

FLETCHER JOSEPH SMITH

THE RAYNER-SLADE
AMALGAMATION

Joseph Fletcher

The Rayner-Slade Amalgamation

«Public Domain»

Fletcher J.

The Rayner-Slade Amalgamation / J. Fletcher — «Public Domain»,

© Fletcher J.

© Public Domain

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	17
CHAPTER V	21
CHAPTER VI	25
CHAPTER VII	29
CHAPTER VIII	33
CHAPTER IX	37
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	38

J. S. Fletcher

The Rayner-Slade Amalgamation

CHAPTER I

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE

About eleven o'clock on the night of Monday, May 12, 1914, Marshall Allergydyke, a bachelor of forty, a man of great mental and physical activity, well known in Bradford as a highly successful manufacturer of dress goods, alighted at the Central Station in that city from an express which had just arrived from Manchester, where he had spent the day on business. He had scarcely set foot on the platform when he was confronted by his chauffeur, a young man in a neat dark-green livery, who took his master's travelling rug in one hand, while with the other he held out an envelope.

"The housekeeper said I was to give you that as soon as you got in, sir," he announced. "There's a telegram in it that came at four o'clock this afternoon—she couldn't send it on, because she didn't know exactly where it would find you in Manchester."

Allergydyke took the envelope, tore it open, drew out the telegram, and stepped beneath the nearest lamp. He muttered the wording of the message—

"On board SS. Perisco

"63 miles N.N.E. Spurn Point, 2.15 p.m., May 12_th_.

"Expect to reach Hull this evening, and shall stop Station Hotel there for night on way to London. Will you come on at once and meet me? Want to see you on most important business—

"JAMES."

Allergydyke re-read this message, quietly and methodically folded it up, slipped it into his pocket, and with a swift glance at the station clock turned to his chauffeur.

"Gaffney," he said, "how long would it take us to run across to Hull?"

The chauffeur showed no surprise at this question; he had served Allergydyke for three years, and was well accustomed to his ways.

"Hull?" he replied. "Let's see, sir—that 'ud be by way of Leeds, Selby, and Howden. About sixty miles in a straight line, but there's a good bit of in-and-out work after you get past Selby, sir. I should say about four hours."

"Plenty of petrol in the car?" asked Allergydyke, turning down the platform. "There is? What time did you have your supper?"

"Ten o'clock, sir," answered Gaffney, with promptitude.

"Bring the car round to the hotel door in the station yard," commanded Allergydyke. "You'll find a couple of Thermos flasks in the locker—bring them into the hotel lounge bar."

The chauffeur went off down the platform. Allergydyke turned up the covered way to the Great Northern Hotel. When the chauffeur joined him there a few minutes later he was giving orders for a supply of freshly-cut beef sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs; the Thermos flasks he handed over to be filled with hot coffee.

"Better get something to eat now, Gaffney," he said. "Get some sandwiches, or some bread and cheese, or something—it's a longish spin."

He himself, waiting while the chauffeur ate and drank, and the provisions were made ready, took a whisky and soda to a chair by the fire, and once more pulled out and read the telegram. And as he read he wondered why his cousin, its sender, wished so particularly to see him at once. James Allergydyke, a man somewhat younger than himself, like himself a bachelor of ample means and of a similar temperament, had of late years concerned himself greatly with various business speculations

in Northern Europe, and especially in Russia. He had just been over to St. Petersburg in order to look after certain of his affairs in and near that city, and he was returning home by way of Stockholm and Christiania, in each of which towns he had other ventures to inspect. But Marshall Allerdyke was quite sure that his cousin did not wish to see him about any of these matters—anything connected with them would have kept until they met in the ordinary way, which would have happened within a day or two. No, if James had taken the trouble to send him a message by wireless from the North Sea, it meant that James was really anxious to see him at the first available moment, and would already have landed in Hull, expecting to find him there. However, with a good car, smooth roads, and a fine, moonlit night—

It was not yet twelve o'clock when Allerdyke wrapped himself up in a corner of his luxurious Rolls-Royce, saw that the box of eatables and the two Thermos flasks were safe in the locker, and told Gaffney to go ahead. He himself had the faculty of going to sleep whenever he pleased, and he went to sleep now. He was asleep as Gaffney went through Leeds and its suburbs; he slept all along the country roads which led to Selby and thence to Howden. But in the silent streets of Howden he woke with a start, to find that Gaffney had pulled up in answer to a question flung to him by the driver of another car, which had come alongside their own from the opposite direction. That car had also been pulled up; within it Allerdyke saw a woman, closely wrapped in furs.

"What is it, Gaffney?" he asked, letting down his own window and leaning out.

"Wants to know which is the best way to get across the Ouse, sir," answered Gaffney. "I tell him there's two ferries close by—one at Booh, the other at Langrick—but there'll be nobody to work them at this hour. Where do you want to get to?" he went on, turning to the driver of the other car.

"Want to strike the Great Northern main line somewhere," answered the driver. "This lady wants to catch a Scotch express. I thought of Doncaster, but—"

The window of the other car was let down, and its occupant looked out. The light of the full moon shone full on her, and Allerdyke lifted his cap to a pretty, alert-looking young woman of apparently twenty-five, who politely returned his salutation.

"Can I give you any advice?" asked Allerdyke. "I understand you want—"

"An express train to Scotland—Edinburgh," replied the lady. "I made out, on arrival at Hull, that if I motored across country I would get a train at some station on the Great Northern line—a morning express. Doncaster, Selby, York—which is nearest from wherever we are!"

"This is Howden," said Allerdyke, looking up at the great tower of the old church. "And your best plan is to follow this road to Selby, and then to York. All the London expresses stop there, but they don't all stop at Selby or at Doncaster. And there's no road bridge over the Ouse nearer than Selby in any case."

"Many thanks," responded the lady. "Then," she went on, looking at her driver, "you will go on to York—that is—how far?" she added, favouring Allerdyke with a gracious smile. "Very far?"

"Less than an hour's run," answered Gaffney for his master. "And a good road."

The lady bowed; Allerdyke once more raised his cap; the two cars parted company. And Allerdyke stopped Gaffney as he was driving off again, and produced the provisions.

"Half-past two," he remarked, pulling out his watch. "You've come along in good style, Gaffney. We'll have something to eat and drink. Queer thing, eh, for anybody to motor across from Hull to catch a Great Northern express on the main line!"

"Mayn't be any trains out of Hull during the night, sir," answered Gaffney, taking a handful of sandwiches. "They'll get one at York, anyway. Want to reach Hull at any particular time, sir?"

"No," answered Allerdyke. "Go along as you've come. You'll have a bit of uphill work over the edge of the Wolds, now. When we strike Hull, go to the Station Hotel."

He went to sleep again as soon as they moved out of Howden, and he only awoke when the car stopped at the hotel door in Hull. A night-porter, hearing the buzz of the engine, came out.

"Put the car in the garage, Gaffney, and then get yourself a bed and lie as long as you like," said Allerdyke. "I'll let you know when I want you." He turned to the night-porter. "You've a Mr. James Allerdyke stopping here I think?" he went on. "He'd come in last night from the Christiania steamer."

The night-porter led the way into the hotel, and towards the office.

"Mr. Marshall Allerdyke?" he asked of the new arrival. "The gentleman left a card for you; I was asked to give it to you as soon as you came."

Allerdyke took the visiting-card which the man produced from a letter rack, and read the lines hastily scribbled on the back—

If you land here during the night, come straight up to my room—263—and rouse me out. Want to see you at once.—J.A.

Allerdyke slipped the card into his pocket and turned to the night-porter.

"My cousin wants me to go up to his room at once," he said. "Just show me the way. Do you happen to know what time he got in last night?" he continued, as they went upstairs. "Was it late?"

"Passengers from the *Perisco*, sir?" answered the night-porter. "There were several of 'em came in last night—she got into the river about eight-thirty. It 'ud be a bit after nine o'clock when your friend came in."

Allerdyke's mind went back to the meeting at Howden.

"Did you have a lady set off from here in the middle of the night?" he asked, out of sheer curiosity. "A lady in a motor-car?"

"Oh! that lady," exclaimed the night-porter, with a grim laugh. "Ah! nice lot of bother she gave me, too. She was one of those *Perisco* passengers—she got in here with the rest, and booked a room, and went to it all right, and then at half-past twelve down she came and said she wanted to get on, and as there weren't no trains she'd have a motor-car and drive to catch an express at Selby, or Doncaster, or somewhere. Nice job I had to get her a car at that time o' night!—and me single-handed—there wasn't a soul in the office then. Meet her anywhere, sir?"

"Met her on the road," replied Allerdyke laconically. "Was she a foreigner, do you know?"

"I shouldn't wonder if she was something of that sort," answered the night-porter. "Sort that would have her own way at all events. Here's the room, sir."

He paused before the door of a room which stood halfway down a long corridor in the centre of the hotel, and on its panels he knocked gently.

"Every room's filled on this floor, sir," he remarked. "I hope your friend's a light sleeper, for there's some of 'em'll have words to say if they're roused at four o'clock in the morning."

"He's a very light sleeper as a rule," replied Allerdyke. He stood listening for the sound of some movement in the room: "Knock again," he said, when a minute had passed without response on the part of the occupant. "Make it a bit louder."

The night-porter, with evident unwillingness, repeated his summons, this time loud enough to wake any ordinary sound sleeper. But no sound came from within the room, and after a third and much louder thumping at the door, Allerdyke grew impatient and suspicious.

"This is queer!" he growled. "My cousin's one of the lightest sleepers I ever knew. If he's in there, there's something wrong. Look here! you'll have to open that door. Haven't you got a key?"

"Key'll be inside, sir," replied the night-porter. "But there's a master-key to all these doors in the office. Shall I fetch it, then?"

"Do!" said Allerdyke, curtly. He began to walk up and down the corridor when the man had hurried away, wondering what this soundness of sleep in his cousin meant. James Allerdyke was not a man who took either drink or drugs, and Marshall's experience of him was that the least sound awoke him.

"Queer!" he repeated as he marched up and down. "Perhaps he's not—"

The quiet opening of a door close by made him lift his eyes from the carpet. In the dim light he saw a man looking out upon him—a man of an unusually thick crop of hair and with a huge beard.

He stared at Allergy half angrily, half sulkily; then he closed his door as quietly as he had opened it. And Allergy, turning back to his cousin's room, mechanically laid his hand on the knob and screwed it round.

The door was open.

Allergy drew a sharp breath as he crossed the threshold. He had stayed in that hotel often, and he knew where the switch of the electric light should be. He lifted a hand, found the switch, and turned the light on. And as it flooded the room, he pulled himself up to a tense rigidity. There, sitting fully dressed in an easy chair, against which his head was thrown back, was his cousin—unmistakably dead.

CHAPTER II

THE DEAD MAN

For a full minute Marshall Allerdyke stood fixed—staring at the set features before him. Then, with a quick catching of his breath, he made one step to his cousin's side and laid his hand on the unyielding shoulder. The affectionate, familiar terms in which they had always addressed each other sprang involuntarily to his lips.

"Why, James, my lad!" he exclaimed. "James, lad! James!"

