the midnight silences, to be alone with the contending forces that tore at him.

If his companion was right, and such things as this made up Romance, then, after all, the drama of life had lost none of its bewilderment. For the woman he had seen between the floating purple curtains was his own wife.

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CHAPTER III

Durkin's first tangible feeling was a passion to lose and submerge himself in the muffling midnight silences, the silences of those outwardly quiet gardens at heart so old in sin and pain.

He felt the necessity for some sudden and sweeping readjustment, and his cry for solitude was like that of the child wounded in spirit, or that of the wild animal sorely hurt in body. Before he could face life again, he felt, he had to build up about him the sustaining fabric of some new and factitious faith.

But as intelligence slowly emerged from the mist and chaos of utter bewilderment, as reason crept haltingly back to her seat, his first blind and indeterminate rage fell away from him. His first black and blinding clouds of suspicion slowly subsided before practical and orderly question and cross-question. Thought adjusted itself to its new environment. Painfully, yet cautiously, he directed his ceaseless artillery of interrogation toward the outer and darker walls of uncertainty still so blankly confronting him.

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THE SHADOWING PAST

It was not that he had been consumed by any direct sense of loss, of deprivation. It was not that he had feared open and immediate treachery. If a rage had burned through him, at the sudden and startling sight of his own wife thus secretly masquerading in an unknown rôle, it was far from being a rage or mere jealousy and distrust.

They had, in other days, each passed through questionable and perilous experiences. Both together and alone they had adventured unwillingly along many of the more dubious channels of life. They had surrendered to temptation; they had sown and reaped and suffered, and become weary of it. They had struggled slowly yet stoically up towards respectability; they had fought for fair-dealing; they had entered a compact to stand by each other through that long and bitter effort to be tardily honest and autumnally aboveboard.

What now so disturbed and disheartened him was the sudden sense of something impending, the vague apprehension of some momentous and far-reaching intrigue which he could not even foreshadow. And it was framing itself into being at a time when he had most prayed for their untrammelled freedom, when he had most looked for their ultimate emancipation from the claws of that too usurious past.

But, above all, what had brought about the sudden change? Why had no inkling of it crept to his

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ears? Why was she, the passionate pleader for the decencies of life whom he had last watched so patiently and heroically imparting the mastery of the pianoforte to seven little English children in a squalid Paris *pension*, now lapsing back into the old and fiercely abjured avenue of irresponsibility? Why had she weakened and surrendered, when he himself, the oldtime weakling of the two, had clung so desperately to the narrow path of rectitude? And what was the meaning and the direction of it all? And what would it lead to? But why, above all, had she kept silent, and given him no warning?

Durkin looked up and listened to the soft rustling of the palm branches. The bray of a distant band saddened him with an unfathomable sense of home-sickness. Through an air that seemed heavy with languid tropicality, and the waiting richness of life, he caught the belated glimmer of lights and the throb and murmur of string music. It carried in to him what seemed the essential and alluring note of all the existence he had once known and lived. Yet day by day he had fought back that sirenic call. It had not always been an open victory — the weight of all the past lay too heavily upon him for that — but for *her* sake he had at least vacillated and hesitated and temporized, waiting and looking for that final strength which would come with her first wistful note of warning, or with her belated return to his side.

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Yet here was Opportunity lying close and thick about him; here Chance had laid the board for its most tempting game. In that way, as the young Chicagoan had said, they stood in the centre of the world. But he had turned away from those clustering temptations, he had left unbroken his veneer of honorable life, for her sake — while she herself had surrendered, unmistakably, irrevocably, whatever strange form the surrender might even at that moment be taking.

All he could do, now, was to wait until morning. There would surely be some message, some hint, some key to the mystery. While everything remained so maddeningly enigmatic, he raked through the tangled past in search of some casual seed of explanation for that still undeciphered present.

He recalled, period by period, and scene by scene, his kaleidoscopic past career, his first fatal blunder as a Grand Trunk telegraph operator, when one slip of the wrist brought a gravel train head-on into an Odd Fellows' Excursion special, his summary dismissal from the railroad, and his unhappy flight to New York, his passionate struggle to work his way up once more, his hunger for money and even a few weeks of leisure, that his long dreamed of photo-telegraphy apparatus might be perfected and duly patented, his consequent fall from grace in the Postal-Union offices, through holding up a trivial racing-return or two until he and his outside con-

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federate had been able to make their illicit wagers, then his official ostracism, and his wandering street-cat life, when, at last, the humbling and compelling pinch of poverty had turned him to "overhead guerrilla" work and the dangers and vicissitudes of a poolroom key-operator. He recalled his chance meeting with MacNutt, the wire-tapper, and their partnership of privateer forces in that strange campaign against Penfield, the alert and opulent poolroom king, who had seemed always able to defy the efforts and offices of a combative and equally alert district-attorney.

Most vividly and minutely of all, he reviewed his first meeting with Frances Candler, and the bewilderment that had filled him when he discovered her to be an intimate and yet a reluctant associate with MacNutt in his work — a bewilderment which lasted until he himself grew to realize how easy was the downward trend when once the first false step had been made.

