

LE QUEUX WILLIAM

MADemoiselle OF
MONTE CARLO

William Le Queux
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FIRST CHAPTER

THE SUICIDE'S CHAIR

“Yes! I’m not mistaken at all! *It’s the same woman!*” whispered the tall, good-looking young Englishman in a well-cut navy suit as he stood with his friend, a man some ten years older than himself, at one of the roulette tables at Monte Carlo, the first on the right on entering the room—that one known to habitual gamblers as “The Suicide’s Table.”

“Are you quite certain?” asked his friend.

“Positive. I should know her again anywhere.”

“She’s very handsome. And look, too, by Jove!—how she is winning!”

“Yes. But let’s get away. She might recognize me,” exclaimed the younger man anxiously. “Ah! If I could only induce her to disclose what she knows about my poor father’s mysterious end then we might clear up the mystery.”

“I’m afraid, if all we hear is true about her, Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo will never do that,” was the other’s reply as they moved away together down the long saloon towards the trente-

et-quarante room.

"Messieurs! Faites vos jeux," the croupiers were crying in their strident, monotonous voices, inviting players to stake their counters of cent-sous, their louis, or their hundred or five hundred franc notes upon the spin of the red and black wheel. It was the month of March, the height of the Riviera season, the fetes of Mi-Careme were in full swing. That afternoon the rooms were overcrowded, and the tense atmosphere of gambling was laden with the combined odours of perspiration and perfume.

Around each table were crowds four or five deep behind those fortunate enough to obtain seats, all eager and anxious to try their fortune upon the rouge or noir, or upon one of the thirty-six numbers, the columns, or the transversales. There was but little chatter. The hundreds of well-dressed idlers escaping the winter were too intent upon the game. But above the click of the plaques, blue and red of different sizes, as they were raked into the bank by the croupiers, and the clatter of counters as the lucky players were paid with deft hands, there rose ever and anon:

"Messieurs! Faites vos jeux!"

Here English duchesses rubbed shoulders with the most notorious women in Europe, and men who at home in England were good churchmen and exemplary fathers of families, laughed merrily with the most gorgeously attired cocottes from Paris, or the stars of the film world or the variety stage. Upon that wide polished floor of the splendidly decorated Rooms, with their beautiful mural paintings and heavy gilt ornamentation, the world

and the half-world were upon equal footing.

Into that stifling atmosphere—for the Administration of the Bains de Mer of Monaco seem as afraid of fresh air as of purity propaganda—the glorious afternoon sunlight struggled through the curtained windows, while over each table, in addition to the electric light, oil-lamps shaded green with a billiard-table effect cast a dull, ghastly illumination upon the eager countenances of the players. Most of those who go to Monte Carlo wonder at the antiquated mode of illumination. It is, however, in consequence of an attempted raid upon the tables one night, when some adventurers cut the electric-light main, and in the darkness grabbed all they could get from the bank.

The two English visitors, both men of refinement and culture, who had watched the tall, very handsome woman in black, to whom the older man had referred as Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo, wandered through the trente-et-quarante rooms where all was silence, and counters, representing gold, were being staked with a twelve-thousand franc maximum.

Those rooms beyond are the haunt of the professional gambler, the man or woman who has been seized by the demon of speculation, just as others have been seized by that of drugs or drink. Curiously enough women are more prone to gamble than men, and the Administration of the Etablissement will tell you that when a woman of any nationality starts to gamble she will become reckless until her last throw with the devil.

Those who know Monte Carlo, those who have been habitués

for twenty years—as the present writer has been—know too well, and have seen too often, the deadly influence of the tables upon the lighter side of woman's nature. The smart woman from Paris, Vienna, or Rome never loses her head. She gambles always discreetly. The fashionable cocottes seldom lose much. They gamble at the tables discreetly and make eyes at men if they win, or if they lose. If the latter they generally obtain a "loan" from somebody. What matter? When one is at "Monty" one is not in a Wesleyan chapel. English men and women when they go to the Riviera leave their morals at home with their silk hats and Sunday gowns. And it is strange to see the perfectly respectable Englishwoman admiring the same daring costumes of the French pseudo—"countesses" at which they have held up their hands in horror when they have seen them pictured in the papers wearing those latest "creations" of the Place Vendome.

Yes. It is a hypocritical world, and nowhere is canting hypocrisy more apparent than inside the Casino at Monte Carlo.

While the two Englishmen were strolling over the polished parquet of the elegant world-famous *salles-de-jeu* "Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo" was experiencing quite an extraordinary run of luck.

But "Mademoiselle," as the croupiers always called her, was usually lucky. She was an experienced, and therefore a careful player. When she staked a maximum it was not without very careful calculation upon the chances. Mademoiselle was well known to the Administration. Often her winnings were

sensational, hence she served as an advertisement to the Casino, for her success always induced the uninitiated and unwary to stake heavily, and usually with disastrous results.

The green-covered gaming table, at which she was sitting next to the end croupier on the left-hand side, was crowded. She sat in what is known at Monte as "the Suicide's Chair," for during the past eight years ten men and women had sat in that fatal chair and had afterwards ended their lives abruptly, and been buried in secret in the Suicide's Cemetery.

The croupiers at that table are ever watchful of the visitor who, all unawares, occupies that fatal chair. But Mademoiselle, who knew of it, always laughed the superstition to scorn. She habitually sat in that chair—and won.

Indeed, that afternoon she was winning—and very considerably too. She had won four maximums *en plein* within the last half-hour, and the crowd around the table noting her good fortune were now following her.

It was easy for any novice in the Rooms to see that the handsome, dark-eyed woman was a practised player. Time after time she let the coups pass. The croupiers' invitation to play did not interest her. She simply toyed with her big gold-chain purse, or fingered her dozen piles or so of plaques in a manner quite disinterested.

She heard the croupier announce the winning number and saw the rakes at work dragging in the stakes to swell the bank. But she only smiled, and now and then shrugged her shoulders.

Whether she won or lost, or whether she did not risk a stake, she simply smiled and elevated her shoulders, muttering something to herself.

Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo was, truth to tell, a sphinx to the staff of the Casino. She looked about thirty, but probably she was older. For five years she had been there each season and gambled heavily with unvarying success. Always well but quietly dressed, her nationality was as obscure as her past. To the staff she was always polite, and she pressed hundred-franc notes into many a palm in the Rooms. But who she was or what were her antecedents nobody in the Principality of Monaco could ever tell.

The whole Cote d'Azur from Hyeres to Ventimiglia knew of her. She was one of the famous characters of Monte Carlo, just as famous, indeed, as old Mr. Drewett, the Englishman who lost his big fortune at the tables, and who was pensioned off by the Administration on condition that he never gamble at the Casino again. For fifteen years he lived in Nice upon the meagre pittance until suddenly another fortune was left him, whereupon he promptly paid up the whole of his pension and started at the tables again. In a month, however, he had lost his second fortune. Such is gambling in the little country ruled over by Prince Rouge-et-Noir.

As the two Englishmen slipped past the end table unseen on their way out into the big atrium with its many columns—the hall in which players go out to cool themselves, or collect their determination for a final flutter—Mademoiselle had just won

the maximum upon the number four, as well as the column, and the croupier was in the act of pushing towards her a big pile of counters each representing a thousand francs.

The eager excited throng around the table looked across at her with envy. But her handsome countenance was quite expressionless. She simply thrust the counters into the big gold-chain purse at her side, glanced at the white-gloved fingers which were soiled by handling the counters, and then counting out twenty-five, each representing a louis, gave them to the croupier, exclaiming:

“Zero-trois!”

Next moment a dozen persons followed her play, staking their cent-sous and louis upon the spot where she had asked the croupier at the end of the table to place her stake.