Even as he spoke, he knew that James would never hear word or sound again in this world. It needed no more than one glance at the rigid features, one touch of the already fixed and statue-like body, to know that James Allerdyke was not only dead, but had been dead some time. And, with a shuddering sigh, Marshall Allerdyke drew himself up and looked round at his surroundings.

Nothing could have been more peaceful than that quiet hotel bedroom; nothing more orderly than its arrangements. Allerdyke had always known his cousin for a man of unusually tidy and methodical habits; the evidence of that orderliness was there, where he had pitched his camp for presumably a single night. His toilet articles were spread out on the dressing-table; his pyjamas were laid across his pillow; his open suit-case lay on a stand at the foot of the bed; by the bedside lay his slippers. An overcoat hung from one peg of the door; a dressing-gown from another; on a chair in a corner lay, neatly folded, a couple of travelling rugs. All these little details Allerdyke's sharp eyes took in at a glance; he turned from them to the things nearer the dead man.

James Allerdyke sat in a big easy chair, placed at the side of a round table set towards a corner of the room. He was fully dressed in a grey tweed suit, but he had taken off one boot—the left—and it lay at his feet on the hearthrug. He himself was thrown back against the high-padded hood of the chair; there was a little frown on his set features, a tiny puckering of the brows above his closed eyes. His hands were lying at his sides, unclasped, the fingers slightly stretched, the thumbs slightly turned inward; everything looked as if, in the very act of taking off his boots, some sudden spasm of pain had seized him, and he had sat up, leaned back, and died, as swiftly as the seizure had come. There was a slight blueness under the lower rims of the eyes, a corresponding tint on the clean-shaven upper lip, but neither that nor the pallor which had long since settled on the rigid features had given anything of ghastliness to the face. The dead man lay back in his chair in such an easy posture that but for his utter quietness, his intense immobility, he might have well been taken for one who was hard and fast asleep.

The sound of the night-porter's returning footsteps sent Allerdyke out into the corridor. Unconsciously he shook his head and raised a hand—as if to warn the man against noise.

"Sh!" he said, still acting and speaking mechanically. "Here's—I knew something was wrong. The fact is, my cousin's dead!"

In his surprise the night-porter dropped the key which he had been to fetch. When he straightened himself from picking it up, his ruddy face had paled.

"Dead!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "Him! Why, he looked the picture of health last night. I noticed that of him, anyway!"

"He's dead now," said Allerdyke. "He's lying there dead. Come in!"

The door along the corridor from which the man of the shock head and great beard had looked out, opened again, and the big head was protruded. Its owner, seeing the two standing there, came out.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, advancing towards them in his pyjamas. "If there's any illness, I'm a medical man. Can I be of use?"

Allerdyke turned sharply, looking the stranger well over. He was not sure whether the man was an Englishman or a foreigner; he fancied that he detected a slightly foreign accent. The tone was well-meaning, and even kindly.

"I'm obliged to you," replied Allerdyke, in his characteristically blunt fashion. "I'm afraid nobody can be of use. The truth is, I came to join my cousin here, and I find him dead. Seems to me he's been dead some time. As you're a doctor, you can tell, of course. Perhaps you'll come in?"

He led the way back into the bedroom, the other two following closely behind him. At sight of the dead man the bearded stranger uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Ah!" he said. "Mr. Allerdyke!"

"You knew him, then?" demanded Marshall. "You've met him?"

The other, who had stooped over the body, bestowing a light touch on face and hand, looked up and nodded.

"I came over with him from Christiania," he answered. "I met him there—at a hotel. I had several conversations with him. In fact, I warned him."

"Warned him? Of what?" asked Allerdyke.

"Over-exertion," replied the doctor quietly. "I saw symptoms of heart-strain. That was why I talked with him. I gathered from what he told me that he was a man who lived a very strenuous life, and I warned him against doing too much. He was not fitted for it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Allerdyke, with obvious impatience. "Why, I always considered him as one of the fittest men I ever knew!"

"Perhaps you did," said the doctor. "Laymen, sir, do not see what a trained eye sees. The proof in his case is—there!"

He pointed to the dead man, at whom the night-porter was staring with astonished eyes.

Allerdyke stared, too, or seemed to stare. In reality, he was gazing into space, wondering about what had just been said.

"Then you think he died a natural death?" he asked, suddenly turning on his companion. "You don't think there's—anything wrong?"

The doctor shook his head calmly.

"I think he died of precisely what I should have expected him to die of," he answered. "Heart failure. It came upon him quite suddenly. You see, he was in the act of taking off his boots. He is a little fleshy—stout. The exertion of bending over and down—that was too much. He felt a sharp spasm—he sat back—he died, there and then."

"There and then!" repeated Allerdyke mechanically. "Well—what's to be done!" he went on. "What is done in these cases—I suppose you know?"

"There will have to be an inquest later on," answered the doctor. "I can give evidence for you, if you like—I am staying in Hull for a few days—for I can certainly testify to what I had observed. But that comes later—at present you had better acquaint the manager of the hotel, and I should suggest sending for a local medical man—there are some eminent men of my profession in this town. And—the body should be laid out. I'll go and dress, and then do what I can for you."

"Much obliged," responded Allerdyke. "Very kind of you. What name, sir?"

"My name is Lydenberg," replied the stranger. "I will give you my card presently. I have the honour of addressing—?"

Allerdyke pulled out his own card-case.

"My name's Marshall Allerdyke," he answered. "I'm his cousin," he went on, with another glance at the still figure. "And, my conscience, I never thought to find him like this! I never heard of any weakness on his part—I always thought him a particularly strong man."

"You will send for another medical man?" asked Dr. Lydenberg. "It will be more satisfactory to you."

"Yes, I'll see to that," replied Allergydyke. He turned to look at the night-porter, who was still hanging about as if fascinated. "Look here!" he said. "We don't want any fuss. Just rouse the manager quietly, and ask him to come here. And find that chauffeur of mine, and tell him I want him. Now, then, what about a doctor? Do you know a real, first-class one?"

"There's several within ten minutes, sir," answered the night-porter. "There's Dr. Orwin, in Coltman Street—he's generally fetched here. I can get a man to go for him at once."

"Do!" commanded Allergydyke. "But send me my driver first—I want him. Tell him what's happened."

He waited, standing and staring at his dead cousin until Gaffney came hurrying along the corridor. Allergydyke beckoned him into the room and closed the door.

"Gaffney," he said. "You see how things are? Mr. James is dead—I found him sitting there, dead. He's been dead some time—hours. There's a doctor, a foreigner, I think, across the passage there, who says it's been heart failure. I've sent for another doctor. Now in the meantime, I want to see what my cousin's got on him, and I want you to help me. We'll take everything off him in the way of valuables, papers, and so on, and put 'em in that small hand-bag of his."

Master and man went methodically to work; and an observer of an unduly sentimental shade of mind might have said that there was something almost callous about their measured, business-like proceedings. But Marshall Allergydyke was a man of eminently thorough and practical habits, and he was doing what he did with an idea and a purpose. His cousin might have died from sudden heart failure; again, he might not, there might have been foul play; there might have been one of many reasons for his unexpected death—anyway, in Allergydyke's opinion it was necessary for him to know exactly what James was carrying about his person when death took place. There was a small hand-bag on the dressing-table; Allergydyke opened it and took out all its contents. They were few—a muffler, a travelling-cap, a book or two, some foreign newspapers, a Russian word-book, a flask, the various odds and ends, small unimportant things which a voyager by sea and land picks up. Allergydyke took all these out, and laying them aside on the table, directed Gaffney to take everything from the dead man's pockets. And Gaffney, solemn of face and tight of lip, set to his task in silence.

There was comparatively little to bring to light. A watch and chain—the small pocket articles which every man carries—keys, a monocle eyeglass, a purse full of gold, loose silver, a note-case containing a considerable sum in bank-notes, some English, some foreign, letters and papers, a pocket diary—these were all. Allergydyke took each as Gaffney produced them, and placed each in the bag with no more than a mere glance.

"Everything there is, sir," whispered the chauffeur at last. "I've been through every pocket."

Allergydyke found the key of the bag, locked it, and set it aside on the mantelpiece. Then he went over to the suit-case lying on the bench at the foot of the bed, closed and locked it, and dropped the bunch of keys in his pocket. And just then Dr. Lydenberg came back, dressed, and on his heels came the manager of the hotel, startled and anxious, and with him an elderly professional-looking man whom he introduced as Dr. Orwin.

When James Allergydyke's dead body had been lifted on to the bed, and the two medical men had begun a whispered conversation beside it, Allergydyke drew the hotel manager aside to a corner of the room.

"Did you see anything of my cousin when he arrived last night?" he asked.

"Not when he arrived—no," replied the manager. "But later—yes. I had some slight conversation with him after he had taken supper. It was nothing much—he merely wished to know if there was always a night-porter on duty. He said he expected a friend, who might turn up at any hour of the night, and he wanted to leave a card for him. That would be you, I suppose, sir?"

"Just so," replied Allergydyke. "Now, how did he seem at that time? And what time was that?"

"Ten o'clock," said the manager. "Seem? Well, sir, he seemed to be in the very best of health and spirits! I was astonished to hear that he was dead. I never saw a man look more like living. He was—"

The elderly doctor came away from the bed approaching Allergydyke.

"After hearing what Dr. Lydenberg tells me, and examining the body—a mere perfunctory examination as yet, you know—I have little doubt that this gentleman died of what is commonly called heart failure," he said. "There will have to be an inquest, of course, and it may be advisable to make a post-mortem examination. You are a relative?"

"Cousin," replied Allergydyke. He hesitated a moment, and then spoke bluntly. "You don't think it's been a case of poisoning, do you?" he said.

Dr. Orwin pursed his lips and regarded his questioner narrowly.

"Self-administered, do you mean?" he asked.

"Administered any way," answered Allergydyke. "Self or otherwise." He squared his shoulders and spoke determinedly. "I don't understand about this heart-failure notion," he went on. "I never heard him complain of his heart. He was a strong, active man—hearty and full of go. I want to know—everything."

"There should certainly be an autopsy," murmured Dr. Orwin. He turned and looked at his temporary colleague, who nodded as if in assent. Then he turned back to Allergydyke. "If you'll leave us for a while, we will just make a further examination—then we'll speak to you later."

Allergydyke signified his assent with a curt nod of the head. Accompanied by the manager and Gaffney he left the room, and with him he carried the small hand-bag in which he had placed the dead man's personal effects.

CHAPTER III

THE SHOE BUCKLE

Once outside the death-chamber, Allerdike asked the manager to give him a bedroom with a sitting-room attached to it, and to put Gaffney in another room close by—he should be obliged, he said, to stay at the hotel until the inquest was over and arrangements had been made for his cousin's funeral. The manager at once took him to a suite of three rooms at the end of the corridor which they were then in. Allerdike took it at once, sent Gaffney down to bring up certain things from the car, and detained the manager for a moment's conversation.

"I suppose you'd a fair lot of people come in last night from that Christiania boat?" he asked.

"Some fifteen or twenty," answered the manager.

"Did you happen to see my cousin in conversation with any of them?" inquired Allerdike.