He brought back to mind their strange adventures and perils and escapes together, day by day and week by week, their early interest that had ripened into affection, their innate hatred of that underground life, which eventually flowered into open revolt and flight, their impetuous marriage, their precipitate journey from the shores of America.

Then came to him what seemed the bitterest memories of all. It was the thought of that first

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too fragile happiness which slowly but implacably merged into discontent, still hidden and tacit, but none the less evident. That interregnum of peace had been a Tantalus-like taste of a draught which he all along knew was to be denied him. Yet, point by point, he recalled their first quiet and hopeful weeks in England, when their old ways of life seemed as far away as the America they had left behind, when they still had unbounded faith in themselves and in the future. Just how or where fell the first corroding touch he could never tell. But in each of them there had grown up a secret unrest — it was, he knew, the hounds of habit whimpering from their kennels. "No one was ever reformed," he had once confided to Frances, "by simply being turned out to grass!" So it was then that they had tried to drug their first rising doubts with the tumult of incessant travel and change. His wife had lured him to secluded places, she had struggled to interest him in a language or two, she had planned quixotic courses of reading — as though a man such as he might be remolded by a few months of modern authors! — and carried him off to centres of gaiety — as though the beat of Hungarian bands and outlandish dances could drive that inmost fever out of his blood!

He endured Aix-les-Bains and its rheumatics, with their bridge-whist and late dinners and incongruous dissipations, for a fortnight. Then they

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fled to the huddled little hotels and *pensions* of the narrow and dark wooded valley of Karlsbad, under skies which Frank declared to be bluer than the blue of forget-me-nots, where, amid Brahmins from India and royalty from Austria and audacious young duchesses from Paris and students from Petersburg and Berlin, and undecipherable strangers from all the remotest corners of the globe, it seemed to Durkin they were at last alone. He confided this feeling to his wife, one tranquil morning after they had drunk their Sprudel from long-handled cups, at the spring where the comely, rubber-garmented native girls caught and doled out the biting hot spray of the geyser. They were seated at the remoter end of the glass-covered Promenade, and a band was playing. Something in the music, for once, had saddened and dispirited Frank.

"Alone?" she had retorted. "Who is ever alone?"

"Well, our wires are down, for a little while, anyway!" laughed Durkin, as he sipped the hot salt water from the china cup. It reminded him, he had said, of all his past sins in epitome. Frank sighed wearily, and did not speak for a minute or two.

"But, after all," she said at last, in a meditative calmness of voice, "there are always some sort of ghostly wires connecting us with one another, holding us in touch with what we have been and done,

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with our past, and with our ancestors, with all our forsaken sins and misdoings. No, Jim, I don't believe we are *ever* alone. There are always sounds and hints, little broken messages and whispers, creeping in to us along those hidden circuits. We call them Intuitions, and sometimes we speak of them as Character, and sometimes as Heredity, and weakness of will — but they are there, just the same!"

The confession of that mood was a costly one, for before the week was out they had, in some way, wearied of the sight of that daily procession of nephritics and neurotics, and were off again, like a pair of homeless swallows, to the Rhine salmon and the Black Forest venison of Baden. From there they fled to the mountain air of St. Moritz, where they were frozen out and driven back to Paris — but always spending freely and thinking little of the vague tomorrow. Durkin, indeed, recognized that taint of improvidence in his veins. He was a spendthrift; he had none of the temperamental foresight and frugality of his wife, who reminded him, from time to time, and with ever-increasing anxiety, of their ever-melting letter of credit. But, on the other hand, she stood ready to sacrifice everything, in order to build some new wall of interest about him, that she might immure him from his past. She still planned and schemed to shield him, not so much from the world, as from himself. Yet

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he had seen, almost from the first, that their pursuit of contentment was born of their common and ever-increasing terror of the future. Each left unuttered the actual emptiness and desolation of life, yet each nursed the bitter sting of it. Day by day he had put on a bold face, because he had long since learned how poignantly miserable his own misery could make her. And, above all things, he hated to see her unhappy.

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CHAPTER IV

THE WIDENING ROAD

Under the softly-waving palms of that midnight garden, Durkin relived their feverish past, month by remembered month, until they found the need of money staring them in the face. He reviewed each increasing dilemma, until, eventually, he had left her in her squalid Paris *pension* with her music pupils and the last eighty francs, while he clutched at the passing straw of an exporting house clerkship in Marseilles. The exporting house, which was under American guidance, had flickered and gone out ignominiously, and week by desperate week each new promise of honest work seemed to wither into a chimera at his feverish touch. He had been told of a demand for electrical experts at Tangier, and had promptly worked his passage to that outlandish sea-port on a Belgian coasting-steamer, only to find a week's employment installing a burglar-alarm system in the ware-house of a Liverpool shipping company. In Gibraltar, a week or two longer, he had been able to supply his immediate wants through assisting in the reconstruction of a moving-picture machine, untimely wrecked

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on the outskirts of Fez by Moorish fanatics who had believed it to be the invention of the Evil One.