“Messieurs! Faites vos jeux!” came the strident cry again.

Then a few seconds later the croupier cried:

“Rien ne vas plus!”

The red and black wheel was already spinning, and the little ivory ball sent by the croupier's hand in the opposite direction was clicking quickly over the numbered spaces.

Six hundred or more eyes of men and women, fevered by the gambling mania, watched the result. Slowly it lost its impetus, and after spinning about unevenly it made a final jump and fell with a loud click.

“Zer-r-o!” cried the croupier.

And a moment later Mademoiselle had pushed before her at

the end of the croupier's rake another pile of counters, while all those who had followed the remarkable woman's play were also paid.

"Mademoiselle is in good form to-day," remarked one ugly old Frenchwoman who had been a well-known figure at the tables for the past ten years, and who played carefully and lived by gambling. She was one of those queer, mysterious old creatures who enter the Rooms each morning as soon as they are open, secure the best seats, occupy them all the luncheon hour pretending to play, and then sell them to wealthy gamblers for a consideration—two or three louis—perhaps—and then at once go to their ease in their own obscure abode.

The public who go to Monte know little of its strange mysteries, or of the odd people who pick up livings there in all sorts of queer ways.

"Ah!" exclaimed a man who overheard her. "Mademoiselle has wonderful luck! She won seventy-five thousand francs at the *Cercle Prive* last night. She won *en plein* five times running. *Dieu!* Such luck! And it never causes her the slightest excitement."

"The lady must be very rich!" remarked an American woman sitting next to the old Frenchwoman, and who knew French well.

"Rich! Of course! She must have won several million francs from the Administration. They don't like to see her here. But I suppose her success attracts others to play. The gambling fever is as infectious as the influenza," declared the old Frenchwoman. "Everyone tries to discover who she is, and where she came from

five years ago. But nobody has yet found out. Even Monsieur Bernard, the chief of the Surveillance, does not know," she went on in a whisper. "He is a friend of mine, and I asked him one day. She came from Paris, he told me. She may be American, she may be Belgian, or she may be English. She speaks English and French so well that nobody can tell her true nationality."

"And she makes money at the tables," said the American woman in the well-cut coat and skirt and small hat. She came from Chelsea, Mass., and it was her first visit to what her pious father had always referred to as the plague spot of Europe.

"Money!" exclaimed the old woman. "Money! *Dieu!* She has losses, it is true, but oh!—what she wins! I only wish I had ten per cent of it. I should then be rich. Mine is a poor game, madame—waiting for someone to buy my seat instead of standing the whole afternoon. You see, there is only one row of chairs all around. So if a smart woman wants to play, some man always buys her a chair—and that is how I live. Ah! madame, life is a great game here in the Principality."

Meanwhile young Hugh Henfrey, who had travelled from London to the Riviera and identified the mysterious mademoiselle, had passed with his friend, Walter Brock, through the atrium and out into the afternoon sunshine.

As they turned upon the broad gravelled terrace in front of the great white facade of the Casino amid the palms, the giant geraniums and mimosa, the sapphire Mediterranean stretched before them. Below, beyond the railway line which is the one

blemish to the picturesque scene, out upon the point in the sea the constant pop-pop showed that the tir-aux-pigeons was in progress; while up and down the terrace, enjoying the quiet silence of the warm winter sunshine with the blue hills of the Italian coast to the left, strolled a gay, irresponsible crowd—the cosmopolitans of the world: politicians, financiers, merchants, princes, authors, and artists—the crowd which puts off its morals as easily as it discards its fur coats and its silk hats, and which lives only for gaiety and without thought of the morrow.

“Let’s sit down,” suggested Hugh wearily. “I’m sure that she’s the same woman—absolutely certain!”

“You are quite confident you have made no mistake—eh?”

“Quite, my dear Walter. I’d know that woman among ten thousand. I only know that her surname is Ferad. Her Christian name I do not know.”

“And you suspect that she knows the secret of your father’s death?”

“I’m confident that she does,” replied the good-looking young Englishman. “But it is a secret she will, I fear, never reveal, unless—unless I compel her.”

“And how can you compel her?” asked the elder of the two men, whose dark hair was slightly tinged with grey. “It is difficult to compel a woman to do anything,” he added.

“I mean to know the truth!” cried Hugh Henfrey fiercely, a look of determination in his eyes. “That woman knows the true story of my father’s death, and I’ll make her reveal it. By gad—

I will! I mean it!"

"Don't be rash, Hugh," urged the other.

"Rash!" he cried. "It's true that when my father died so suddenly I had an amazing surprise. My father was a very curious man. I always thought him to be on the verge of bankruptcy and that the Manor and the land might be sold up any day. When old Charman, the solicitor, read the will, I found that my father had a quarter of a million lying at the bank, and that he had left it all to me—provided I married Louise!"

"Well, why not marry her?" queried Brock lazily. "You're always so mysterious, my dear Hugh."

"Why!—because I love Dorise Ranscomb. But Louise interests me, and I'm worried on her account because of that infernal fellow Charles Benton. Louise poses as his adopted daughter. Benton is a bachelor of forty-five, and, according to his story, he adopted Louise when she was a child and put her to school. Her parentage is a mystery. After leaving school she at first went to live with a Mrs. Sheldon, a young widow, in an expensive suite in Queen Anne's Mansions, Westminster. After that she has travelled about with friends and has, I believe, been abroad quite a lot. I've nothing against Louise, except—well, except for the strange uncanny influence which that man Benton has over her. I hate the fellow!"

"I see! And as you cannot yet reach Woodthorpe and your father's fortune, except by marrying Louise—which you don't intend to do—what are you going to do now?"

“First, I intend that this woman they call ‘Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo,’ the lucky woman who is a decoy of the Administration of the Bains de Mer, shall tell me the true circumstance of my father’s death. If I know them—then my hand will be strengthened.”

“Meanwhile you love Lady Ranscomb’s daughter, you say?”

“Yes. I love Dorise with all my heart. She, of course, knows nothing of the conditions of the will.”

There was a silence of some moments, interrupted only by the pop-pop of the pigeon-shots below.

Away across the white balustrade of the broad magnificent terrace the calm sapphire sea was deepening as the winter afternoon drew in. An engine whistled—that of the flower train which daily travels express from Cannes to Boulogne faster than the passenger train-deluxe, and bearing mimosa, carnations, and violets from the Cote d’Azur to Covent Garden, and to the florists’ shops in England.

“You’ve never told me the exact circumstances of your father’s death, Hugh,” remarked Brock at last.

“Exact circumstances? Ah! That’s what I want to know. Only that woman knows the secret,” answered the young man. “All I know is that the poor old guv’-nor was called up to London by an urgent letter. We had a shooting party at Woodthorpe and he left me in charge, saying that he had some business in London and might return on the following night—or he might be away a week. Days passed and he did not return. Several letters came

for him which I kept in the library. I was surprised that he neither wrote nor returned, when, suddenly, ten days later, we had a telegram from the London police informing me that my father was lying in St. George's Hospital. I dashed up to town, but when I arrived I found him dead. At the inquest, evidence was given to show that at half-past two in the morning a constable going along Albemarle Street found him in evening dress lying huddled up in a doorway. Thinking him intoxicated, he tried to rouse him, but could not. A doctor who was called pronounced that he was suffering from some sort of poisoning. He was taken to St. George's Hospital in an ambulance, but he never recovered. The post-mortem investigation showed a small scratch on the palm of the hand. That scratch had been produced by a pin or a needle which had been infected by one of the newly discovered poisons which, administered secretly, give a post-mortem appearance of death from heart disease."

"Then your father was murdered—eh?" exclaimed the elder man.

"Most certainly he was. And that woman is aware of the whole circumstances and of the identity of the assassin."