The manager shrugged his shoulders. He was not definitely sure about that; he had a notion that he had seen Mr. James Allerdike talking with some of the *Perisco* passengers, but the notion was vague.

"You know how it is," he went on. "People come in—they stand about talking in the hall—groups, you know—they go from one to another. I think I saw him talking to that doctor who's in there now with Dr. Orwin—the man with the big beard—and to a lady who came at the same time. There were several ladies in the party—the passengers were all about in the hall, and in the coffee-room, and so on. There are a lot of other people in the house, too, of course."

"It's this way," said Allerdike. "I'm not at all satisfied about what these doctors say, so far. They may be right, of course—probably are. Still I want to know all I can, and, naturally, I'd like to know who the people were that my cousin was last in company with. You never know what may have happened—there's often something that doesn't show at first."

"There was—nothing missing in his room, I hope?" asked the manager with professional anxiety.

"Nothing that I know of," answered Allerdike. "My man and I have searched him, and taken possession of everything—all that he had on him is in that bag, and I'm going to examine it now. No—I don't think anything had been taken from him, judging by what I've seen."

"You wouldn't like me to send for the police?" suggested the manager.

"Not at present," replied Allerdike. "Not, at any rate, until these doctors say something more definite—they'll know more presently, no doubt. Of course, you've a list of all the people who came in last night?"

"They would all register," answered the manager. "But then, you know, sir, many of them will be going this morning—most of them are only breaking their journey. You can look over the register whenever you like."

"Later on," said Allerdike. "In the meantime, I'll examine these things."

Send me up some coffee as soon as your people are stirring."

He unlocked the hand-bag when the manager had left him. It seemed to his practical and methodical mind that his first duty was to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the various personal effects which he and Gaffney had found on the dead man. Of the valuables he took little notice; it was very evident, in his opinion, that if James Allerdike's death had been brought about by some sort of foul play—a suspicion which had instantly crossed his mind as soon as he discovered that his cousin was dead—the object of his destroyer had not been robbery. James had always been accustomed to carrying a considerable sum of money on him; Gaffney's search had brought a considerable sum to light. James also wore a very valuable watch and chain and two fine diamond rings; there they all were. Not robbery—no; at least, not robbery of the ordinary sort. But—had

there been robbery of another, a bigger, a subtle, and deep-designed sort? James was a man of many affairs and schemes—he might have had valuable securities, papers relating to designs, papers containing secrets of great moment; he was interested, for example, in several patents—he might have had documents pertinent to some affair of such importance that ill-disposed folk, eager to seize them, might have murdered him in order to gain possession of them. There were many possibilities, and there was always—to Allerdyke's mind—the improbability that James had died through sudden illness.

Now that Marshall Allerdyke's mind was clearing, getting free of the first effects of the sudden shock of finding his cousin dead, doubt and uneasiness as to the whole episode were rising strongly within him. He and James had been brought up together; they had never been apart from each other for more than a few months at a time during thirty-five years, and he flattered himself that he knew James as well as any man of James's acquaintance. He could not remember that his cousin had ever made any complaint of illness or indisposition; he had certainly never had any serious sickness in his life. As to heart trouble, Allerdyke knew that a few years previous to his death, James had taken out a life-policy with a first-rate office, and had been passed as a first-class life: he remembered, as he sat there thinking over these things, the self-satisfied grin with which James had come and told him that the examining doctor had declared him to be as sound as a bell. It was true, of course, that disease might have set in after that—still, it was only six weeks since he had seen James and James was then looking in a fit, healthy, hearty state. He had gone off on one of his Russian journeys as full of life and spirits as a man could be—and had not the hotel manager just said that he seemed full of health, full of go, at ten o'clock last night? And yet, within a couple of hours or so—according to what the medical men thought from their hurried examination—this active vigorous man was dead—swiftly and mysteriously dead.

Allerdyke felt—felt intensely—that there was something deeply strange in all this, and yet it was beyond him, with his limited knowledge, to account for James's sudden death, except on the hypothesis suggested by the two doctors. All sorts of vague, half-formed thoughts were in his mind. Was there any person who desired James's death? Had any one tracked him to this place—got rid of him by some subtle means? Had—

"Pshaw!" he muttered, suddenly interrupting his train of thought, and recognizing how shapeless and futile it all was. "It just comes to this—I'm asking myself if the poor lad was murdered! And what have I to go on? Naught—naught at all!"

Nevertheless, there were papers before him which had been taken from James's pocket; there was the little journal or diary which he always carried, and in which, to Allerdyke's knowledge, he always jotted down a brief note of each day's proceedings wherever he went. He could examine these, at any rate—they might cast some light on his cousin's recent doings.

He began with the diary, turning over its pages until he came to the date on which James had left Bradford for St. Petersburg. That was on March 30th. He had travelled to the Russian capital overland—by way of Berlin and Vilna, at each of which places he had evidently broken his journey. From St. Petersburg he had gone on to Moscow, where he had spent the better part of a week. All his movements were clearly set out in the brief pencilled entries in the journal. From Moscow he had returned to St. Petersburg; there he had stayed a fortnight; thence he had journeyed to Revel, from Revel he had crossed the Baltic to Stockholm; from Stockholm he had gone across country to Christiania. And from Christiania he had sailed for Hull to meet his death in that adjacent room where the doctors were now busied with his body.

Marshall Allerdyke, though he had no actual monetary connection with them, had always possessed a fairly accurate knowledge of his cousin's business affairs—James was the sort of man who talked freely to his intimates about his doings. Therefore Allerdyke was able to make out from the journal what James had done during his stay at St. Petersburg, in Moscow, in Revel, and in Stockholm, in all of which places he had irons of one sort or another in the fire. He recognized the names of

various firms upon which James had called—these names were as familiar to him as those of the big manufacturing concerns in his own town. James had been to see this man, this man had been to see James. He had dined with such an one; such an one had dined with him. Ordinarily innocent entries, all these; there was no subtle significance to be attached to any of them: they were just the sort of entries which the busy commercial man, engaged in operations of some magnitude, would make for his own convenience.

There was, in short, nothing in that tiny book—a mere, waistcoat-pocket sort of affair—which Allerdike was at a loss to understand, or which excited any wonder or speculation in him: with one exception. That exception was in three entries: brief, bald, mere lines, all made during James's second stay—the fortnight period—in St. Petersburg. They were:—

April 18: Met Princess.

April 20: Lunched with Princess.

April 23: Princess dined with me.

These entries puzzled Allerdike. His cousin had been going over to Russia at least twice a year for three years, but he had never heard him mention that he had formed the acquaintance of any person of princely rank. Who was this Princess with whom James had evidently become on such friendly terms that they had lunched and dined together? James had twice written to him during his absence—he had both letters in his pocket then, and one of them was dated from St. Petersburg on April 24th, but there was no mention of any Princess in either. Seeking for an explanation, he came to the conclusion that James, who had a slight weakness for the society of ladies connected with the stage, had made the acquaintance of some actress or other, ballet-dancer, singer, artiste, and had given her the nickname of Princess.

That was all there was to be got from the diary. It amounted to nothing. There were, however, the loose papers. He began to examine these methodically. They were few in number—James was the sort of man who never keeps anything which can be destroyed: Allerdike knew from experience that he had a horror of accumulating what he called rubbish. These papers, fastened together with a band of india-rubber, were all business documents, with one exception—a letter from Allerdike himself addressed to Stockholm, to wait James's arrival. There were some specifications relating to building property; there was a schedule of the timber then standing in a certain pine forest in Sweden in which James had a valuable share; there was a balance-sheet of a Moscow trading concern in which he had invested money; there were odds and ends of a similar nature—all financial. From these papers Allerdike could only select one which he did not understand, which conveyed no meaning to him. This was a telegram, dispatched from London on April 21st, at eleven o'clock in the morning. He spread it out on the table and slowly read it:—

"To James Allerdike, Hotel Grand Monarch, St. Petersburg.

"Your wire received. If Princess will confide goods to your care to personally bring over here have no doubt matter can be speedily and satisfactorily arranged. Have important client now in town until middle May who seems to be best man to approach and is likely to be a generous buyer.

"FRANKLIN FULLAWAY, Waldorf Hotel, London."

Here was another surprise: Allerdike had never in his life heard James mention the name—Franklin Fullaway. Yet here Mr. Franklin Fullaway, whoever he might be, was wiring to James as only a business acquaintance of some standing would wire. And here again was the mention of a Princess—presumably, nay, evidently, the Princess to whom reference was made in the diary. And there was mention, too, of goods—probably valuable goods—to be confided to James's care for conveyance to England, to London, for sale to some prospective purchaser. If James had brought them, where were they? So far as Allerdike had ascertained, James had no luggage beyond his big suitcase and the handbag which now stood on the table before his own eyes—he was a man for travelling light, James, and never encumbered himself with more than indispensable necessities. Where, then—

A tap at the door of the sitting-room prefaced the entry of the two medical men.

"We heard from the manager that you were in this room, Mr. Allergy," said Dr. Orwin. "Well, we made a further examination of your relative, and we still incline to the opinion expressed already. Now, if you approve it, I will arrange at once for communicating with the Coroner, removing the body, and having an autopsy performed. As Dr. Lydenberg has business in the town which will keep him here a few days, he will join me, and it will be more satisfactory to you, no doubt, if another doctor is called—I should advise the professional police surgeon. If you will leave it to me—"

"I'll leave everything of that sort to you, doctor," said Allergy. "I'm much obliged to both of you, gentlemen. You understand what I'm anxious about?—I want to be certain—certain, mind you!—of the cause of my cousin's death. Now you speak of removing him? Then I'll just go and take a look at him before that's done."

He presently locked up his rooms, leaving the hand-bag there, also locked, and went alone to the room in which James lay dead. Most folks who knew Marshall Allergy considered him a hard, unsentimental man, but there were tears in his eyes as he stooped over his cousin's body and laid his hand on the cold forehead. Once more he broke into familiar, muttered speech.

"If there's been aught wrong, lad," he said. "Aught foul or underhand, I'll right thee!—by God, I will!"

Then he stooped lower and kissed the dead man's cheek, and pressed the still hands. It was with an effort that he turned away and regained his self-command—and it was in that moment that his eyes, slightly blurred as they were, caught sight of an object which lay half-concealed by a corner of the hearth-rug—a glittering, shining object, which threw back the gleam of the still burning electric light. He strode across the room and picked it up—the gold buckle of a woman's shoe, studded with real, if tiny, diamonds.

CHAPTER IV

MR. FRANKLIN FULLAWAY

Allerdyke carried his find away to his own room and carefully examined it. The buckle was of real gold; the stones set in it were real diamonds, small though they were. He deduced two ideas from these facts—one, that the owner was a woman who loved pretty and expensive things; the other, that she must have a certain natural carelessness about her not to have noticed that the buckle was loose on her shoe. But as he put the buckle safely away in his own travelling bag, he began to speculate on matters of deeper import—how did it come to be lying there in James Allerdyke's room? How long had it been lying there? Had its owner been into that room recently? Had she, in fact, been in the room since James Allerdyke took possession of it on his arrival at the hotel?