It was at Gibraltar, too, that his first mocking hopes for some renewal of life had come to him, along with the vague hint that his transmitting camera had at last been recognized, and perhaps even marketed. But escape from that little seaport had been as difficult as escape from gaol. He had finally effected a hazardous and ever-memorable migration from Algeciras to Cimiez, but only by acting as chauffeur for a help-abandoned, gout-ridden, and irritable-minded ex-ambassador to Persia, together with a scrupulously inattentive trained nurse, who, apparently, preferred diamonds to a uniform, and smuggled incredible quantities of hand-made lace under the tonneau seat-cushions. And then he had found himself at Monte Carlo, still waiting for word from Paris, fighting against a grim new temptation which, vampire-like, had grown stronger and stronger as its victim daily had grown weaker and weaker.

For along the sea-front, one indolent and golden afternoon, he had learned that an American yacht in the harbor was sending ashore for a practical electrician, since a defective generator had left its cabins of glimmering white and gold in sudden darkness. Durkin, after a brief talk with the second officer, had been taken aboard the tender and hurried out to where the lightless steamer rocked

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and swung at her anchor chain in the intense turquoise bay. He had hoped, at first, that he was approaching his ship of deliverance, that luck was favoring the luckless and at last the means of his escape were at hand. So he asked, with outward unconcern, just what the yacht's course was. They were bound for Messina, the second officer had replied, and from there they went on to Corfu for a couple of weeks, and then on to Ragusa.

He went on board and looked over the armature core. It was of the slotted drum type, he at once perceived, built up of laminations of soft steel painted to break up eddy currents, and as he tested the soft amber mica insulation about the commutators of hard-rolled copper, he knew that the defective generator could be repaired in three-quarters of an hour. But certain scraps of talk that came to his ears amid the clink of glasses, from one of the shadowy saloons, had stung into vague activity his old, irrepressible hunger for the companionship of his own kind, his own race.

It was uncommonly pleasant, he had told himself as he had caught the first drone of the lowered, confidential voices, to hear the old home talk, and even broken snatches of old home interests. As he explored the ship and minutely examined automatic circuit-breaker and switchboard and fuse, he even made it a point to see that his explorations took him into the pantry-like cabin next to the saloon from

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which these droning voices drifted. As he gave apparently studious and unbroken attention to a stretch of defective wiring, he was in fact making casual mental note of the familiar tones of the distant voices, listening impersonally and dreamily to each question and answer and suggestion that passed between that quietly talking group. One of the talkers, he soon found, was a Supreme Court judge on his vacation, equable and deliberative in his occasional query or view or criticism; another was apparently a secret agent from the office of the New York district-attorney, still another two were either Scotland Yard men or members of some continental detective bureau — this Durkin assumed from their broad-voweled English voices and their seemingly intimate knowledge of European criminal procedure. The fifth man he could in no way place. But it was this man who interrupted the others, and, apparently taking a slip of paper from some inside pocket or some well-closed wallet, read aloud a list which, he first explained, had been secured from some undesignated safe on the night of a certain raid.

"Three hundred and twenty shares of National Bank of Commerce," read the voice methodically, the reader checking off each item, obviously, as he went along. "One certificate of forty-seven shares of United States Steel Preferred; two certificates of one hundred shares each of Erie Railroad First

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Preferred; eighteen personal cheques, with names and amounts and banks attached; seven I. O. U.'s, with amounts and dates and initials."

"Probably worthless, from our point of view!" interposed a voice.

The dreaminess suddenly went out of Durkin's eyes, as he listened.

"Postal-Union Telegraph bonds, valued at $102,-345," went on the reading voice, and again the interrupting critic remarked: "Which, you see, we may regard as very significant, since it both obviously and inferably demonstrates that the telegraph company and the poolrooms are compelled to stand together!"

Durkin followed the list, with inclined head and uplifted hands, forgetting even his simulation of work, until the end was reached.

"In all, you see, one quarter of a million dollars in negotiable securities, if we are to rely on this memorandum, which, as I stated before, ought to be authentic, for it was taken from the Penfield safe the night of the first raid."

Durkin started, as though the circuit with which his fingers absently toyed had suddenly become a live wire.

"Penfield!" The word sent a little thrill through his body. Penfield — the very name was a challenging trumpet to him. But again he bent and listened to the drone of the nearby voices.

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"And Keenan, you say, is in Genoa?" asked one of the Englishmen.

"If he's not there now he will be during the week," answered the American.

"You're sure of that?"

"All I know is that our Milan man secured duplicates of his cables. Three of them were in cipher, but he was able to make reasonably sure of the Genoa trip!"

"It would be rather hard to get at him, *there!*"

"But if he strikes north, as you say, and goes first to Liverpool, and gets home by the back door, as it were, by taking a steamer to Quebec or Montreal ——"

"That's a mere blind!"

"But why say that?"

"Because he's too wise to strike British territory, before he unloads. It's not a mere matter of stopping the transfer of this stock, or whether or not all of it is negotiable. What we want is tangible and incriminating evidence. The signatures of those cheques are ——"

That was the last word that came to Durkin's ears, for at that moment a steward, with a tray of glasses, hurried into the pantry. His suspicious eye saw nothing beyond a busy electrician replacing a switchboard. But before the intruding steward had departed the second officer was at Durkin's elbow, overlooking his labors, and

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no further word or hint came to the ears of the listener.