"How do you know that?"

"By a letter I afterwards opened—one that had been addressed to him at Woodthorpe in his absence. It was anonymous, written in bad English, in an illiterate hand, warning him to 'beware of that woman you know—Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo.' It bore the French stamp and the postmark of Tours."

“I never knew all this,” Brock said. “You are quite right, Hugh! The whole affair is a tangled mystery. But the first point we must establish before we commence to investigate is—who is Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo?”

SECOND CHAPTER

CONCERNS A GUILTY SECRET

Just after seven o'clock that same evening young Henfrey and his friend Brock met in the small lounge of the Hotel des Palmiers, a rather obscure little establishment in the Avenue de la Costa, behind the Gardens, much frequented by the habitués of the Rooms who know Monte Carlo and prefer the little place to life at the Paris, the Hermitage, and the Riviera Palace, or the Gallia, up at Beausoleil.

The Palmiers was a place where one met a merry cosmopolitan crowd, but where the cocotte in her bright plumage was absent—an advantage which only the male habitué of Monte Carlo can fully realize. The eternal feminine is always so very much in evidence around the Casino, and the most smartly dressed woman whom one might easily take for the wife of an eminent politician or financier will deplore her bad luck and beg for “a little loan.”

“Well,” said Hugh as his friend came down from his room to the lounge, “I suppose we ought to be going—eh? Dorise said half-past seven, and we'll just get across to the Metropole in time. Lady Ranscomb is always awfully punctual at home, and I expect she carries out her time-table here.”

The two men put on light overcoats over their dinner-jackets

and strolled in the warm dusk across the Gardens and up the Galerie, with its expensive little shops, past the original Ciro's to the Metropole.

In the big hall they were greeted by a well-preserved, grey-haired Englishwoman, Lady Ranscomb, the widow of old Sir Richard Ranscomb, who had been one of the greatest engineers and contractors of modern times. He had begun life as a small jerry-builder at Golder's Green, and had ended it a millionaire and a knight. Lady Ranscomb was seated at a little wicker table with her daughter Dorise, a dainty, fair-haired girl with intense blue eyes, who was wearing a rather daring jazzing gown of pale-blue, the scantiness of which a year or two before would have been voted quite beyond the pale for a lady, and yet in our broad-minded to-day, the day of undressing on the stage and in the home, it was nothing more than "smart."

Mother and daughter greeted the two men enthusiastically, and at Lady Ranscomb's orders the waiter brought them small glasses of an aperitif.

"We've been all day motoring up to the Col di Tenda. Sospel is lovely!" declared Dorise's mother. "Have you ever been there?" she asked of Brock, who was an habitue of the Riviera.

"Once and only once. I motored from Nice across to Turin," was his reply. "Yes. It is truly a lovely run there. The Alps are gorgeous. I like San Dalmazzo and the chestnut groves there," he added. "But the frontiers are annoying. All those restrictions. Nevertheless, the run to Turin is one of the finest I know."

Presently they rose, and all four walked into the crowded *salle-a-manger*, where the chatter was in every European language, and the gay crowd were gossiping mostly of their luck or their bad fortune at the *tapis vert*. At Monte Carlo the talk is always of the run of sequences, the many times the zero-trois has turned up, and of how little one ever wins *en plein* on thirty-six.

To those who visit "Charley's Mount" for the first time all this is as Yiddish, but soon he or she, when initiated into the games of roulette and trente-et-quarante, quickly gets bitten by the fever and enters into the spirit of the discussions. They produce their "records"—printed cards in red and black numbers with which they have carefully pricked off the winning numbers with a pin as they have turned up.

The quartette enjoyed a costly but exquisite dinner, chatting and laughing the while.

Both men were friends of Lady Ranscomb and frequent visitors to her fine house in Mount Street. Hugh's father, a country landowner, had known Sir Richard for many years, while Walter Brock had made the acquaintance of Lady Ranscomb a couple of years ago in connexion with some charity in which she had been interested.

Both were also good friends of Dorise. Both were excellent dancers, and Lady Ranscomb often allowed them to take her daughter to the Grafton, Ciro's, or the Embassy. Lady Ranscomb was Hugh's old friend, and he and Dorise having been thrown together a good deal ever since the girl returned from Versailles

after finishing her education, it was hardly surprising that the pair should have fallen in love with each other.

As they sat opposite each other that night, the young fellow gazed into her wonderful blue eyes, yet, alas! with a sinking heart. How could they ever marry?

He had about six hundred a year—only just sufficient to live upon in these days. His father had never put him to anything since he left Brasenose, and now on his death he had found that, in order to recover the estate, it was necessary for him to marry Louise Lambert, a girl for whom he had never had a spark of affection. Louise was good-looking, it was true, but could he sacrifice his happiness; could he ever cut himself adrift from Dorise for mercenary motives—in order to get back what was surely by right his inheritance?

Yet, after all, as he again met Dorise's calm, wide-open eyes, the grim truth arose in his mind, as it ever did, that Lady Ranscomb, even though she had been so kind to him, would never allow her only daughter to marry a man who was not rich. Had not Dorise told him of the sly hints her mother had recently given her regarding a certain very wealthy man named George Sherrard, an eligible bachelor who lived in one of the most expensive flats in Park Lane, and who was being generally sought after by mothers with marriageable daughters. In many cases mothers—and especially young, good-looking widows with daughters "on their hands"—are too prone to try and get rid of them "because my daughter makes me look so old," as they whisper to their

intimates of their own age.

After dinner all four strolled across to the Casino, presenting their yellow cards of admission—the monthly cards granted to those who are approved by the smug-looking, black-coated committee of inspection, who judge by one's appearance whether one had money to lose.

Dorise soon detached herself from her mother and strolled up the Rooms with Hugh, Lady Ranscomb and Brock following.

None of them intended to play, but they were strolling prior to going to the opera which was beneath the same roof, and for which Lady Ranscomb had tickets.

Suddenly Dorise exclaimed:

“Look over there—at that table in the corner. There's that remarkable woman they call ‘Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo’!”

Hugh started, and glancing in the direction she indicated saw the handsome woman seated at the table staking her counters quite unconcernedly and entirely absorbed in the game. She was wearing a dead black dress cut slightly low in the neck, but half-bare shoulders, with a string of magnificent Chinese jade beads of that pale apple green so prized by connoisseurs.

Her eyes were fixed upon the revolving wheel, for upon the number sixteen she had just thrown a couple of thousand franc counters. The ball dropped with a sudden click, the croupier announced that number five had won, and at once raked in the two thousand francs among others.

Mademoiselle shrugged her shoulders and smiled faintly.

Yvonne Ferad was a born gambler. To her losses came as easily as gains. The Administration knew that—and they also knew how at the little pigeon-hole where counters were exchanged for cheques she came often and handed over big sums in exchange for drafts upon certain banks, both in Paris and in London.

Yet they never worried. Her lucky play attracted others who usually lost. Once, a year before, a Frenchman who occupied a seat next to her daily for a month lost over a quarter of a million sterling, and one night threw himself under the Paris *rapide* at the long bridge over the Var. But on hearing of it the next day from a croupier Mademoiselle merely shrugged her shoulders, and said:

“I warned him to return to Paris. The fool! It is only what I expected.”

Hugh looked only once across at the mysterious woman whom Dorise had indicated, and then drew her away. As a matter of fact he had no intention that mademoiselle should notice him.

“What do you know of her?” he asked in a casual way when they were on the other side of the great saloon.

“Well, a Frenchman I met in the hotel the day before yesterday told me all sorts of queer stories about her,” replied the girl. “She’s apparently a most weird person, and she has uncanny good luck at the tables. He said that she had won a large fortune during the last couple of years or so.”