He realized the possibility of various answers to these questions. The buckle might have been dropped by a former occupant of the room. But was that likely? Would an object sparkling with diamonds have escaped the eyes of even a careless chambermaid? Would it have escaped the keener eyes of James Allerdyke? Anyhow, that question could easily be settled by finding out how long that particular room had been unoccupied before James was put into it. A much more important question was—had the owner of the buckle been in the room between nine o'clock of the previous evening and five o'clock that morning? Out of that, again, rose certain supplementary questions: What had she been doing there? And most important of all—who was she? That might possibly be solved by an inspection of the hotel register, and after he had drunk the coffee which was presently brought up to him, Allerdyke went down to the office to set about that necessary, yet problematic, task.

As he reached the big hall on the ground floor of the hotel, the manager came across to him, displaying a telegram.

"For your cousin, sir," he announced, handing it over to Allerdyke.

"Just come in."

Allerdyke slowly opened the envelope, and as he unfolded the message, caught the name Franklin Fullaway at its foot—

"Let me know what time you arrive King's Cross to-day and I will meet you, highly important we should both see my prospective client at once."

This message bore the same address which Allerdyke had found in the telegram discovered in James's pocket-book—Waldorf Hotel—and he determined to wire Mr. Franklin Fullaway immediately. He sat down at a writing-table in the hall and drew a sheaf of telegraph forms towards him. But it was not easy to compose the message which he wished to send. He knew nothing of the man to whom he must address it, nothing of his business relations with James; he had no clear notion of what the present particular transaction was, nor how it might be connected with what had just happened. After considerable thought he wrote out a telegram of some length, and carried it himself to the telegraph office in the station outside:—

"To *Franklin Fullaway, Waldorf Hotel, London.*

"Your wire to James Allerdyke opened by undersigned, his cousin. James Allerdyke died suddenly here during night. Circumstances somewhat mysterious. Investigation proceeding. Have found on body your telegram to him of April 21. Glad if you can explain business referred to therein, or give any other information about his recent doings abroad.

"From MARSHALL ALLERDYKE, Station Hotel, Hull."

It was by that time eight o'clock, and the railway station and the hotel had started into the business of another day. There were signs that people who had stayed in the hotel over-night were about to take their departure by early trains, and Allerdyke hastened back to the office to look over the register—he was anxious to know who and what the folk were who had been near and about his cousin

in his last hours. But a mere glance at the big pages showed him the uselessness of his task. There were some seventy or eighty entries, made during the previous twenty-four hours; it was impossible to go into the circumstances of each. He turned with a look of despair to the manager at his elbow.

"Nothing much to be made out of that!" he muttered. "Still—which are the people who came off the *Perisco* last night?"

The manager summoned a clerk; the clerk indicated a sequence of entries, amongst which Allerdyke at once noticed the name of Dr. Lydenberg. The rest were, of course, unfamiliar to him.

"There was a lady here last night, who, according to your night-porter, changed her mind about staying, and set off in a motor-car about midnight," observed Allerdyke. "Which is she, now, in this lot?"

The clerk instantly pointed to an entry, made in a big, dashing, artistic-looking handwriting.

"That," he answered. "Miss Celia Lennard—Number 265."

Two numbers away from James Allerdyke's room—Number 263! The inquirer pricked his ears.

"It was she who went off in the middle of the night," continued the clerk. "She pestered me with a lot of questions as to how she could get North—to Edinburgh. That would be about eleven o'clock. I told her she couldn't get a train until morning. I saw her going upstairs just before I went off duty—soon after eleven. It seems, according to the night-porter—"

"I know—he told me," said Allerdyke, interrupting him. "He got her a car, she wanted to be driven to some station on the Great Northern main line—I met her on the road at two-thirty. I suppose the driver of that car can be found?—he'll have returned by this, I should think."

"Oh, you can find him all right," answered the clerk. "The car was got from a garage close by."

Allerdyke jotted down the name of the garage in his pocket-book, and proceeded to make further inquiries about his cousin's movements on the previous night. He interviewed various hotel servants—waiters, chambermaids, porters, all could tell him something, and the sum total of what they could tell amounted, for all practical purposes, to next to nothing. James Allerdyke had come to the hotel just as several other people had come. He had been served with a light supper in the coffee-room; he had been seen chatting with one or two people in the lounge and in the smoking-room; a chambermaid had seen him in his own room—according to all these people there was nothing in his appearance or his behaviour that was out of the common, and all agreed that he looked very well.

The manager, who accompanied Allerdyke in his round of these inquiries, glanced at him with a puzzled expression when they came to an end.

"Of course, sir, if you would like the police to be summoned," he suggested for the second time. "Perhaps—"

"No—not yet!" answered Allerdyke. "I daresay they'll have to be called in; indeed, I suppose it's absolutely necessary, because of the inquest, but I'll wait until I hear what these doctors have to say, and, besides that, I want to get some news from London. It's a queer business altogether, and if there has been any foul play, why"—he paused and looked round at the people who were passing in and out of the hall, in a corner of which he and the manager were standing—"we can't hold up all these folk and ask 'em if they know anything, you know," he added, with a grim smile.

"That's the devil of it! If there has, as I say, been aught wrong—murder, to put it plainly—why, the criminal or criminals may already be off or going off now, amongst these people, and I can't stop them. In a few hours they may be where nobody can find them—don't you see?"

The manager did see, and shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of helplessness. Again he could only suggest expert help from the police—but this time he added to his suggestion the remark that he understood there was nothing for the police to take hold of—no clue, no signs of foul play.

"Not yet," agreed Allerdyke. "But—there may be. Well, I'm afraid that register is no good. It's meaningless. A list of names conveys nothing—except for future reference. For the present we must wait. But—in any way you can—keep your eyes open. There's one thing you can do—there was a lady in here last night who took Room 265 and left it at midnight to go away in a motor-car which

your night-porter got for her. I particularly want to see the chambermaid who attended that lady. Let me see her privately—I've a question to ask her."

"She shall be sent up to your sitting-room as soon as I've found her," responded the manager. "This is the servants' breakfast-hour, but—"

"Send her up there after nine o'clock," said Allergydyke. "In the meantime I've another inquiry to make elsewhere."

He found Gaffney and sent him round to the garage from which Miss Celia Lennard had obtained her midnight car, with instructions to find the chauffeur who had driven her, and to get from him what information he could as to her movements subsequent to the rencontre at Howden.

"Don't excite his suspicions," said Allergydyke, "but pump him for any news he can give you. I want to know what became of her."

Gaffney speedily returned, fully informed of Miss Lennard's movements up to a certain point. The chauffeur had just got back, and was about to seek the bed from which he had been pulled at one o'clock in the morning. He had taken the lady to York—only to find that there was no train thence to Edinburgh until after nine o'clock. So she had turned into the Station Hotel at York, to wait, and there he had left her.

There was little of importance in this, but it seemed to indicate that Miss Lennard was certainly about to travel North, and that her hurried departure from the hotel was due to a genuine desire to reach her ultimate destination as speedily as possible. While Allergydyke was wondering if it would be worth while to follow her up, merely because she had been a fellow-passenger with his cousin, the manager came to him with another telegram.

"That lady we were talking about," he said, laying the telegram before Allergydyke, "has just sent me this. I thought you'd like to see it as you were asking about her."

Allergydyke saw that the message was addressed to the manager, and had been dispatched from York railway station three-quarters of an hour previously.

"Please ask chambermaid to search for diamond shoe-buckle which I believe I lost in your hotel last night. If found send by registered post to Miss Lennard, 503_a_, Bedford Court Mansions, London."

Allergydyke memorized that address while he secretly wondered whether he should or should not tell the manager that the missing property was in his possession. Finally he determined to keep silence for the moment, and he handed back the message with an assumption of indifference.

"I should think a thing of that sort will soon be found," he observed.

"Look here—never mind about sending that chambermaid to me just now;

I'll see her later. I'm going to breakfast."

He wondered as he sat in the coffee-room, eating and drinking, if any of the folk about him knew anything about the dead man whose body had been quietly taken away by the doctors while the hotel routine went on in its usual fashion. It seemed odd, strange, almost weird, to think that any one of these people, eating fish or chops, chatting, reading their propped-up newspapers, might be in possession of some knowledge which he would give a good deal to appropriate.

Of one fact, however, he was certain—that diamond buckle belonged to Miss Celia Lennard, and she lived at an address in London which he had by that time written down in his pocket-book. And now arose the big (and, in view of what had happened, the most important and serious) question—how had Miss Celia Lennard's diamond buckle come to be in Room Number 263? That question had got to be answered, and he foresaw that he and Miss Lennard must very quickly meet again.

But there were many matters to be dealt with first, and they began to arise and to demand attention at once. Before he had finished breakfast came a wire from Mr. Franklin Fullaway, answering his own:—

"Deeply grieved and astonished by your news. Am coming down at once, and shall arrive Hull two o'clock. In meantime keep strict guard on your cousin's effects, especially on any sealed package. Most important this should be done."

This message only added to the mass of mystery which had been thickening ever since the early hours of the morning. Strict guard on James's effects—any sealed package—what did that mean? But a very little reflection made Allergy come to the conclusion that all these vague references and hints bore relation to the possible transaction mentioned in the various telegrams already exchanged between James Allergy and Franklin Fullaway, and that James had on him or in his possession when he left Russia something which was certainly not discovered when Gaffney searched the dead man.

There was nothing to do but to wait: to wait for two things—the result of the medical investigation, and the arrival of Mr. Franklin Fullaway. The second came first. At ten minutes past two a bustling, quick-mannered American strode into Marshall Allergy's private sitting-room, and at the instant that the door was closed behind him asked a question which seemed to burst from every fibre of his being—

"My dear sir! Are they safe?"

CHAPTER V

THE NASTIRSEVITCH JEWELS

Allerdyke, like all true Yorkshiremen, had been born into the world with a double portion of caution and a triple one of reserve, and instead of answering the question he took a leisurely look at the questioner. He saw before him a tall, good-looking, irreproachably attired man of from thirty to thirty-five years of age, whose dark eyes were ablaze with excitement, whose equally dark, carefully trimmed moustache did not conceal the agitation of the lips beneath. Mr. Franklin Fullaway, in spite of his broad shoulders and excellent muscular development, was evidently a highly strung, nervous, sensitive gentleman; nothing could be plainer than that he had travelled from town in a state of great mental activity which was just arriving at boiling-point. Everything about his movements and gestures denoted it—the way in which he removed his hat, laid aside his stick and gloves, ran his fingers through his dark, curly hair, and—more than anything—looked at Marshall Allerdyke. But Allerdyke had a habit of becoming cool and quiet when other men grew excited and emotional, and he glanced at his visitor with seeming indifference.

"Mr. Fullaway, I suppose?" he said, phlegmatically. "Aye, to be sure! Sit you down, Mr. Fullaway. Will you take anything?—it's a longish ride from London, and I daresay you'd do with a drink, what?"

"Nothing, nothing, thank you, Mr. Allerdyke," answered Fullaway, obviously surprised by the other's coolness. "I had lunch on the train."