But he had heard enough. The flame had been applied to the dry acreage of his too arid and idle existence. He had remained passive too long. It was change that brought chance. And even though that change meant descent, it would, after all, be only the momentary dip that preceded the upward flight again. And as he gazed thoughtfully landward, where Monte Carlo lay vivid and glowing under the sheltering Alpes-Maritimes, like a golden lizard sunning itself on a shelf of gray rock, he felt within him a more kindly and comprehensive feeling for that flower-strewn arena of vast hazards. It was, after all, the great chances of life that made existence endurable. Its only anodyne lay in effort and feverish struggle. And his chance for work had come!

Half an hour later he was rowed ashore, with a good Havana cigar between his teeth and three good English sovereigns in his pocket. As he made his way up to his hotel he could feel some inner part of him still struggling and shrinking back from the enticing avenue of activity which his new knowledge was opening up before him.

He smiled, now, a little grimly, as he sat under the rustling palms and thought of those old, unnecessary scruples. He had been holding himself to a compact which no longer existed. And, all

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along, he had been regarding himself as the weakling, the vacillator, when it was he who had held out the longest! He had even, in those earlier hesitating moments, consolingly recalled to his mind how Monsieur Blanc's modestly denominated Société Anonyme des Bains de Mer et Cercle des Ètrangers made it a point to proffer a railway ticket to any impending wreck, such as himself, who might drift like a stain across its roads of merriment, or leave a telltale blot upon one of its perennially beautiful and ever-odorous flower-beds. But now, as he reviewed those past weeks of hesitation and inward struggle, a sense of relapse crept over him. As he recalled the picture of the clear-cut profile between the floating purple curtains, a vague indifference as to the final outcome of things took possession of him.

He almost exulted in the meaning of the strange meeting, which, one hour before, had seemed to bring the universe crashing down about his head. Then, as his plans and thoughts took more definite shape, his earlier recklessness merged into an almost pleasurable sense of relief and release, of freedom after confinement. He felt incongruously grateful for the lash that had awakened him to even illicit activity; life, under the passion for accomplishment, under the zest for risk and responsibility, seemed to take on its older and deeper meaning once more. It was, he told himself, as if the

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foreign tongue which he had so wearily heard on every side of him, for so long, had suddenly translated itself into intelligibility, or as if the text beneath the pictures in those ubiquitous illustrated papers from Paris, which he had studied so blankly and so blindly, had suddenly become as plain as his own English to him.

But his moment of exaltation, his mood of careless emancipation, was a brief one. He was no longer alone in life. His bitterness of heart had blinded him to obligations. He had not yet fathomed the mystery of Frank's appearance. He had not yet even made sure of her relapse. Above all, he had not put forth a hand to help her in what might be an inexplicable extremity. The morning could still bring some word from her. He himself would spend the day in search of her. He would have to proceed guardedly, but he would leave no stone unturned. It was not, he told himself, that he was giving fate one last chance to treat more kindly with him. It was, rather, that all his natural being wanted and reached out for this woman who had first taught him the meaning and purpose of life. . . . His mind went back, suddenly, to one afternoon, months before, at Abbazia, when they had come up from sea-bathing in the Adriatic. He had leaned down over her, to help her up the Angiolina bath steps, wet and slippery with sea-water. The mingled gold and chestnut of her thick

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hair was dank and sodden with brine, the wistful face that she turned up to him was pinched and colorless and blue about the lips. She seemed, of a sudden, as she leaned heavily on his arm, a presaging apparition out of the dim future, an adumbration of her own body grown frail and old, looking up to him for help, calling forlornly to him for solace. And in that impressionable moment his heart had gone out to her, in a burst of pity that seemed deeper and stronger than love itself.

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CHAPTER V

Durkin waited until, muffled and far away, the throb and drone of an orchestra floated up to him. This was followed, scatteringly, by the bells of the different *tables d'hôte*. They, too, sounded thin and remote, drifting up through the soft, warm air that had always seemed so exotic to him, so redolent of foreign-odored flowers, so burdened with alien-smelling tobacco smoke, of unfamiliar sea scents incongruously shot through with even the fumes of an unknown and indescribable cookery.

While that genial shrill and tinkle of many bells meant refreshment and most gregarious frivolity for the chattering, loitering, laughing and ever-spectacular groups so far below him — and how he hated their outlandish gibberish and their arrogant European aloofness! — it meant for him hard work, and hard work of a somewhat perilous and stimulating nature.

For, as the last of the demurely noisy groups made their way through the deepening twilight to the different hotels and cafés that already spangled the hillsides with scattering clusters of light, Dur-

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kin coolly removed his shoes, twisted and knotted his two bath towels into a stout rope, securely tied back his heavy French window-shutter of wood with one of his sheets, and having attached his improvised rope to the base of the shutters, swung himself deftly out. On the return swing he caught the cast-iron water-pipe that scaled the wall from window tier to window tier. Down this jointed pipe he went, gorilla-like, segment by segment, until he reached what he knew to be the hotel's third floor. Here he rested for a moment or two against the wall, feeling inwardly grateful that a Mediterranean climate still made possible Monaco's primitive outside plumbing — to the initiated, he inwardly remarked, such things had always their unlooked-for advantages. He also felt both relieved and grateful to see that the two windows between him and his destination had been left shuttered against the heat of the afternoon sun. The third window he could see, was not thus barricaded, although, as he had expected, the sash itself was securely locked.