Hugh made no remark as to the reason of his visit to the Riviera, for, indeed, he had arrived only the day previously, and she had welcomed him joyously. Little did she dream that her

lover had come out from London to see that woman who was declared to be so notorious.

"I noticed her playing this afternoon," Hugh said a moment later in a quiet reflective tone. "What do the gossips really say about her, Dorise? All this is interesting. But there are so many interesting people here."

"Well, the man who told me about her was sitting with me outside the Cafe de Paris when she passed across the Place to the Casino. That caused him to make the remarks. He said that her past was obscure. Some people say that she was a Danish opera singer, others declare that she was the daughter of a humble tobacconist in Marseilles, and others assert that she is English. But all agree that she is a clever and very dangerous woman."

"Why dangerous?" inquired Hugh in surprise.

"Ah! That I don't know. The man who told me merely hinted at her past career, and added that she was quite a respectable person nowadays in her affluence. But—well—" added the girl with a laugh, "I suppose people gossip about everyone in this place."

"Who was your informant?" asked her lover, much interested.

"His name is Courtin. I believe he is an official of one of the departments of the Ministry of Justice in Paris. At least somebody said so yesterday."

"Ah! Then he probably knew more about her than he told you, I expect."

"No doubt, for he warned my mother and myself against

making her acquaintance,” said the girl. “He said she was a most undesirable person.”

At that moment Lady Ranscomb and Walter Brock joined them, whereupon the former exclaimed to her daughter:

“Did you see that woman over there?—still playing—the woman in black and the jade beads, against whom Monsieur Courtin warned us?”

“Yes, mother, I noticed her. I’ve just been telling Hugh about her.”

“A mysterious person—eh?” laughed Hugh with well-affected indifference. “But one never knows who’s who in Monte Carlo.”

“Well, Mademoiselle is apparently something of a mystery,” remarked Brock. “I’ve seen her here before several times. Once, about two years ago, I heard that she was mixed up in a very celebrated criminal case, but exactly what it was the man who told me could not recollect. She is, however, one of the handsomest women in the Rooms.”

“And one of the wealthiest—if report be true,” said Lady Ranscomb.

“She fascinates me,” Dorise declared. “If Monsieur Courtin had not warned us I should most probably have spoken to her.”

“Oh, my dear, you must do no such thing!” cried her mother, horrified. “It was extremely kind of monsieur to give us the hint. He has probably seen how unconventional you are, Dorise.”

And then, as they strolled on into the farther room, the conversation dropped.

"So they've heard about Mademoiselle, it seems!" remarked Brock to his friend as they walked back to the Palmiers together in the moonlight after having seen Lady Ranscomb and her daughter to their hotel.

"Yes," growled the other. "I wish we could get hold of that Monsieur Courtin. He might tell us a bit about her."

"I doubt if he would. These French officials are always close as oysters."

"At any rate, I will try and make his acquaintance at the Metropole to-morrow," Hugh said. "There's no harm in trying."

Next morning he called again at the Metropole before the ladies were about, but to his chagrin, he learnt from the blue-and-gold concierge that Monsieur Courtin, of the Ministry of Justice, had left at ten-fifteen o'clock on the previous night by the *rapide* for Paris. He had been recalled urgently, and a special *coupe-lit* had been reserved for him from Ventimiglia.

That day Hugh Henfrey wandered about the well-kept palm-lined gardens with their great beds of geraniums, carnations and roses. Brock had accepted the invitation of a bald-headed London stock-broker he knew to motor over to lunch and tennis at the Beau Site, at Cannes, while Dorise and her mother had gone with some people to lunch at the Reserve at Beaulieu, one of the best and yet least pretentious restaurants in all Europe, only equalled perhaps by Capsa's, in Bucharest.

"Ah! If she would only tell!" Hugh muttered fiercely to himself as he walked alone and self-absorbed. His footsteps led

him out of Monte Carlo and up the winding road which runs to La Turbie, above the beautiful bay. Ever and anon powerful cars climbing the hill smothered him in white dust, yet he heeded them not. He was too full of thought.

“Ah!” he kept on repeating to himself. “If she would only tell the truth—if she would only tell!”

Hugh Henfrey had not travelled to Monte Carlo without much careful reflection and many hours of wakefulness. He intended to clear up the mystery of his father’s death—and more, the reason of that strange incomprehensible will which was intended to wed him to Louise.

At four o’clock that afternoon he entered the Rooms to gain another surreptitious look at Mademoiselle. Yes! She was there, still playing on as imperturbably as ever, with that half-suppressed sinister smile always upon her full red lips.

Sight of her aroused his fury. Was that smile really intended for himself? People said she was a sphinx, but he drew his breath, and when outside the Casino again in the warm sunshine he halted upon the broad red-carpeted steps and beneath his breath said in a hard, determined tone:

“Gad! She shall tell me! She shall! I’ll compel her to speak—to tell me the truth—or—or—!”

That evening he wrote a note to Dorise explaining to her that he was not feeling very well and excusing himself from going round to the hotel. This he sent by hand to the Metropole.

Brock did not turn up at dinner. Indeed, he did not expect

his friend back till late. So he ate his meal alone, and then went out to the Cafe de Paris, where for an hour he sat upon the *terrasse* smoking and listening to the weird music of the red-coated orchestra of Roumanian gipsies.

All the evening, indeed, he idled, chatting with men and women he knew. *Carmen* was being given at the Opera opposite, but though he loved music he had no heart to go. The one thought obsessing him was of the handsome and fascinating woman who was such a mystery to all.

At eleven o'clock he returned to the cafe and took a seat on the *terrasse* in a dark corner, in such a position that he could see anyone who entered or left the Casino. For half an hour he watched the people passing to and fro. At last, in a long jade-green coat, Mademoiselle emerged alone, and, crossing the gardens, made her way leisurely home on foot, as was her habit. Monte Carlo is not a large place, therefore there is little use for taxis.

When she was out of sight, he called the waiter to bring him a liqueur of old cognac, which he sipped, and then lit another cigarette. When he had finished it he drained the little glass, and rising, strolled in the direction the woman of mystery had taken.

A walk of ten minutes brought him to the iron gates of a great white villa, over the high walls of which climbing roses and geraniums and jasmine ran riot. The night air was heavy with their perfume. He opened the side gate and walked up the gravelled drive to the terrace whereon stood the house,

commanding a wonderful view of the moon-lit Mediterranean and the far-off mountains of Italy.

His ring at the door was answered by a staid elderly Italian manservant.

"I believe Mademoiselle is at home," Hugh said in French. "I desire to see her, and also to apologize for the lateness of the hour. My visit is one of urgency."

"Mademoiselle sees nobody except by appointment," was the man's polite but firm reply.

"I think she will see me if you give her this card," answered Hugh in a strained, unusual voice.

The man took it hesitatingly, glanced at it, placed it upon a silver salver, and, leaving the visitor standing on the mat, passed through the glass swing-doors into the house.

For some moments the servant did not reappear.

Hugh, standing there, entertained just a faint suspicion that he heard a woman's shrill exclamation of surprise. And that sound emboldened him.

At last, after an age it seemed, the man returned, saying:

"Mademoiselle will see you, Monsieur. Please come this way."

He left his hat and stick and followed the man along a corridor richly carpeted in red to a door on the opposite side of the house, which the servant threw open and announced the visitor.

Mademoiselle had risen to receive him. Her countenance was, Hugh saw, blanched almost to the lips. Her black dress caused her pallor to be more apparent.

"Well, sir? Pray what do you mean by resorting to this ruse in order to see me? Who are you?" she demanded.

Hugh was silent for a moment. Then in a hard voice he said:

"I am the son of the dead man whose card is in your hands, Mademoiselle! And I am here to ask you a few questions!"