"Very convenient, that," observed Allerdyke. "I can remember when there wasn't a chance of it. Aye—and what might this be that you're asking about, now, Mr. Fullaway? What do you refer to?"

Fullaway, after a moment's surprised look at the Yorkshireman's stolid face, elevated his well-marked eyebrows and shook his head. Then he edged his chair nearer to the table at which Allerdyke sat.

"You don't know, then, that your cousin had valuables on him?" he asked in an altered tone.

"I know exactly what my cousin had on him, and what was in his baggage, when I found him dead in his room," replied Allerdyke drily.

"And what that was—was just what I should have expected to find.

But—nothing more."

Fullaway almost leapt in his chair.

"Nothing more!" he exclaimed. "Nothing more than you would have expected to find! Nothing?"

Allerdyke bent across the table, giving his visitor a keen look.

"What would you have expected to find if you'd found him as I found him?" he asked. "Come—what, now?"

He was watching the American narrowly, and he saw that Fullaway's excitement was passing off, was being changed into an attentive eagerness. He himself thrust his hand into his breast pocket and drew out the papers which had been accumulating there since his arrival and discovery.

"We'd best be plain, Mr. Fullaway," he said. "I don't know you, but I gather that you knew James, and that you'd done business together."

"I knew Mr. James Allerdyke very well, and I've done business with him for the last two years," replied Fullaway.

"Just so," assented Allerdyke. "And your business—"

"That of a general agent—an intermediary, if you like," answered Fullaway. "I arrange private sales a good deal between European sellers and American buyers—pictures, curiosities, jewels, antiques, and so on.

"I'm pretty well known, Mr. Allerdike, on both sides the Atlantic."

"Quite so," said Allerdike. "I'm not in that line, however, and I don't know you. But I'll tell you all I do know and you'll tell me all you know. When I searched my cousin for papers, I found this wire from you—sent to James at St. Petersburg. Now then, what does it refer to? Those valuables you hinted at just now?"

"Exactly!" answered Fullaway. "Nothing less!"

"What valuables are they?" asked Allerdike.

"Jewels! Worth a quarter of a million," replied Fullaway.

"What? Dollars?"

Fullaway laughed derisively.

"Dollars! No, pounds! Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, my dear sir!" he answered.

"You think he had them on him?"

"I'm sure he had them on him!" asserted Fullaway. He, in his turn, began to produce papers. "At any rate, he had them on him when he was in Christiania the other day. He was bringing them over here—to me."

"On whose behalf?" asked Allerdike.

"On behalf of a Russian lady, a Princess, who wished to find a purchaser for them," replied the American promptly.

"In that case—to come to the point," said Allerdike, "if my cousin James had that property on him when he landed here last night and it wasn't—as it certainly wasn't—on him when I found him this morning—he's been robbed?"

"Robbed—and murdered that he might be robbed!" answered Fullaway.

The two men looked steadily at each other for a while. Then Allerdike laid his papers on the table between them.

"You'd better tell me all you know about it," he said quietly. "Let's hear it all—then we shall be getting towards knowing what to do."

"Willingly!" exclaimed the American. He produced and spread out a couple of cablegrams on which he laid a hand while he talked. "As I have already said, I have had several deals in business with Mr. James Allerdike. I last saw him towards the end of March, in town, and he then mentioned to me that he was just about setting out for Russia. On April 20th I received this cable from him—sent, you see, from St. Petersburg. Allow me to read it to you. He says. 'The Princess Nastirsevitch is anxious to find purchaser for her jewels, valued more than once at about a quarter of million pounds. Wants money to clear off mortgages on her son's estate, and set him going again. Do you know of any one likely to buy in one lot? Can arrange to bring over myself for buyers' inspection if chance of immediate good sale. James Allerdike.' Now, as soon as I received that from your cousin I immediately thought of a possible and very likely purchaser—Mr. Delkin, a Chicago man, whose only daughter is just about to marry an English nobleman. I knew that Mr. Delkin had a mind to give his daughter a really fine collection of jewels, and I went at once to him regarding the matter. In consequence of my interview with Mr. Delkin, I cabled to James Allerdike on April 21st, saying—"

"This is it, no doubt," said Allerdike, producing the message of the date mentioned.

"That is it," assented Fullaway, glancing across the table. "Very well, you see what I said. He replied to that at once—here is his reply. It is, you see, very brief. It merely says, 'All right—shall wire details later—keep possible buyer on.' I heard no more until last Thursday, May 8th, when I received this cablegram, sent, you see, from Christiania. In it he says: 'Expect reach Hull Monday night next. Shall come London next day. Arrange meeting with your man. Have got all goods.' Now those last four words, Mr. Allerdike, if they mean anything at all, mean that your cousin was bringing these valuable jewels with him; had them on him when he cabled from Christiania. And if you did not find them when you searched him—where are they? Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth!"

Allerdyke took the three cablegrams from his visitor and carefully read them through, comparing them with the dates already known to him, and with Fullaway's messages in reply. Eventually he put all the papers together, arranging them in sequence. He laid them on the table between Fullaway and himself, and for a moment or two sat reflectively drumming the tips of his fingers on them.

"Who is this Princess Nastirsevitch?" he asked suddenly looking up.

"Royalty, eh?"

"No," answered Fullaway, with a smile. "I don't know much about these European titles and dignities, but I don't think the title of Prince means in Russia what it does in England. A Prince there, I think, is some sort of nobleman, like your dukes and earls, and so on, here. But, anyway, the Princess Nastirsevitch isn't a Russian at all, except by marriage—she's a countryman of my own. I guess you've heard of her—she was Helen Hamilton, the famous dancer."

Allerdyke shook his head.

"Not my line at all," he said. "It was a bit in James's, though. Dancer, eh? And married a Prince?"

"Twenty-five years ago," replied Fullaway. "Ancient history, that. But I know a good deal about her. She made a big fortune with her dancing, and she invested largely in pearls and diamonds—I know that. I also happen to know that she'd one son by her marriage, of whom she's passionately fond. And I read this thing in this way: I guess the old Prince's estates (he's dead, a year or two ago) were heavily mortgaged, and she hit on the notion of clearing all off by selling her jewels, so that her son might start clear—no encumbrances on the property, you know."

Allerdyke pursed his lips and rubbed his chin.

"What I don't understand is that she confided a quarter of a million's worth of goods of that sort to a man whom she couldn't know so very well," he observed. "I never heard James speak of her."

"That may be," replied Fullaway. "But he may have known her very well for all that. However, there are the facts. And," he added, with emphasis, "there, Mr. Allerdyke, are those four words, sent from Christiania, 'Have got all goods!' Now, we can be reasonably sure of what he meant. He'd got the Princess's jewels. Very well! Where are they?"

Allerdyke got to his feet, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, began to stride about the room. All this was not merely puzzling, but, in a way which he could not understand, distasteful to him. Somehow—he did not know why, nor at that moment try to think why—he resented the fact that any one knew more about his dead cousin than he did. And he began to wonder as he strode about the room how much this Mr. Franklin Fullaway knew.

"Did my cousin James ever mention this Princess to you?" he suddenly asked, stopping in his walk to and fro. "I mean—before he went over to Russia this last time?"

"He just mentioned that he knew her—mentioned it in casual conversation," answered Fullaway. "She and I being fellow Americans, the subject interested me, of course. But—he only said that he had met her in Russia."

"Aye, well," said Allerdyke musingly, "it's true he did go across to Russia a good deal, and no doubt he knew folk there that he never told me about."

"Well," he went on, throwing himself into his chair again, "what's to be done? Do you honestly think that he had those things on him when he came here last night? You do? Very well, then, he's been murdered by some devil or devils who's got 'em! But how? And who are they—or who's he—or—good Lord! it might be who's she?"

"Poisoned," said Fullaway. "That's my answer to your question of—how? As to your other question—is there no clue to anything? you forget—I don't know any details. I only know that he was found dead. Under what circumstances?"

Allerdyke pulled his chair nearer to his visitor.

"I'd forgotten," he said. "I'll tell you the lot. See if you can make aught out of it—they always say you Yankees have sharp brains. Try to see a bit of daylight! So far it licks me."

He gave the American a brief yet full account of all that had happened since his receipt of James Allerdike's wireless message. And Fullaway listened in silence, taking everything in, making no interruption, and at the end he spoke quietly and with decision.

"We must find that woman—Miss Celia Lennard—and at once," he said.

"That's absolutely necessary."

"Just so," agreed Allerdike. "But look here—I've been thinking that over. Is it very likely that a woman who'd stolen two hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of stuff from an hotel would wire back to its manager, giving her address, for the sake of a shoe-buckle, even one set with diamonds?"

"I'm not—for the moment—supposing that she is the thief," answered Fullaway. "Why I want—and must—find her at once is to ask her a simple question. What was she doing in James Allerdike's room?"

For—I've an idea."

"What?" demanded Allerdike.

"This," replied Fullaway. "They were fellow-passengers on the *Perisco*. Your cousin—as I daresay you know—was the sort of man who readily makes friends, especially with women. My idea is that if this Miss Lennard went into his room last night it was to be shown the Princess Nastirsevitch's jewels. Your cousin was just the sort of man who knew how a woman would appreciate an exhibition of such things. And—"

At that moment a waiter tapped at the sitting-room door and announced Dr. Orwin.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIMA DONNA'S PORTRAIT

Marshall Allergy's sharp eyes were quick to see that his new visitor had something of importance to communicate and wished to give his news in private. Dr. Orwin glanced inquiringly at the American as he took the seat which Allergy drew forward, and the cock of his eyes indicated a strong desire to know who the stranger was.

"Friend of my late cousin," said Allergy brusquely. "Mr. Franklin Fullaway, of London—just as anxious as I am to hear what you have to tell us, doctor. You've come to tell something, of course?"

The doctor inclined his head towards Fullaway, and added a grave bow in answer to Allergy's question.

"The autopsy has been made," he replied. "By Dr. Lydenberg, Dr. Quillet, who is one of the police-surgeons here, and myself. We made a very careful and particular examination."

"And—the result?" asked Allergy eagerly. "Is it what you anticipated from your first glance at him—here?"

The doctor's face became a shade graver; his voice assumed an oracular tone.

"My two colleagues," he said, "agreed that your cousin's death resulted from heart failure which arose from what we may call ordinary causes. There is no need for me to go into details—it is quite sufficient to say that they are abundantly justified in coming to the conclusion at which they have arrived: it is quite certain that your cousin's heart had recently become seriously affected. But as regards myself"—here he paused, and looking narrowly from one to the other of his two hearers, he sank his voice to a lower, more confidential tone—"as regards myself, I am not quite so certain as Dr. Lydenberg and Dr. Quillet appear to be. The fact of the case is, I think it very possible that Mr. James Allergy was—poisoned."

Neither of the two who listened so intently made any reply to this significant announcement. Instead they kept their eyes intently fixed on the doctor's grave face; then they slowly turned from him to each other, exchanging glances. And after a pause the doctor went on, speaking in measured and solemn accents.