Once convinced of this, he dropped down, stealthily, and lay full length on the balcony flooring, with his ear close against the casement woodwork, listening. Reasonably satisfied, he rose to his knees, and took from his vest pocket a small diamond ring. Holding this firmly between his thumb and forefinger, he described a semi-circle on the heavy window-glass. He listened again, intently. Then he

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took a small cold-chisel from still another pocket, and having cut away the putty at the base of the semicircle, smote the face of the glass one sharp little tap.

It cracked neatly, along the line of the circling diamond-scratch, so that, with the help of a suction cap made from the back of a kid glove, he was able to draw out the loosened segment of glass. Then he waited and listened still again. As he thrust in through the little opening a cautiously exploring hand the casual act seemed to take on the dignity of a long-considered ritual. It was a ceremonial moment to him, he felt, for it marked his transit, across some narrow moral divide, from lonely ascent to lonely decline.

The impression stayed with him only a second. He turned back to his work, with a reckless little upthrust of each resolute shoulder. His searching fingers found the old-fashioned window lever, of hammered brass, and on this he pressed down and back, quietly. A moment later the sash swung slowly out, and he was inside the room, closing the shutters and then the window after him.

He stood there, in the dark quietness, for what must have been a full minute. Then he took from his pocket a box of wax matches. He had purchased them for the purpose, from the frugal old woman who month by month and season by season carried on her quiet trade at the foot of the Casino

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steps, catching, as it were, the tiny drippings from the flaring tapers in that Temple of Gold. And day after day, one turn of the roulette wheel took and gave more money than all her years of frugal trade might amass!

Taking one of the vestas, he struck a light, and holding it above his head, carefully examined the room, from side to side. Then he tiptoed to a door, which stood ajar. This, he saw by a second match, was a sleeping-room; and the two rooms, obviously, made up the suite. A door, securely locked, opened from the sleeping-room into the outer hallway. The door which opened from the larger room was likewise locked, but to make assurance doubly sure Durkin slid a second inside bolt, for already his quick eye had caught the gleam of its polished brass, just below the door-knob of the ordinary mortised lock. Then, groping his way to the little switch-board, he touched a button, and the room was flooded with light. He first looked about, carefully but quickly, and then glanced at his watch. He had at least two hours in which to do his work. Any time after that Pobloff might return. And by midnight at least the Prince's valet would be back from Nice, to begin packing his master's boxes.

He slipped into the bedroom, and took from the bed a blanket and comforter. These he draped above the hall door, to muffle any chance sound. Then he turned to the northeast corner of the room,

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where stood what seemed to be a dressing cabinet, with little shelves and a plate-glass mirror above it. The lower part of it was covered by a polished rosewood door.

One sharp twist and pry with his cold-chisel forced this flimsy outer door away from its lock. Beneath it, thus lightly masked, stood the more formidable safe door itself. Durkin drew in a sharp breath of relief as he looked at it with critical eyes. It was not quite the sort of thing he had expected. If it had been a combination lock he had intended to tear away the woodwork covering it, pad the floor with the bed mattress, and then pry it over on its face, to chisel away the cement that he knew would lie under its vulnerable sheet-iron bottom. But it was an ordinary, old-fashioned lock and key "Mennlicher," Durkin at the first glance had seen — the sort of strong box which a Third avenue cigar seller, at home, would scarcely care to keep on his premises. Yet this was the deposit vault for which hotel guests, such as Prince Ignace Slevenski Pobloff, paid ten francs a day extra.

The sound of footsteps passing down the hallway caused the intruder to draw back and listen. He turned quickly, waited, and came to a quick, new decision. Before doing so, however, he reexamined the room more critically.

This Prince Ignace Slevenski Pobloff was, obviously, a man of taste. He was also a man of

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means — and Durkin wondered if in that fact alone lay the reason why a certain young Belgian adventuress had followed him from Tangier to Algeciras, and from Algeciras to Gibraltar, and from Gibraltar still on to the Riviera. She had, at any rate, not followed a scentless quarry. He was not the mere curled and perfumed impostor so common to that little principality of shams. Even the garrulous young Chicagoan, from whom Durkin had secured his first Casino tickets, was able to vouch for the fact that Pobloff was a true *boyard*. He was also something or other in the imperial diplomatic service — just what it was Durkin could not at the moment remember.

But he nursed his own personal convictions as to the moral stability of this true *boyard*. He had quietly witnessed, at Algeciras, the Prince's adroit card "riffling" in the sun-parlors of The Reina Cristina, when the gouty ex-ambassador to Persia had parted company with many cumbersome dollars. Durkin's only course, in that time of adversity and humility, had been one of silence. But he had inwardly and adventurously resolved, if ever Fate should bring him and the Prince together under circumstances more untrammelled, he would not let pass a chance to balance up that ledger of princely venality. For here indeed was an adversary, Durkin very well knew, who was worthy of any man's steel.