The handsome woman smiled sarcastically and shrugged her half-bare shoulders, her fingers trembling with her jade beads.

"Oh! Your father is dead—is he?" she asked with an air of indifference.

"Yes. *He is dead*," Hugh said meaningly, as he glanced around the luxurious little room with its soft rose-shaded lights and pale-blue and gold decorations. On her right as she stood were long French windows which opened on to a balcony. One of the windows stood ajar, and it was apparent that when he had called she had been seated in the long wicker chair outside enjoying the balmy moonlight after the stifling atmosphere of the Rooms.

"And, Mademoiselle," he went on, "I happen to be aware that you knew my father, and—that you are cognizant of certain facts concerning his mysterious end."

"I!" she cried, raising her voice in sudden indignation. "What on earth do you mean?" She spoke in perfect English, though he had hitherto spoken in French.

"I mean, Mademoiselle, that I intend to know the truth," said Hugh, fixing his eyes determinedly upon hers. "I am here to learn it from your lips."

"You must be mad!" cried the woman. "I know nothing of the

affair. You are mistaken!”

“Do you, then, deny that you have ever met a man named Charles Benton?” demanded the young fellow, raising his voice. “Perhaps, however, that is a bitter memory, Mademoiselle—eh?”

The strikingly handsome woman pursed her lips. There was a strange look in her eyes. For several moments she did not speak. It was clear that the sudden appearance of the dead man’s son had utterly unnerved her. What could he know concerning Charles Benton? How much of the affair did he suspect?

“I have met many people, Mr.—er—Mr. Henfrey,” she replied quietly at last. “I may have met somebody named Benton.”

“Ah! I see,” the young man said. “It is a memory that you do not wish to recall any more than that of my dead father.”

“Your father was a good man. Benton was not.”

“Ah! Then you admit knowing both of them, Mademoiselle,” cried Hugh quickly.

“Yes. I—well—I may as well admit it! Why, indeed, should I seek to hide the truth—*from you*,” she said in a changed voice. “Pardon me. I was very upset at receiving the card. Pardon me—will you not?”

“I will not, unless you tell me the truth concerning my father’s death and his iniquitous will left concerning myself. I am here to ascertain that, Mademoiselle,” he said in a hard voice.

“And if I tell you—what then?” she asked with knit brows.

“If you tell me, then I am prepared to promise you on oath

secrecy concerning yourself—provided you allow me to punish those who are responsible. Remember, my father died by foul means. *And you know it!*”

The woman faced him boldly, but she was very pale.

“So that is a promise?” she asked. “You will protect me—you will be silent regarding me—you swear to be so—if—if I tell you something. I repeat that your father was a good man. I held him in the highest esteem, and—and—after all—it is but right that you, his son, should know the truth.”

“Thank you Mademoiselle. I will protect you if you will only reveal to me the devilish plot which resulted in his untimely end,” Hugh assured her.

Again she knit her brows and reflected for a few moments. Then in a low, intense, unnatural voice she said:

“Listen, Mr. Henfrey. I feel that, after all, my conscience would be relieved if I revealed to you the truth. First—well, it is no use denying the fact that your father was not exactly the man you and his friends believed him to be. He led a strange dual existence, and I will disclose to you one or two facts concerning his untimely end which will show you how cleverly devised and how cunning was the plot—how—”

At that instant Hugh was startled by a bright flash outside the half-open window, a loud report, followed by a woman’s shrill shriek of pain.

Then, next moment, ere he could rush forward to save her, Mademoiselle, with the truth upon her lips unuttered, staggered

and fell back heavily upon the carpet!

THIRD CHAPTER

IN THE NIGHT

Hugh Henfrey, startled by the sudden shot, shouted for assistance, and then threw himself upon his knees beside the prostrate woman.

From a bullet wound over the right ear blood was slowly oozing and trickling over her white cheek.

“Help! Help!” he shouted loudly. “Mademoiselle has been shot from outside! *Help!*”

In a few seconds the elderly manservant burst into the room in a state of intense excitement.

“Quick!” cried Hugh. “Telephone for a doctor at once. I fear your mistress is dying!”

Henfrey had placed his hand upon Mademoiselle’s heart, but could detect no movement. While the servant dashed to the telephone, he listened for her breathing, but could hear nothing. From the wall he tore down a small circular mirror and held it against her mouth. There was no clouding.

There was every apparent sign that the small blue wound had proved fatal.

“Inform the police also!” Hugh shouted to the elderly Italian who was at the telephone in the adjoining room. “The murderer must be found!”

By this time four female servants had entered the room where their mistress was lying huddled and motionless. All of them were in *deshabille*. Then all became excitement and confusion. Hugh left them to unloosen her clothing and hastened out upon the veranda whereon the assassin must have stood when firing the shot.

Outside in the brilliant Riviera moonlight the scent of a wealth of flowers greeted his nostrils. It was almost bright as day. From the veranda spread a wide, fairy-like view of the many lights of Monte Carlo and La Condamine, with the sea beyond shimmering in the moonlight.

The veranda, he saw, led by several steps down into the beautiful garden, while beyond, a distance of a hundred yards, was the main gate leading to the roadway. The assassin, after taking careful aim and firing, had, no doubt, slipped along, and out of the gate.

But why had Mademoiselle been shot just at the moment when she was about to reveal the secret of his lamented father's death?

He descended to the garden, where he examined the bushes which cast their dark shadows. But all was silence. The assassin had escaped!

Then he hurried out into the road, but again all was silence. The only hope of discovering the identity of the criminal was by means of the police vigilance. Truth to tell, however, the police of Monte Carlo are never over anxious to arrest a criminal, because Monte Carlo attracts the higher criminal class of both

sexes from all over Europe. If the police of the Principality were constantly making arrests it would be bad advertisement for the Rooms. Hence, though the Monte Carlo police are extremely vigilant and an expert body of officers, they prefer to watch and to give information to the bureaux of police of other countries, so that arrests invariably take place beyond the frontiers of the Principality of Monaco.

It was not long before Doctor Leneveu, a short, stout, bald-headed little man, well known to habitués of the Rooms, among whom he had a large practice, entered the house of Mademoiselle and was greeted by Hugh. The latter briefly explained the tragic circumstances, whereupon the little doctor at once became fussy and excited.

Having ordered everyone out of the room except Henfrey, he bent and made an examination of the prostrate woman.

“Ah! m’sieur,” he said, “the unfortunate lady has certainly been shot at close quarters. The wound is, I tell you at once, extremely dangerous,” he added, after a searching investigation. “But she is still alive,” he declared. “Yes—she is still breathing.”

“Still alive!” gasped Henfrey. “That’s excellent! I—I feared that she was dead!”

“No. She still breathes,” the doctor replied. “But, tell me exactly what has occurred. First, however, we will get them to remove her upstairs. I will telephone to my colleague Duponteil, and we will endeavour to extract the bullet.”

“But will she recover, doctor?” asked Hugh eagerly in French.

“What do you think?”

The little man became serious and shook his head gravely.

“Ah! m’sieur, that I cannot say,” was his reply. “She is in a very grave state—very! And the brain may be affected.”

Hugh held his breath. *Surely Yvonne Ferad was not to die with the secret upon her lips!*

At the doctor’s orders the servants were about to remove their mistress to her room when two well-dressed men of official aspect entered. They were officers of the Bureau of Police.

“Stop!” cried the elder, who was the one in authority, a tall, lantern-jawed man with a dark brown beard and yellow teeth. “Do not touch that lady! What has happened here?”

Hugh came forward, and in his best French explained the circumstances of the tragedy—how Mademoiselle had been shot in his presence by an unknown hand.

“The assassin, whoever he was, stood out yonder—upon the veranda—but I never saw him,” he added. “It was all over in a second—and he has escaped!”