"There is no need, either, at present—only at present—that I should tell you why I think that," he continued. "I may be wrong—my two colleagues are inclined to think I am wrong. But they quite agree with me that it will be proper to preserve certain organs—you understand?—for further examination by, say, the Home Office analyst, who is always, of course, a famous pathological expert. That will be done—in fact, we have already sealed up what we wish to be further examined. But"—he paused again, shaking his head more solemnly than ever—"the truth is, gentlemen," he went on at last, "I am doubtful if even that analysis and examination will reveal anything. If my suspicions are correct—and perhaps I ought to call them mere notions, theories, ideas, rather than suspicions—but, at any rate, if there is anything in the vague thoughts which I have, no trace of any poison will be found—and yet your cousin may have been poisoned, all the same."

"Secretly!" exclaimed Fullaway.

Dr. Orwin gave the American a sharp glance which indicated that he realized Fullaway's understanding of what he had just said.

"Precisely," he answered. "There are poisons—known to experts—which will destroy life almost to a given minute, and of which the most skilful pathologist and expert will not be able to find a single trace. Now, please, understand my position—I say, it is quite possible, quite likely, quite in accordance with what I have seen, that this unfortunate gentleman died of heart failure brought about by even such an ordinary exertion as his stooping forward to untie his shoe-lace, but—I also think it

likely that his death resulted from poison, subtly and cunningly administered, probably not very long before his death took place. And if I only knew—"

He paused at that, and looked searchingly and meaningly at Marshall Allerdyke before he continued. And Allerdyke looked back with the same intentness and nodded.

"Yes—yes!" he said. "If you only knew—? Say it, doctor!"

"If I only knew if there was any reason why any person wished to take this man's life," responded Dr. Orwin, slowly and deliberately. "If I knew that somebody wanted to get him out of the way, for instance—"

Allerdyke jumped to his feet and tapped Fullaway on the shoulder.

"Come in here a minute," he said, motioning towards the door of his bedroom. "Excuse us, doctor—I want to have a word with this gentleman. Look here," he continued, when he had led the American into the bedroom and had closed the door. "You hear what he says? Shall we tell him? Or shall we keep it all dark for a while? Which—what?"

"Tell him under promise of secrecy," replied Fullaway after a moment's consideration. "Medical men are all right—yes, tell him. He may suggest something. And I'm inclined to think his theory is correct, eh?"

"Correct!" exclaimed Allerdyke, with a grim laugh. "You bet it's correct! Come on, then—we'll tell him all. Now, doctor," he went on, leading the way back into the sitting-room, "we're going to give you our confidence. You'll treat it as a strict confidence, a secret between us, for the present. The truth is that when my cousin came to this hotel last night he was in possession—that is, we have the very strongest grounds for believing him to have been in possession—of certain extremely valuable property—jewels worth a large amount—which he was carrying, safeguarding, from a lady in Russia to this gentleman in London. When I searched his body and luggage, these valuables were missing. Mr. Fullaway and myself haven't the least doubt that he was robbed. So your theory—eh?"

Dr. Orwin had listened to this with deep attention, and he now put two quick questions.

"The value of these things was great?"

"Relatively, very great," answered Allerdyke.

"Enough to engage, the attention of a clever gang of thieves?"

"Quite!"

"Then," said the doctor, "I am quite of opinion that my ideas are correct. These, people probably tracked your cousin to this place, contrived to administer a subtle and deadly poison to him last night, and entered his room after the time at which they knew it would take effect. Have you any clue—even a slight one?"

"Only this," answered Allerdyke, and proceeded to narrate the story of the shoe-buckle, adding Fullaway's theory to it. "That's not much, eh?"

"You must find that woman and produce her at the inquest," said the doctor. "I take it that Mr. Fullaway's idea is a correct one. Your cousin probably did invite Miss Lennard into his room to show her these jewels—that, of course, would prove that he had them in his possession at some certain hour last night. Now, about that inquest. It is fixed for ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Let me advise you as to your own course of procedure, having an eye on what you have told me. Your object should be to make the proceedings to-morrow merely formal, so that the Coroner can issue his order for interment, and then adjourn for further evidence. It will be sufficient if you give evidence identifying the body, if evidence is given of the autopsy, and an adjournment asked for until a further examination of the reserved organs and viscera can be made. For the present, I should keep back the matter of the supposed robbery until you can find this Miss Lennard. At the adjourned inquest—say in a week or ten days hence—everything pertinent can be brought out. But you will need legal help—I am rather trespassing on legal preserves in telling you so much."

"Deeply obliged to you, doctor—and you can add to our obligations by giving us the name of a good man to go to," said Allerdyke. "We'll see him at once and fix things up for to-morrow morning."

Dr. Orwin wrote down the name and address of a well-known solicitor, and presently went away. When he had gone, Allerdyke turned to Fullaway.

"Now, then," he said, "you and I'll do one or two things. We'll call on this lawyer. Then we'll cable to the Princess. But how shall we get her address!"

"There's sure to be a Russian Consul in the town," suggested Fullaway.

"Good idea! And I'm going to telephone to this Miss Lennard's address in London," continued Allerdyke. "She evidently set off from here to Edinburgh; but, anyway, the address she gave in that wire to the manager is a London one, and I'm going to try it. Now let's get out and be at work."

The ensuing conversation between these two and a deeply interested and much-impressed solicitor resulted in the dispatch of a lengthy cablegram to St. Petersburg, a conversation over the telephone with the housekeeper of Miss Celia Lennard's London flat, and the interviewing of the captain and stewards of the steamship on which James Allerdyke had crossed from Christiania. The net result of this varied inquiry was small, and produced little that could throw additional light on the matter in question. The *Perisco* officials had not seen anything suspicious in the conduct or personality of any of their passengers. They had observed James Allerdyke in casual conversation with some of them—they had seen him talking to Miss Lennard, to Dr. Lydenberg, to others, ladies and gentlemen who subsequently put up at the Station Hotel for the night. Nothing that they could tell suggested anything out of the common. Miss Lennard's housekeeper gave no other information than that her mistress was at present in Edinburgh, and was expected to remain there for at least a week. And towards night came a message from the Princess Nastirsevitch confirming Fullaway's conviction that James Allerdyke was in possession of her jewels and announcing that she was leaving for England at once, and should travel straight, via Berlin and Calais, to meet Mr. Franklin Fullaway at his hotel in London.

The solicitor agreed with Dr. Orwin's suggestions as to the course to be followed with regard to the inquest; it would be wise, he said, to keep matters quiet for at any rate a few days, until they were in a position to bring forward more facts. Consequently, the few people who were present at the Coroner's court next morning gained no idea of the real importance of the inquiry which was then opened. Even the solitary reporter who took a perfunctory note of the proceedings for his newspaper gathered no more from what he heard than that a gentleman had died suddenly at the Station Hotel, that it had been necessary to hold an inquest, that there was some little doubt as to the precise cause of his death, and that the inquest was accordingly adjourned until the medical men could tell something of a more definite nature. Nothing sensational crept out into the town; no bold-lettered headlines ornamented the afternoon editions. An hour before noon Marshall Allerdyke entrusted his cousin's body to the care of certain kinsfolk who had come over from Bradford to take charge of it; by noon he and Fullaway were slipping out of Hull on their way to Edinburgh—to search for a witness, who, if and when they found her, might be able to tell them—what?

"Seems something like a wild-goose chase," said Allerdyke as the train steamed on across country towards York and the North. "How do we know where to find this woman in Edinburgh? Her housekeeper didn't know what hotel she was at—I suppose we'll have to try every one in the place till we come across her!"

"Edinburgh is not a very big town," remarked Fullaway. "I reckon to run her down—if she's still there—within a couple of hours. It's our first duty, anyway. If she—as I guess she did—saw those jewels, then we know that James Allerdyke had them on him when he reached Hull, dead sure."

"And supposing she can tell that?" said Allerdyke. "What then? How does that help? The devils who got 'em have already had thirty-six hours' start of us!"

The American produced a bulky cigar-case, found a green cigar, and lighted it with a deliberation which was in marked contrast to his usual nervous movements.

"Seems to me," he said presently, "seems very much to me that this has been a great thing! I figure it out like this—somehow, somebody has got to know of what the Princess and your cousin

were up to—that he was going to carry those valuable jewels with him to England. He must have been tracked all the way, unless—does any unless strike you, now?"

"Not at the moment," replied Allerdyke. "So unless what?"

"Unless the thieves—and murderers—were waiting there in Hull for his arrival," said Fullaway quietly. "That's possible!"

"Strikes me a good many possibilities are knocking around," remarked Allerdyke, with more than his usual dryness. "As for me, I'll want to know a lot about these valuables and their consignment before I make up my mind in any way. I tell you frankly. I'm not running after them—I'm wanting to find the folk who killed my cousin, and I only hope this young woman'll be able to give me a hand. And the sooner we get to the bottle of hay and begin prospecting for the needle the better!"

But the search for Miss Celia Lennard to which Allerdyke alluded so gloomily was not destined to be either difficult or lengthy. As he and his companion walked along one of the platforms in the Waverley Station in Edinburgh that evening, on their way to a cab, Allerdyke suddenly uttered a sharp exclamation and seized the American by the elbow, twisting him round in front of a big poster which displayed the portrait of a very beautiful woman.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "There she is! See? That's the woman. Man alive, we've hit it at once! Look!"

Fullaway turned and stared, not so much at the portrait as at the big lettering above and beneath it:

ZÉLIE DE LONGARDE,

THE WORLD-FAMED SOPRANO

RECENTLY RETURNED FROM MOSCOW

AND ST. PETERSBURG

Only Visit to Edinburgh this Year

TO-NIGHT AT 8

CHAPTER VII

THE FRANTIC IMPRESARIO

Fullaway slowly read this announcement aloud. When he had made an end of it he laughed.

"So your mysterious lady of the midnight motor, your Miss Celia Lennard of the Hull hotel, is the great and only Zélie de Longarde, eh?" he said. "Well, I guess that makes matters a lot easier and clearer. But you're sure it isn't a case of striking resemblance?"

"I only saw that woman for a minute or two, by moonlight, when she stuck her face out of her car to ask the way," replied Allerdyke, "but I'll lay all I'm worth to a penny-piece that the woman I then saw is the woman whose picture we're staring at. Great Scott! So she's a famous singer, is she? You know of her, of course? That sort of thing's not in my line—never was—I don't go to a concert or a musical party once in five years."

"Oh, she's great—sure!" responded Fullaway. "Beautiful voice—divine! And, as I say, things are going to be easy. I've met this lady more than once, though I didn't know that she'd any other name than that, which is presumably her professional one, and I've also had one or two business deals with her. So all we've got to do is to find out which hotel she's stopping at in this city, and then we'll go round there, and I'll send in my card. But I say—do you see, this affair's to-night, this very evening, and at eight o'clock, and it's past seven now. She'll be arraying herself for the platform. We'd better wait until—"

Allerdyke's practical mind asserted itself. He twisted the American round in another direction, and called to a porter who had picked up their bags.

"All that's easy," he said. "We'll stick these things in the left-luggage spot, dine here in the station, and go straight to the concert. There, perhaps, during an interval, we might get in a word with this lady who sports two names. Come on, now."