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So the intruder, opening and closing drawers as he went, glanced quickly but appreciatively at the highly emblazoned cards lying on the little red-leather-covered writing-table, at the litter of papers bearing the red and blue and gold of the triple-crowned double eagle, at the solid gold seal, at the row of splendid and regal-looking women in silver photograph holders, above the reading-desk, and a decanter or two of cut-glass. In one of the drawers of this desk he found an ivory-handled revolver, a toy-like thirty-two caliber hammerless, of English make. Durkin glanced at it curiously, noticed that each chamber held its cartridge, turned it over in his hand, replaced it in the drawer, and after a moment's thought, took it out once more and slipped it into his hip pocket. Then his rapidly roving eye took in the sable top-coat flung carelessly across the foot of the bed, the neat little heelless Tunisian slippers beneath it, the glistening, military-looking boots, each carefully nursing its English shoe-tree, a highly embroidered smoking-cap, an ivory-handled shaving-set in its stamped morocco case, one razor for each day of the week, and the silver-mounted toilet bottles, so heavily chased.

Having, apparently, made careful mental note of the rooms, Durkin once more turned back to the switchboard, and prying loose the fluted molding that concealed the lighting-wires, he scraped away

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the insulating tissue and severed the thread of copper with a sweep or two of his narrow file. He felt safer, in that enforced darkness, for the work which lay before him.

The black gloom was punctuated by the occasional flare of a match, and the silence broken now and then, as he worked before the safe, by the metallic click and scrape of steel against steel, and by the muffled rasp and whine of his file against the wax-covered key which from time to time he fitted into the unyielding safe lock. As he filed and tested and refiled, with infinite care and patience, his preoccupied mind ranged vaguely along the channel of thought which the events of the last half-hour had opened up before him. He wondered why it was that Fortune should so favor those who stood the least in need of her smile. For four nights during the last seven, he knew, the Prince had won, and won heavily, both in the Casino and in the Club Privé. Yet, on the other hand, there was the little Bulgarian princess with rooms just across the corridor from his own, and the rightful possessor of the plain little diamond with which he had just cut his way into this more sumptuous chamber. For a week past now, down at the Casino, she had been losing steadily, as of course the vast and undirected majority always must lose. Even her solitaire earrings had been taken to Nice and pawned, Durkin knew. Three days before

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that, too, her maid — and who is ever anybody on the Riviera without a maid? — had been reluctantly and woefully discharged. At the Trente et Quarante table, as well, Durkin had watched the last thousand-franc note of the Princess wither away. "And this, my dear, will mean another three months with my sweet old palsied Duc de la Houspignolle," she had laughingly yet bitterly exclaimed, in excellent English, to the impassive young Oxford man who was then dogging her heels. She was a wit, and she had a beautiful hand, even though she was no better than the rest of Monte Carlo, ruminated the safe-breaker easily, as he squinted, under the flare of a match, at the ward indentations in his wax-covered key-flange.

His thoughts went back, as he worked, to the timely yet unexpected scene at the stair-head, two hours before. There he had helped a slim young *femme de chambre* support the Princess to her room, that royal lady having done her best to drown her ill fortune in absinthe and American high-balls — which, he knew, was ever an impossible combination. She had collapsed at the head of the stairs, and as he had helped lift her he had first caught sight of the solitaire diamond on the limp and slender finger. This reactionary mood, in the face of the earlier more tragical hours of that day of wearing anxieties, was almost one of facetiousness. He seemed to revel in the memory of what, in time, he knew,

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would be humiliating to him. It was a puny little diamond ring, of but three or four carats' weight, he mused, and yet with it had come the actual, if not the moral, turn in the tide of all his restless activities. It marked the moment when life seemed to fall back to its older and darker areas; it was the first diminutive milestone on his new road of adventure. But he would return the ring, of that he stoutly reassured himself, for he still nursed his ironic sense of justice in the smaller things. Yes, he would return the ring, he repeated, with his ever-recurring inapposite scrupulosity, for the young Princess was a lady of fortune under an unlucky star, like himself.

Durkin smiled a little, over his wax-covered key, as he still filed and fitted and listened. Then he gave vent to an almost inaudible "Ah!" for the bit of the key made the complete circuit, at last, and the wards of the lock clicked back into place.

He swung open the heavy iron door, cautiously, listened for a moment, and then struck another match.

That Pobloff might have the bank-notes with him was a contingency; that he would carry about with him two thousand napoleons was an absurdity. And Durkin knew the money had not been deposited — to ascertain that had been part of his day's work. The Prince, of course, was a prodigal and free-handed gentleman — how much of his

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winnings had already leaked through his careless fingers it was impossible to surmise. Durkin even resented the thought of that extravagance — as though it were a personal and obvious injustice to himself. If it was all the fruit of blind chance, if it came thus unearned and accidental, why should he not have his share of it? Already Monte Carlo had taught him the mad necessity for money. But now, of all times, it was necessary for him. One-half, one-quarter, of the sum which this careless-eyed Slavic aristocrat had carried so jauntily away from the Trente et Quarante table would endow him with the means to come into his own once more. It was essential that he secure his sinews of war, even before he could continue his search for Frank, or rescue her from the dangers that beset her, if she still wished for rescue. If he regretted the underground and underhand steps through which that money could alone come into his possession, he consoled his still protesting conscience with the claim that it was, after all, only a battle of wit against disinterested wit. For, self-delusively, he was beginning once more to regard all organized society and its ways as a mere inquisitorial process which the adventurous could ignore and the keen-witted could circumvent. Warfare, such as his, must be a law unto itself!