“And pray who are you?” demanded the police officer bluntly. “Please explain.”

Hugh was rather nonplussed. The question required explanation, no doubt. It would, he saw, appear very curious that he should visit Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo at that late hour.

“I—well, I called upon Mademoiselle because I wished to obtain some important information from her.”

“What information? Rather late for a call, surely?”

The young Englishman hesitated. Then, with true British grit, he assumed an attitude of boldness, and asked:

“Am I compelled to answer that question?”

“I am Charles Ogier, chief inspector of the Surete of Monaco, and I press for a reply,” answered the other firmly.

“And I, Hugh Henfrey, a British subject, at present decline to satisfy you,” was the young man’s bold response.

“Is the lady still alive?” inquired the inspector of Doctor Leneveu.

“Yes. I have ordered her to be taken up to her room—of course, when m’sieur the inspector gives permission.”

Ogier looked at the deathly countenance with the closed eyes, and noted that the wound in the skull had been bound up with a cotton handkerchief belonging to one of the maids. Mademoiselle’s dark well-dressed hair had become unbound and was straying across her face, while her handsome gown had been torn in the attempt to unloosen her corsets.

“Yes,” said the police officer; “they had better take her upstairs. We will remain here and make inquiries. This is a very queer affair—to say the least,” he added, glancing suspiciously at Henfrey.

While the servants carried their unconscious mistress tenderly upstairs, the fussy little doctor went to the telephone to call Doctor Duponteil, the principal surgeon of Monaco. He had hesitated whether to take the victim to the hospital, but had decided that the operation could be done just as effectively

upstairs. So, after speaking to Duponteil, he also spoke to the sister at the hospital, asking her to send up two nurses immediately to the Villa Amette.

In the meantime Inspector Ogier was closely questioning the young Englishman.

Like everyone in Monte Carlo he knew the mysterious Mademoiselle by sight. More than once the suspicions of the police had been aroused against her. Indeed, in the archives of the Prefecture there reposed a bulky dossier containing reports of her doings and those of her friends. Yet there had never been anything which would warrant the authorities to forbid her from remaining in the Principality.

This tragedy, therefore, greatly interested Ogier and his colleague. Both of them had spent many years in the service of the Paris Surete under the great Goron before being appointed to the responsible positions in the detective service of Monaco.

"Then you knew the lady?" Ogier asked of the young man who was naturally much upset over the startling affair, and the more so because the secret of his father's mysterious death had been filched from him by the hand of some unknown assassin.

"No, I did not know her personally," Henfrey replied somewhat lamely. "I came to call upon her, and she received me."

"Why did you call at this hour? Could you not have called in the daytime?"

"Mademoiselle was in the Rooms until late," he said.

"Ah! Then you followed her home—eh?"

“Yes,” he admitted.

The police officer pursed his lips and raised his eyes significantly at his colleague.

“And what was actually happening when the shot was fired? Describe it to me, please,” he demanded.

“I was standing just here”—and he crossed the room and stood upon the spot where he had been—“Mademoiselle was over there beside the window. I had my back to the window. She was about to tell me something—to answer a question I had put to her—when someone from outside shot her through the open glass door.”

“And you did not see her assailant?”

“I saw nothing. The shot startled me, and, seeing her staggering, I rushed to her. In the meantime the assailant—whoever he was—disappeared!”

The brown-bearded man smiled dubiously. As he stood beneath the electric light Hugh saw doubt written largely upon his countenance. He instantly realized that Ogier disbelieved his story.

After all it was a very lame one. He would not fully admit the reason of his visit.

“But tell me, m’sieur,” exclaimed the police officer. “It seems extraordinary that any person should creep along this veranda.” And he walked out and looked about in the moonlight. “If the culprit wished to shoot Mademoiselle in secret, then he would surely not have done so in your presence. He might easily have

shot her as she was on her way home. The road is lonely up here.”

“I agree, monsieur,” replied the Englishman. “The whole affair is, to me, a complete mystery. I saw nobody. But it was plain to me that when I called Mademoiselle was seated out upon the veranda. Look at her chair—and the cushions! It was very hot and close in the Rooms to-night, and probably she was enjoying the moonlight before retiring to bed.”

“Quite possibly,” he agreed. “But that does not alter the fact that the assassin ran considerable risk in coming along the veranda in the full moonlight and firing through the open door. Are you quite certain that Mademoiselle’s assailant was outside—and not inside?” he asked, with a queer expression upon his aquiline face.

Hugh saw that he was hinting at his suspicion that he himself had shot her!

“Quite certain,” he assured him. “Why do you ask?”

“I have my own reasons,” replied the police officer with a hard laugh. “Now, tell me what do you know about Mademoiselle Ferad?”

“Practically nothing.”

“Then why did you call upon her?”

“I have told you. I desired some information, and she was about to give it to me when the weapon was fired by an unknown hand.”

“Unknown—eh?”

“Yes. Unknown to me. It might be known to Mademoiselle.”

“And what was this information you so urgently desired?”

“Some important information. I travelled from London to Monte Carlo in order to obtain it.”

“Ah! Then you had a motive in coming here—some strong motive, I take it?”

“Yes. A very strong motive. I wanted her to clear up certain mysterious happenings in England.”

Ogier was instantly alert.

“What happenings?” he asked, for he recollected the big dossier and the suspicions extending over four or five years concerning the real identity and mode of life of the handsome, sphinx-like woman Yvonne Ferad.

Hugh Henfrey was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

“Happenings in London that—well, that I do not wish to recall.”

Ogier again looked him straight in the face.

“I suggest, M’sieur Henfrey”—for Hugh had given him his name—“I suggest that you have been attracted by Mademoiselle as so many other men have been. She seems to exercise a fatal influence upon some people.”

“I know,” Hugh said. “I have heard lots of things about her. Her success at the tables is constant and uncanny. Even the Administration are interested in her winnings, and are often filled with wonder.”

“True, m’sieur. She keeps herself apart. She is a mysterious person—the most remarkable in all the Principality. We, at

the Bureau, have heard all sorts of curious stories concerning her—once it was rumoured that she was the daughter of a reigning European sovereign. Then we take all the reports with the proverbial grain of salt. That Mademoiselle is a woman of outstanding intellect and courage, as well as of great beauty, cannot be denied. Therefore I tell you that I am intensely interested in this attempt upon her life.”

“And so am I,” Hugh said. “I have a strong reason to be.”

“Cannot you tell me that reason?” inquired the officer of the Surete, still looking at him very shrewdly. “Why fence with me?”

Henfrey hesitated. Then he replied:

“It is a purely personal matter.”

“And yet, you have said that you were not acquainted with Mademoiselle!” remarked Ogier suspiciously.

“That is quite true. The first time I have spoken to her was this evening, a few minutes before the attempt was made upon her life.”

“Then your theory is that while you stood in conversation with her somebody crept along the veranda and shot her—eh?”

“Yes.”

Ogier smiled sarcastically, and turning to his colleague, ordered him to search the room. The inspector evidently suspected the young Englishman of having shot Mademoiselle, and the search was in order to try and discover the weapon.

Meanwhile the brown-bearded officer called the Italian manservant, who gave his name as Giulio Cataldi, and who stated

that he had been in Mademoiselle Ferad's service a little over five years.

"Have you ever seen this Englishman before?" Ogier asked, indicating Hugh.

"Never, until to-night, m'sieur," was the reply. "He called about twenty minutes after Mademoiselle's return from the Rooms."

"Has Mademoiselle quarrelled with anybody of late?"

"Not to my knowledge, m'sieur. She is of a very quiet and even disposition."

"Is there anyone you know who might possess a motive to shoot her?" asked Ogier. "The crime has not been committed with a motive of robbery, but either out of jealousy or revenge."