He hurried his companion from the cloak-room to the dining-room, gave a quick order on his own behalf to the waiter, left Fullaway to give his own, and began to eat and drink with the vigour of a man who means to waste no time.

"There's one thing jolly certain, my lad!" he said presently, leaning confidentially across the table after he had munched in silence for a while. "This Miss Lennard, or Mamselle, or Signora de Longarde, or whatever her real label is, hasn't got those jewels—confound 'em! Folks who steal things like that don't behave as she's doing."

"I never thought she had stolen the jewels," answered Fullaway. "What I want to know is—has she seen them, and when, and where, and under what circumstances? You've got her shoe-buckle all safe?"

"Waistcoat-pocket just now," replied Allerdyke laconically.

"That'll be an extra passport," observed Fullaway. "Not that it's needed, because, as I said, I've done business for her. Oddly enough, that was in the jewel line—I negotiated the sale of Pinkie Pell's famous pearl necklace with Mademoiselle de Longarde. You've heard of that, of course?"

"Never a whisper!" answered Allerdyke. "Not in my line, those affairs."

Who was Pinkie Pell, anyhow!"

"Pinkie Pell was a well-known music-hall artiste, my dear sir, once a great favourite, who came down in the world, and had to sell her valuables," replied the American. "To the last she stuck to a pearl necklace, which was said to have been given to her by the Duke of Bendlecombe—Pinkie, they said, attached a sentimental value to it. However, it had to be sold, and I sold it for Pinkie to the lady we're going to see to-night. Seven thousand five hundred—it's well worth ten. Mademoiselle will be wearing it, no doubt—she generally does, anyway—so you'll see it."

"Not unless we get a front pew," said Allergydyke. "Hurry up, and let's be off! Our best plan," he went on as they made for a cab, "will be to get as near the platform as possible, so that I can make certain sure this is the woman I saw at Howden yesterday morning—when I positively identify her, I'll leave it to you to work the interview with her, either at this concert place or at her hotel afterwards. If it can be done at once, all the more to my taste—I want to be knowing things."

"Oh, we're going well ahead!" said Fullaway. "I'll work it all right. I noticed on that poster that this affair is being run by the Concert-Director Ernest Weiss. I know Weiss—he'll get us an interview with the great lady after she's appeared the first time."

"It's a fortunate thing for me to have a man who seems to know everybody," remarked Allergydyke. "I suppose it's living in London gives you so much acquaintance?"

"It's my business to know a lot of people," answered Fullaway. "The more the better—for my purposes. I'll tell you how I came to know your cousin later that's rather interesting. Well, here's the place, and it's five to eight now. We've struck it very well, and the only trouble'll be about getting good seats, especially as we're in morning dress."

Allergydyke smiled at that—in his opinion, money would carry a man anywhere, and there was always plenty of that useful commodity in his pockets. He insisted on buying the seats himself, and after some parleying and explaining at the box-office, he and his companion were duly escorted to seats immediately in front of a flower-decked platform, where they were set down amidst a highly select company of correctly attired folk, who glanced a little questioningly at their tweed suits, both conspicuous amidst silks, satins, broadcloths, and glazed linen. Allergydyke laughed as he thrust a program into Fullaway's hand.

"I worked that all right," he whispered. "Told the chap in that receipt of custom that you were a foreigner of great distinction travelling incognito in Scotland, and I your travelling companion, and that our luggage hadn't arrived from Aberdeen, so we couldn't dress, but we must hear this singing lady at all cost and in any case. Then I slapped down the brass and got the tickets—naught like brass in ready form, my lad! Now, then, when does the desired party appear?"

Fullaway unfolded his program and glanced over the items. The Concert-Direction of Ernest Weiss was famous for the fare which it put before its patrons, and here was certainly enough variety of talent to please the most critical—a famous tenor, a popular violinist, a contralto much in favour for her singing of tender and sentimental songs, a notable performer on the violincello, a local vocalist whose speciality was the singing of ancient Scottish melodies, and—item of vast interest to a certain section of the audience—a youthful prodigy who was fondly believed to have it in her power to become a female Paderewski. These performers were duly announced on the program in terms of varying importance; outstanding from all of them, of course, was the great star of the evening, the one and only Zélie de Longarde, acknowledged Queen of Song in Milan and Moscow, Paris and London, New York and Melbourne.

"Comes on fifth, I see," observed Allergydyke, glancing over his program unconcernedly. "Well, I suppose we've got to stick out the other four. I'm not great on music, Fullaway—don't know one tune from another. However, I reckon I can stand a bit of noise until my lady shows herself."

He listened with good-natured interest, which was not far removed from indifference, to the contralto, the 'cellist, the violinist, only waking up to something like enthusiasm when the infant prodigy, a quaint, painfully shy little creature, who bobbed a side curtsy at the audience, and looked much too small to tackle the grand piano, appeared and proceeded to execute wonderful things with her small fingers.

"That's a bit of all right!" murmured Allergydyke, when the child had finished her first contribution. "That's a clever little party! But she's too big in the eye, and too small in the bone—wants plenty of new milk, and new-laid eggs, and fresh air, and not so much piano-thumping, does that. Clever—clever—but unnatural, Fullaway!—they mustn't let her do too much at that. Well, now I suppose we shall see the shoe-buckle lady."

The packed audience evidently supposed the same thing. Over it—the infant prodigy having received her meed of applause and bobbed herself awkwardly out of sight—had come that atmosphere of expectancy which invariably heralds the appearance of the great figure on any similar occasion. It needed no special intuition on Allerdyke's part to know that all these people were itching to show their fondness for Zélie de Longarde by clapping their hands, waving their program, and otherwise manifesting their delight at once more seeing a prime favourite. All eyes were fixed on the wing of the platform, all hands were ready to give welcome. But a minute passed—two minutes—three minutes—and Zélie de Longarde did not appear. Another minute—and then, endeavouring to smile bravely and reassuringly, and not succeeding particularly well in the attempt, a tall, elaborately attired, carefully polished-up man, unmistakably German, blonde, heavy, suave, suddenly walked on to the platform and did obeisance to the audience.

"Weiss!" whispered Fullaway. "Something's wrong! Look at his face—he's in big trouble."

The concert-director straightened himself from that semi-military bow, and looked at the faces in front of him with a mute appeal.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have to entreat the high favour of your kind indulgence. Mademoiselle de Longarde is not yet arrived from her hotel. I hope—I think—she is now on her way. In the meantime I propose, with your gracious consent, to continue, our program with the next item, at the conclusion of which, I hope, Mademoiselle will appear."

The audience was sympathetic—the audience was ready to be placated. It gave cordial hearing and warm favour to the singer of Scottish melodies—it even played into Mr. Concert-Director Weiss's hands by according the local singer an encore. But when he had finally retired there was another wait, a longer one which lengthened unduly, a note of impatience sounded from the gallery; it was taken up elsewhere. And suddenly Weiss came again upon the platform—this time with no affectation of suave entreaty. He was plainly much upset; his elegant waistcoat seemed to have assumed careworn creases, his mop of blonde hair was palpably rumpled as if he had been endeavouring to tear some of its wavy locks out by force. And when he spoke his fat voice shook with a mixture of chagrin and anger.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I crave ten thousand—a million—pardons for this so-unheard-of state of affairs! The—the truth is, Mademoiselle de Longarde is not yet here. What is more—I have to tell you the truth—Mademoiselle refuses to come—refuses to fulfil her honourable engagement. We are—have been for some time—on the telephone with her. Mademoiselle is at her hotel. She declares she has been robbed—her jewels have all been stolen from their case in her apartments. She is—how shall I say?—turning the hotel upside down! She refuses to budge one inch until her jewels are restored to her. How then?—I cannot restore her jewels. I say to her—my colleagues say to her—it is not your jewels we desire—it is your so beautiful, so incomparable voice. She reply—I cannot tell you what she reply! In effect—no jewels, no song! Ladies and gentlemen, once more!—your most kind, most considerate indulgence! I go there just now—I fly; swift, to the hotel, to entreat Mademoiselle on my knees to return with me! In the meantime—"

As Weiss retired from the platform, and the longhaired 'cellist came upon it, Fullaway sprang up, dragging Allerdyke after him. He led the way to a sidedoor, whispered something to an attendant, and was quickly ushered through another door to an ante-room behind the wings, where Weiss, livid with anger, was struggling into an opera-cloak. The concert-director gasped as he caught sight of the American.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Fullaway!" he exclaimed. "You here! You have heard?—you have been in front. You hear, then—she will not come to sing because her jewels are missing, eh? She—"

"What hotel is Mademoiselle de Longarde stopping at, Weiss?" asked Fullaway quietly.

"The North British and Caledonian—I go there just now!" answered Weiss.

"I am ruined if she will not appear—ruined, disgraced! Jewels! Ah—!"

"Come on—we're going with you," said Fullaway. "Quick now!"

Allerdyke got some vivid impressions during the next few minutes, impressions various, startling. They began with a swift whirl through the lighted streets of the smoky old city, of a dash upstairs at a big hotel; they ended with a picture of a beautiful, highly enraged woman, who was freely speaking her mind to a dismayed hotel manager and a couple of men who were obviously members of the detective force.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JEWEL BOX

Mademoiselle Zélie de Longarde, utterly careless of the fact that her toilette was but half complete, that she wore no gown, and that the kimono which she had hastily assumed on discovering her loss had slipped away from her graceful figure to fall in folds about her feet, interrupted the torrent of her eloquence to stare at the three men whom a startled waiter ushered into her sitting-room. Her first glance fell on the concert-director, and she shook her fist at him.

"Go away, Weiss!" she commanded, accompanying the vigorous action of her hand with an equally emphatic stamp of a shapely foot. "Go away at once—go and play on the French horn; go and do anything you like to satisfy your audience! Not one note do I sing until somebody finds me my jewels! Edinburgh's stole them, and Edinburgh'll have to give them back. It's no use your waiting here—I won't budge an inch. I—"

She paused abruptly, suddenly catching sight of Fullaway, who at once moved towards her with a confidential and reassuring smile.

"You!" she exclaimed. "What brings you here? And who's that with you—surely the gentleman of whom I asked my way in some wild place the other night! What—"

"Mademoiselle," said Fullaway, with a deep bow, "let me suggest to you that the finest thing in this mundane state of ours is—reason. Suppose, now, that you complete your toilet, tell us what it is you have lost; leave us—your devoted servants—to begin the task of finding it, and while we are so engaged, hasten with Mr. Weiss to the hall to fulfil your engagement? A packed audience awaits you—palpitating with sympathy and—"

"And curiosity," interjected the aggrieved prima donna, as she threw a hasty glance at her deshabelle and snatched up the kimono. "Pretty talk, Fullaway—very, and all intended to benefit Weiss there. Lost, indeed!—I've lost all my jewels, and up to now nobody"—here she flashed a wrathful glance at the hotel manager and the two detectives—"nobody has made a single suggestion about finding them!"

Fullaway exchanged looks with the other men. Once more he assumed the office of spokesman.

"Perhaps you have not told them precisely what it is they're to find," he suggested. "What is it now, Mademoiselle? The Pinkie Pell necklace for instance!"