Then he gave all his attention to the work before him, as he lifted from the safe, first a small

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steel despatch box, neatly initialed in gold, "I. S. P.," and then a packet of blue-tinted envelopes, held together by two rubber bands, and written on, here and there, in a language which the intruder assumed to be Russian. Next came a japanned-tin box, which proved to hold nothing but a file of quite unintelligible, Seidlitz-powder-colored papers, and then what seemed, to Durkin's exploring fingers, to be a few small morocco cases. The question flashed through his mind: What if, after all, the money he was looking for was not to be found! He struck still another match, with impatient hands. His first fever of audacity had burned itself out, and some indefinite cold reaction of disdain and disgust was setting in. Stooping low, he peered into the safe once more.

Then he gave a little sigh of relief. For there, behind a row of books that looked like small ledgers or journals, he caught sight of a stout leather bag, tied with a corded silk rope. He dropped the burned-out end of the match, and, thrusting in an arm, lifted out the bag. As he placed it on the floor the muffled click of metal smote on his ear. He wiped the sweat from his forehead, with a sense of relief. He had risked too much to go away empty-handed.

He tore at the carefully knotted cord, first with his fingers and then with his teeth. It was not so heavy as he had hoped it might be. On more

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collected second thoughts, indeed, it was woefully light. But the knot defied his efforts. He took out a second match, and was on the point of striking it.

Instead of doing so, he stood suddenly erect, and then backed noiselessly into the remotest corner of the room. For a key had been thrust into the lock of the anteroom door, and already the handle was being slowly turned back.

Durkin's breath quickened and shortened, and his hand swung back to his hip pocket. Then he waited, with his revolver in his hand.

He counted and weighed his chances, quickly, one by one, as he stood there, in the black silence. He caught the diffused glimmer of the reflected light from the outer room as the door opened and closed, sharply. But the momentary half-light did not give him a glimpse of who or what was before him, for in a second all was blackness again. His first uneasy thought was that it was a very artful move. He and that Other were alone there, in the utter darkness. Neither, now, would have the advantage. He had been a fool to leave one of the doors without its double lock, of some sort. He had once been told that it was always through the more trivial contingency that the criminal was ultimately trapped.

He strained his ears, and listened. He could hear nothing. Yet he was positive that he could

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feel some approaching presence. It may have been a minute vibration of flooring; it may have been through the operation of some occult sixth sense. But he was sure of that mysterious Other, coming closer and closer to him.

Suddenly something seemed to stir and move in the darkness. He crouched, with every nerve and muscle ready, and a moment later he would have relieved the tension with some sort of cry, had he not realized that it was the wooden Swiss clock above the cabinet, beginning to strike the hour.

The sound came to an end, and Durkin was assuring himself that it could now be neither Pobloff nor the valet, when a second sound sent a tingle of apprehension through his frame.

It was the blue spurt of a match that suddenly cut the blackness before him. The fool — he was striking a light!

Durkin crouched lower, and watched the flame as it grew on the darkness. The direct glare of it made him blink a little, but he swung his revolver barrel just above it, and a little to the right. He was more confident now, and quite collected. However it all turned out, it could not be much worse than starving to death, unknown and alone in some public square of Monaco.

As the tiny luminous circle flowered into wider flame the match was held higher. Durkin could see the rose-like glow between the phalanges of the

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fingers shielding the light. Then, of a sudden, a face grew out of the blackness, a white face shadowed by a plumed hat. It was a woman's face.

Durkin lowered his revolver, slowly, inch by inch.

It was his wife who stood there in the darkness, not six paces away from him.

"You!" he gasped involuntarily, incredibly. Sheer wonder survived his instinctive recoil. It was the bolt, striking twice in the same spot.

The two white faces looked at each other, gaped at each other, insanely. He could see her breath come and go, shortly, and the deathly pallor of her face, and the relaxed lower jaw that had fallen a little away from the drooping upper lip. But she neither moved nor spoke. The match burned to her finger-ends, and fell to the floor. Darkness enveloped them again.

"You!" he repeatedly vacuously. The blackness and the silence seemed to blanket and smother him, like something tangible to the touch. He took three steps toward where she still stood motionless, and in an agonized whisper cried out to her:

"My God, Frank, what is it?"

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CHAPTER VI

THE WOMAN SPEAKS

"Ssssh!" said the woman under her breath, as she clutched Durkin's arm.

He shook her hand off, impatiently, although the act seemed at cross-purposes with his own will.

"But you — here!" he still gasped.

"Oh, Jim!" she half-moaned, inadequately. Yet an *aura* of calmness seemed to surround her. So great was his own excitement that the words burst from him of their own will, apparently, and sounded like the utterance of a voice not his own.

"What's it mean! How'd you get here?"

He could hear her shuddering, indrawn sigh.

"What, in the name of heaven, do *you* want in here? Why don't you speak?"

There was a moment of unbroken silence. For the first time it seemed to come home to him that this woman who confronted him was his own wife, in the flesh and blood.

"What are *you* doing here?" she demanded at last.