"I know of nobody," declared the highly respectable Italian, whose moustache was tinged with grey. He shrugged his shoulders and showed his palms as he spoke.

"Mademoiselle arrived here two months ago, I believe?" queried the police official.

"Yes, m'sieur. She spent the autumn in Paris, and during the summer she was at Deauville. She also went to London for a brief time, I believe."

"Did she ever live in London?" asked Hugh eagerly, interrupting Ogier's interrogation.

"Yes—once. She had a furnished house on the Cromwell Road for about six months."

"How long ago?" asked Henfrey.

"Please allow me to make my inquiries, monsieur!" exclaimed the detective angrily.

"But the question I ask is of greatest importance to me in my own inquiries," Hugh persisted.

"I am here to discover the identity of Mademoiselle's assailant," Ogier asserted. "And I will not brook your interference."

"Mademoiselle has been shot, and it is for you to discover who fired at her," snapped the young Englishman. "I consider that I have just as much right to put a question to this man as you have, that is"—he added with sarcasm—"that is, of course, if you don't suspect him of shooting his mistress."

"Well, I certainly do not suspect that," the Frenchman said. "But, to tell you candidly, your story of the affair strikes me as a very improbable one."

"Ah!" laughed Hugh, "I thought so! You suspect me—eh? Very well. Where is the weapon?"

"Perhaps you have hidden it," suggested the other meaningly. "We shall, no doubt, find it somewhere."

"I hope you will, and that will lead to the arrest of the guilty person," Hugh laughed. Then he was about to put further questions to the man Cataldi when Doctor Leneveu entered the room.

"How is she?" demanded Hugh breathlessly.

The countenance of the fussy little doctor fell.

"Monsieur," he said in a low earnest voice, "I much fear that

Mademoiselle will not recover. My colleague Duponteil concurs with that view. We have done our best, but neither of us entertain any hope that she will live!” Then turning to Ogier, the doctor exclaimed: “This is an amazing affair—especially in face of what is whispered concerning the unfortunate lady. What do you make of it?”

The officer of the Surete knit his brows, and with frankness replied:

“At present I am entirely mystified—entirely mystified!”

FOURTH CHAPTER

WHAT THE DOSSIER CONTAINED

Walter Brock was awakened at four o'clock that morning by Hugh touching him upon the shoulder.

He started up in bed and staring at his friend's pale, haggard face exclaimed:

"Good Heavens!—why, what's the matter?"

"Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo has been shot!" the other replied in a hard voice.

"Shot!" gasped Brock, startled. "What do you mean?"

Briefly Hugh who had only just entered the hotel, explained the curious circumstances—how, just at the moment she had been about to reveal the secret of his father's death she was shot.

"Most extraordinary!" declared his friend. "Surely, we have not been followed here by someone who is determined to prevent you from knowing the truth!"

"It seems much like it, Walter," replied the younger man very seriously. "There must be some strong motive or no person would dare to shoot her right before my eyes."

"Agreed. Somebody who is concerned in your father's death has adopted this desperate measure in order to prevent Mademoiselle from telling you the truth."

"That's exactly my opinion, my dear Walter. If it was a

crime for gain, or through motives of either jealousy or revenge, Mademoiselle would certainly have been attacked on her way home. The road is quite deserted towards the crest of the hill.”

“What do the police say?”

“They do not appear to trouble to track Mademoiselle’s assailant. They say they will wait until daylight before searching for footprints on the gravel outside.”

“Ah! They are not very fond of making arrests within the Principality. It’s such a bad advertisement for the Rooms. The Administration like to show a clean sheet as regards serious crime. Our friends here leave it to the French or Italian police to deal with the criminals so that the Principality shall prove itself the most honest State in Europe,” Brock said.

“The police, I believe, suspect me of shooting her,” said Hugh bluntly.

“That’s very awkward. Why?”

“Well—they don’t know the true reason I went to see her, or they would never believe me to be guilty of a crime so much against my own interests.”

Brock, who was still sitting up in bed in his pale blue silk pyjamas, reflected a few moments.

“Well, Hugh,” he said at last, “after all it is only natural that they should believe that you had a hand in the matter. Even though she told you the truth, it is quite within reason that you should have suddenly become incensed against her for the part she must have played in your father’s mysterious death, and in a

frustration of anger you shot her.”

Hugh drew a long breath, and his eyebrows narrowed.

“By Jove! I had never regarded it in that light before!” he gasped. “But what about the weapon?”

“You might easily have hidden it before the arrival of the police. You admit that you went out on the veranda. Therefore if they do chance to find the weapon in the garden then their suspicions will, no doubt, be considerably increased. It’s a pity, old man, that you didn’t make a clean breast of the motive of your visit.”

“I now see my horrible mistake,” Henfrey admitted. “I thought myself wise to preserve silence, to know nothing, and now I see quite plainly that I have only brought suspicion unduly upon myself. The police, however, know Yvonne Ferad to be a somewhat mysterious person.”

“Which renders the situation only worse,” Brock said. Then, after a pause, he added: “Now that you have declined to tell the police why you visited the Villa Amette and have, in a way, defied them, it will be best to maintain that attitude. Tell them nothing, no matter what happens.”

“I intend to pursue that course. But the worst of it is, Walter, that the doctors hold out no hope of Mademoiselle’s recovery. I saw Duponteil half an hour ago, and he told me that he could give me no encouraging information. The bullet has been extracted, but she is hovering between life and death. I suppose it will be in the papers to-morrow, and Dorise and her mother will know of

my nocturnal visit to the house of a notorious woman.”

“Don’t let that worry you, my dear chap. Here, they keep the news of all tragedies out of the papers, because shooting affairs may be thought by the public to be due to losses at the Rooms. Recollect that of all the suicides here—the dozens upon dozens of poor ruined gamblers who are yearly laid to rest in the Suicides’ Cemetery—not a single report has appeared in any newspaper. So I think you may remain assured that Lady Ranscomb and her daughter will not learn anything.”

“I sincerely hope they won’t, otherwise it will go very hard with me,” Hugh said in a low, intense voice. “Ah! What a night it has been for me!”

“And if Mademoiselle dies the assailant, whoever he was, will be guilty of wilful murder; while you, on your part, will never know the truth concerning your father’s death,” remarked the elder man, running his fingers through his hair.

“Yes. That is the position of this moment. But further, I am suspected of the crime!”

Brock dressed while his friend sat upon the edge of the bed, pale-faced and agitated. Suppose that the assailant had flung his pistol into the bushes, and the police eventually discovered it? Then, no doubt, he would be put across the frontier to be arrested by the police of the Department of the Alpes Maritimes.

Truly, the situation was most serious.

Together the two men strolled out into the early morning air and sat upon a seat on the terrace of the Casino watching the sun

as it rose over the tideless sea.

For nearly an hour they sat discussing the affair; then they ascended the white, dusty road to the beautiful Villa Amette, the home of the mysterious Mademoiselle.

Old Giulio Cataldi opened the door.

"Alas! m'sieur, Mademoiselle is just the same," he replied in response to Hugh's eager inquiry. "The police have gone, but Doctor Leneveu is still upstairs."

"Have the police searched the garden?" inquired Hugh eagerly.

"Yes, m'sieur. They made a thorough examination, but have discovered no marks of footprints except those of yourself, myself, and a tradesman's lad who brought up a parcel late last night."

"Then they found no weapon?" asked the young Englishman.

"No, m'sieur. There is no clue whatever to the assailant."

"Curious that there should be no footmarks," remarked Brock. "Yet they found yours, Hugh."

"Yes. The man must surely have left some trace outside!"

"One would certainly have thought so," Brock said. "I wonder if we may go into the room where the tragedy happened?" he asked of the servant.