The prima donna, who was already retreating through the door of the bedroom on whose threshold she had been standing, flashed a scornful look at her questioner over the point of her white shoulder.

"Pinkie Pell necklace!" she exclaimed. "Everything's gone! The whole lot!

Look at that—not so much as a ring left in it!"

She pointed a slender, quivering finger to a box which stood, lid thrown open, on a table in the sitting-room, by which the detectives were standing, open-mouthed, and obviously puzzled. Allerdyke, following the pointing finger, noted that the box was a very ordinary-looking affair—a tiny square chest of polished wood, fitted with a brass swing handle. It might have held a small type-writing machine; it might have been a medicine chest; it certainly did not look the sort of thing in which one would carry priceless jewels. But Mademoiselle de Longarde was speaking again.

"That's what I always carried my jewels in—in their cases," she said. "And they were all in there when I left Christiania a few days ago, and that box has never been out of my sight—so to speak—since. And when I opened it here to-night, wanting the things, it was as empty as it is now. And if I behave handsomely, and go with Weiss there, to fulfil this engagement, it'll only be on condition that you stop here, Fullaway, and do your level best to get me my jewels back. I've done all I can—"

I've told the manager there, and I've told those two policemen, and not a man of them seems able to suggest anything! Perhaps you can."

With that she disappeared and slammed the door of the bedroom, and the six men, left in a bunch, looked at each other. Then one of the detectives spoke, shaking his head and smiling grimly.

"It's all very well to say we suggest nothing," he said. "We want some facts to go on first. Up to now, all the lady's done is to storm at us and at everybody—she seems to think all Edinburgh's in a conspiracy to rob her! We don't know any circumstances yet, except that she says she's been robbed. Perhaps—"

"Wait a bit," interrupted Fullaway. "Let us get her off to her engagement. Then we can talk. I suppose," he continued, turning to the manager, "she first announced her loss to you?"

"She announced her loss to the whole world, in a way of speaking," answered the manager, with a dry laugh.

"She screamed it out over the main staircase into the hall! Everybody in the place knows it by this time—she took good care they should. I don't know how she can have been robbed—so far as I can learn she's scarcely been out of these rooms since she came into them yesterday afternoon. The grand piano had been put in for her before she arrived, and she's spent all her time singing and playing—I don't believe she's ever left the hotel. And as I pointed out to her when she fetched me up, she found this box locked when she went to it—why didn't the thieves carry it bodily away? Why—"

"Just so—just so!" broke in Fullaway. "I quite appreciate your points. But there is more in this than meets the first glance. Let us get Mademoiselle off to her engagement, I say—that's the first thing. Then we can do business. Weiss," he continued, drawing the concert-director aside, "you must arrange to let her appear as soon as possible after you get back to the hall, and to put forward her appearance in the second half of your program, so that she can return here as soon as possible—she'll only be in irrepressible fidgets until she knows what's been done. And—you know what she is!—you ought to be very thankful that she's allowed herself to be persuaded to go with you. Mademoiselle," he went on, as the prima donna, fully attired, but innocent of jewelled ornament, swept into the room, "you are doing the right thing—bravely! Go, sing—sing your best, your divinest—let your admiring audience recognize that you have a soul above even serious misfortune. Meanwhile, allow me to order your supper to be served in this room, for eleven o'clock, and permit me and my friend, Mr. Allerdike, to invite ourselves to share it with you. Then—we will give you some news that will interest and astonish you."

"That only makes me all the more frantic to get back," exclaimed the prima donna. "Come along, now, Weiss—you've got a car outside, I suppose? Hurry, then, and let me get it over."

When the vastly relieved concert-director had led his bundle of silks and laces safely out, Fullaway laughed and turned to the other men.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "perhaps we can have a little quiet talk about this affair." He flung himself into a seat and nodded at the hotel-manager. "Just tell us exactly what's happened since Mademoiselle arrived here," he said. "Let's get an accurate notion of all her doings. She came—when?"

"She got here about the beginning of yesterday afternoon," answered the manager, who did not appear to be too well pleased about this disturbance of his usual proceedings. "She has always had this suite of rooms whenever she has sung in Edinburgh before, and it was understood that whenever she wrote or wired for them we were to arrange for a grand piano, properly tuned to concert-pitch, to be put in for her. She wrote for the suite over a fortnight ago from Russia, and, of course, we had everything in readiness for her. She turned up, as I say, yesterday, alone—she explained something about her maid having been obliged to leave her on arrival in England, and since she came she's had the services of one of our smartest chambermaids, whom she herself picked out after carefully inspecting a whole dozen of them. That chambermaid can tell you that Mademoiselle's scarcely left her rooms since then, and it's an absolute mystery to me that any person could get in here, open this

box, and abstract its contents. As I say—if anybody wanted to steal her jewels, why didn't he pick up this box and carry it bodily off instead of hanging about to pick the lock? I don't believe—"

"Ah, quite so!" interrupted Fullaway. "I quite agree with you. Now, at what time did Mademoiselle announce the loss of her jewels?"

"Oh, about—say, an hour ago. This chambermaid—she's there in the bedroom now—was helping her to dress for the concert. She—Mademoiselle—went to this box to get out what ornaments she wanted. According to the girl, she let out an awful scream, and, just as she was, rushed to the head of the main stairs—these rooms, as you see, are on our first floor—and began to shout for me, for anybody, for everybody. The hall below was just then full of people—coming in and out of the dining-room and so on. She set the whole place going with the noise she made," added the manager, visibly annoyed. "It would have been far better if she'd shown some reserve—"

"Reserve is certainly an admirable quality," commented Fullaway, "but it is foreign to young ladies of Mademoiselle's temperament. Well—and then?"

"Oh, then, of course, I came up to her suite. She showed me this box. It had stood, she declared, on a table by her bedside, close to her pillows, from the moment she entered her rooms yesterday. She swore that it ought to have been full of her jewels—in cases. When she had opened it—just before this—it was empty. Of course, she demanded the instant presence of the police. Also, she insisted that I should at once, that minute, lock every door in the hotel, and arrest every person in it until their effects and themselves could be rigorously searched and examined. Ridiculous!"

"As you doubtless said," remarked Fullaway.

"No—I said nothing. Instead I telephoned for police assistance. These two officers came. And," concluded the manager, with a sympathetic glance at the detectives, "since they came Mademoiselle has done nothing but insist on arresting every soul within these walls—she seems to think there's a universal conspiracy against her."

"Exactly," said Fullaway. "It is precisely what she would think—under the circumstances. Now let us see this chambermaid."

The manager opened the door of the bedroom, and called in a pretty, somewhat shy, Scotch damsel, who betrayed a becoming confusion at the sight of so many strangers. But she gave a plain and straightforward account of her relations with Mademoiselle since the arrival of yesterday. She had been in almost constant attendance on Mademoiselle ever since her election to the post of temporary maid—had never left her save at meal-times. The little chest had stood at Mademoiselle's bed-head always—she had never seen it moved, or opened. There was a door leading into the bedroom from the corridor. Mademoiselle had never left the suite of rooms since her arrival. She had talked that morning of going for a drive, but rain had begun to fall, and she had stayed in. Mademoiselle had seemed utterly horrified when she discovered her loss. For a moment she had sunk on her bed as if she were going to faint; then she had rushed out into the corridor, just as she was, screaming for the manager and the police.

When the pretty chambermaid had retired, Fullaway took up the box from which the missing property was believed to have been abstracted. He examined it with seeming indifference, yet he announced its particulars and specifications with business-like accuracy.

"Well—this chest, cabinet, or box," he observed carelessly. "Let us look at it. Here, gentlemen, we have a piece of well-made work. It is—yes, eighteen inches square all ways. It is made of—yes, rosewood. Its corners, you see, are clamped with brass. It has a swing handle, fitted into this brass plate which is sunk into the lid. It has also three brass letters sunk into that lid—Z. D. L. Its lock does not appear to be of anything but an ordinary nature. Taking it altogether, I don't think this is the sort of thing in which you would believe a lady was carrying several thousand pounds' worth of pearls and diamonds. Eh?"

One of the detectives stirred uneasily—he did not quite understand the American's light and easy manner, and he seemed to suspect him of persiflage.

"We ought to be furnished with a list of the missing articles," he said.

"That's the first thing."

"By no means," replied Fullaway. "That, my dear sir, is neither the first, nor the second, nor the third thing. There is much to do before we get to that stage. At present, you, gentlemen, cannot do anything. To-morrow morning, perhaps, when I have consulted with Mademoiselle de Longarde, I may call you in again—or call upon you. In the meantime, there's no need to detain you. Now," he continued, turning to the manager, when the detectives, somewhat puzzled and bewildered, had left the room, "will you see that your nicest supper is served—for three—in this room at eleven o'clock, against Mademoiselle's return? Send up your best champagne. And do not allow yourself to dwell on Mademoiselle's agitation on discovering her loss. That agitation was natural. If it is any consolation to you, I will give you a conclusion which may be satisfactory to your peace of mind as manager. What is it? Merely this—that though Mademoiselle de Longarde has undoubtedly lost her jewels, they were certainly not stolen from her in this hotel!"

CHAPTER IX

THE LADY'S MAID'S MOTHER

When the manager, much appeased and relieved in mind, had gone, Fullaway tapped at the door of the bedroom, summoned the pretty chambermaid, and handed her the rosewood box.

"Put this back exactly where Mademoiselle has kept it since she came here," he commanded. "Now you yourself—you're going to stay in the rooms until she comes back from the concert? That's right—if she returns before my friend and I come up again, tell her that we shall present ourselves at five minutes to eleven. Come downstairs, Allerdyke," he proceeded, leading the way from the room. "We must book rooms for the night here, so we'll send to the station for our things and make our arrangements, after which we'll smoke a cigar and talk—I am beginning to see chinks of daylight."

He led Allerdyke down to the office, completed the necessary arrangements, and went on to the smoking-room, in a quiet corner of which he pulled out his cigar-case.

"Well?" he said. "What do you think now?"

"I think you're a smart chap," answered Allerdyke bluntly. "You did all that very well. I said naught, but I kept an eye and an ear open. You'll do."

"Very complimentary!—but I wasn't asking you what you thought about me," said Fullaway, with a laugh. "I'm asking you what you think of the situation, as illuminated by this last episode?"

"Well, I'm still reflecting on what you said to that manager chap," answered Allerdyke. "You really think this young woman has lost her jewels?"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt at all," replied Fullaway. "Mademoiselle is impetuous, impulsive, demonstrative, much given to insisting on her own way, but she's absolutely honest and truthful, and I've no doubt whatever—none!—that she's been robbed. But—not here. She never brought those jewels here. They were not in that box when she came here. Mademoiselle, my dear sir, was relieved of those jewels either on the steamer, as she crossed from, Christiania to Hull, or during the few hours she spent at the Hull hotel. The whole thing—the robbery from your cousin, the robbery from Mademoiselle de Longarde—is all the work of a particularly clever and brilliant gang of international thieves; and, by the holy smoke, sir, we've got our hands full! For there isn't a clue to the identity of the operators, so far, unless the lady with whom we are going to sup can help us to one."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.