He responded, even in his mood of hot antag-

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onism, to some note of ever-sustained appeal about her. Even through the black gloom that blanketed and blinded him some phantasmal and sub-conscious medium, like the imaginary circuit of a multiplex telegraph system, seemed to carry to his mind some secondary message, some thought that she herself had not uttered. She, too, was suffering, but she had not shown it, for such was her way, he remembered. A wave of sympathy obliterated his resentment. He caught her in his arms, hungrily, and kissed her abandonedly. He noticed that her skin was cold and moist.

"Oh, Jim," she murmured again, weakly.

"It's so long, isn't it?"

Then she added, with a little catch of the breath, as though even that momentary embrace were a joy too costly to be countenanced, "Turn on the lights, quick!"

"I can't," he told her. "I've cut the wires."

He felt at her blindly, through the muffling blackness. She was shaking a little now, on his arm. It bewildered him to think how his hunger for her could still obliterate all consciousness of time and place.

"Why didn't you write?" she pleaded pitifully.

"I did write — a dozen times. Then I telegraphed!"

"Not a word came!" she cried.

"Then I wrote twice to London!"

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"And *those* never came. Oh, everything was against me!" she moaned.

"But how did you get here?" he still demanded.

She did not answer his question. Instead, she asked him: "Where did you send the Paris letters?"

"To 11 bis avenue Beaucourt."

She groaned a little, impatiently.

"That was foolish — I wrote you that I was leaving there — that I *had* to go!"

"Not a line reached me!"

He heard her little gasp of despair before she spoke.

"I was put out of there," she went on, hurriedly and evenly, yet with a *vibrata* of passion in her crowded utterance. "There wasn't a penny left — the pupils I had gave up their lessons. What they had heard or found out I don't know. Then I got a tiny room in the rue de Sèvres. I sold my last thing, then our wedding ring, even, to get it."

"And then what?"

"I still waited — I thought you would know, or find out, and that in some way or other I should still hear from you. I would have gone to the police, or advertised, but I knew it wouldn't be safe."

Once more the embittering consciousness of some

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dark coalition of forces against them swept over him. Fate, at every step, had frustrated them.

"I advertised twice, in the Herald?"

"Where would I see the Herald?"

"But you must have known I was trying to find you — that I was doing everything possible!"

"I knew nothing," she answered, in her poignantly emotionless voice. And the thought swept through Durkin that something within her had withered and died during those last grim weeks of suffering.

"But here — how did you get here — and what's this Lady Boxspur business?" he still insisted.

"Yes, yes," she almost moaned, "if you'll only wait I'll tell you. But is it safe to stay here? Have you thought where we are?"

"Yes; it's safe, quite safe, for an hour yet."

"Why didn't you send me money, or help me?" she asked, in her dead and unhappy monotone.

"I did, eighty francs, all I had. I hadn't a penny left. I didn't know the damned language. I prowled about like a cat in a strange garret, but I tried everything, from the American consul at Nice to a *Herald* correspondent at San Remo. Then I got word of a consumptive young writer from New York, at Mentone — but he died the day I was to meet him. Then I heard of the new Marconi station up the coast, and worked at wireless for two weeks, and made twenty dollars, before

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they sacked me for not being able to send a message out to a Messina fruit-steamer, in Italian. Then I chanced on the job of doctoring up a generator on an American yacht down here in the bay."

"Yes, yes — I know how hard it is!"

"But listen! When I was on board at work I overheard a Supreme Court judge and a special agent from the Central Office in New York and two English detectives talking over the loss of certain securities. And those securities belong to Richard Penfield!"

He knew that she had started, at the sound of that name.

"Penfield!" she gasped. "What of him?"

"When the district-attorney's men raided Penfield's New York gambling club, one of Penfield's new men got away with all his papers. They had been withdrawn from the Fifth Avenue Safe Deposit Company, for they were mostly cheques and negotiable securities, worth about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. But beyond all their face value, they constituted *prima facie* evidence against the gambler."

"But what's all this to us, now?"

"They were smuggled to New Jersey. There the Jersey City chief of police took action, and this agent of Penfield's carried the documents across the North River and up to Stamford. From there he got back to New York again, by night, where

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he met a second agent, who had secured passage on the *Slavonia* for Naples. The first man is MacNutt."

"MacNutt!" ejaculated the listening woman.

"Yes, MacNutt! He compromised with Penfield and swung in with him when the district-attorney started pounding at them both. The second man is a lawyer named Keenan, who was disbarred for conspiracy in the Brayton divorce case. Keenan and his papers are due at Genoa on Friday. I found some of this out on board the yacht. I thought it over — and it was the only way open for me. I couldn't stand out against it all, any longer. I thought I could make the plunge, without your ever knowing it — and perhaps get enough to keep you out of any more messes like this!"

"You had given me up?" she cried, reprovingly.

"No — no — no — I'd only given up waiting for chances to *find you*. My God, don't you suppose I knew you needed me!"

"It would have been too late!" she said, in her dead voice. "It's too late, already!"

"Then you don't care?" he demanded, almost brokenly.

"I'll never complain, or whine, again!" she answered with dreary listlessness.

"Then why *are* you in this room?"

"*I mean that I've given up myself*. I'm in it,

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