"Certainly, m'sieur," was the courteous reply, and he conducted them both into the apartment wherein Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo had been shot down.

"Did you accompany Mademoiselle when she went to

London, Giulio?" asked young Henfrey of the old Italian, after he had described to Brock exactly what had occurred.

"Yes, m'sieur," he replied. "I was at Cromwell Road for a short time. But I do not care for London, so Mademoiselle sent me back here to look after the Villa because old Jean, the concierge, had been taken to the hospital."

"When in London you knew some of Mademoiselle's friends, I suppose?"

"A few—only a few," was the Italian's reply.

"Did you ever know a certain Mr. Benton?"

The old fellow shook his head blankly.

"Not to my knowledge, m'sieur," he replied. "Mademoiselle had really very few friends in London. There was a Mrs. Matthews and her husband, Americans whom she met here in Monte Carlo, and Sir George Cave-Knight, who died a few weeks ago."

"Do you remember an elderly gentleman named Henfrey calling?" asked Hugh.

Old Cataldi reflected for a moment, and then answered:

"The name sounds familiar to me, m'sieur, but in what connexion I cannot recollect. That is your name, is it not?" he asked, remembering the card he had taken to his mistress.

"Yes," Hugh replied. "I have reason to believe that my late father was acquainted with your mistress, and that he called upon her in London."

"I believe that a gentleman named Henfrey did call, because

when I glanced at the card you gave me last night the name struck me as familiar,” the servant said. “But whether he actually called, or whether someone at table mentioned his name I really cannot recollect.”

“Ah! That’s a pity,” exclaimed Hugh with a sigh. “As a matter of fact it was in order to make certain inquiries regarding my late father that I called upon Mademoiselle last night.”

Giulio Cataldi turned in pretence of rearranging a chair, but in reality to avert his face from the young man’s gaze—a fact which Hugh did not fail to notice.

Had he really told the truth when he declared that he could not recollect his father calling?

“How long were you in London with Mademoiselle?” asked Henfrey.

“About six weeks—not longer.”

Was it because of some untoward occurrence that the old Italian did not like London, Hugh wondered.

“And you are quite sure that you do not recollect my father calling upon your mistress?”

“As I have said, m’sieur, I do not remember. Yet I recall the name, as it is a rather unusual one.”

“And you have never heard of Mr. Benton?”

Cataldi shook his head.

“Well,” Hugh went on, “tell me whether you entertain any suspicions of anyone who might be tempted to kill your mistress. Mademoiselle has enemies, has she not?”

“Who knows?” exclaimed the man with the grey moustache and small, black furtive eyes.

“Everyone has enemies of one sort or another,” Walter remarked. “And no doubt Mademoiselle has. It is for us to discover the enemy who shot her.”

“Ah! yes, it is, m’sieur,” exclaimed the servant. “The poor Signorina! I do hope that the police will discover who tried to kill her.”

“For aught we know the attempt upon the lady’s life may prove successful after all,” said Hugh despairingly. “The doctors hold out no hope of her recovery.”

“None. A third doctor has been in consultation—Doctor Bazin, from Beaulieu. He only left a quarter of an hour ago. He told me that the poor Signorina cannot possibly live! Ah! messieurs, how terrible all this is—*povera Signorina!* She was always so kind and considerate to us all.” And the old man’s voice trembled with emotion.

Walter Brock gazed around the luxurious room and at the long open window through which streamed the bright morning sun, with the perfume of the flowers outside. What was the mystery concerning Mademoiselle Yvonne? What foundation had the gossips for those constant whisperings which had rendered the handsome woman so notorious?

True, the story of the death of Hugh’s father was an unusually strange one, curious in every particular—and stranger still that the secret was held by this beautiful, but mysterious, woman who

lived in such luxury, and who gambled so recklessly and with invariable good fortune.

As they walked back to the town Hugh's heart sank within him.

"She will die," he muttered bitterly to himself. "She'll die, and I shall never learn the truth of the poor gov'nor's sad end, or the reason why I am being forced to marry Louise Lambert."

"It's an iniquitous will, Hugh!" declared his friend. "And it's infernally hard on you that just at the very moment when you could have learnt the truth that shot was fired."

"Do you think the woman had any hand in my father's death?" Hugh asked. "Do you think that she had repented, and was about to try and atone for what she had done by confessing the whole affair?"

"Yes. That is just the view I take," answered Brock. "Of course, we have no idea what part she played in the business. But my idea is that she alone knows the reason why this marriage with Louise is being forced upon you."

"In that case, then, it seems more than likely that I've been followed here to Monte Carlo, and my movements watched. But why has she been shot? Why did not her enemies shoot me? They could have done so twenty times during the past few days. Perhaps the shot which hit her was really intended for me?"

"I don't think so. There is a monetary motive behind your marriage with Louise. If you died, your enemy would gain nothing. That seems clear."

“But who can be my secret enemy?” asked the young man in dismay.

“Mademoiselle alone knows that, and it was undoubtedly her intention to warn you.”

“Yes. But if she dies I shall remain in ignorance,” he declared in a hard voice. “The whole affair is so tangled that I can see nothing clearly—only that my refusal to marry Louise will mean ruin to me—and I shall lose Dorise in the bargain!”

Walter Brock, older and more experienced, was equally mystified. The pessimistic attitude of the three doctors who had attended the injured woman was, indeed, far from reassuring. The injury to the head caused by the assailant’s bullet was, they declared, most dangerous. Indeed, the three medical men marvelled that she still lived.

The two men walked through the palm-lined garden, bright with flowers, back to their hotel, wondering whether news of the tragedy had yet got abroad. But they heard nothing of it, and it seemed true, as Walter Brock had declared, that the police make haste to suppress any tragic happenings in the Principality.

Though they were unconscious of it, a middle-aged, well-dressed Frenchman had, during their absence from the hotel, been making diligent inquiries regarding them of the night concierge and some of the staff.

The concierge had recognized the visitor as Armand Buisson, of the police bureau at Nice. It seemed as though the French police were unduly inquisitive concerning the well-conducted

young Englishman and his companion.

Now, as a matter of fact, half an hour after Hugh had left the Villa Amette, Ogier had telegraphed to Buisson in Nice, and the latter had come along the Corniche road in a fast car to make his own inquiries and observations upon the pair of Englishmen. Ogier strongly suspected Henfrey of firing the shot, but was, nevertheless, determined to remain inactive and leave the matter to the Prefecture of the Department of Alpes Maritimes. Hence the reason that the well-dressed Frenchman lounged in the hall of the hotel pretending to read the "Phare du Littoral."

Just before noon Hugh went to the telephone in the hotel and inquired of Cataldi the progress of his mistress.

"She is just the same, m'sieur," came the voice in broken English. "*Santa Madonna!* How terrible it all is! Doctor Leneveu has left, and Doctor Duponteil is now here."

"Have the police been again?"

"No, m'sieur. Nobody has been," was the reply.

So Hugh rang off and crossed the hall, little dreaming that the well-dressed Frenchman had been highly interested in his questions.

Half an hour later he went along to the Metropole, where he had an engagement to lunch with Dorise and her mother.

When they met, however, Lady Ranscomb exclaimed:

"Why, Hugh, you look very pale. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," he laughed forcedly. "I'm not very bright to-day. I think it was the sirocco of yesterday that has upset me a

little, that's all."

Then, while they were seated at table, Dorise suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh! do you know, mother, that young French lady over yonder, Madame Jacomet, has just told me something. There's a whisper that the mysterious woman, Mademoiselle of Monte Carlo, was shot during the night by a discarded lover!"

"Shot!" exclaimed Lady Ranscomb. "Dear me! How very dreadful. What really happened?"

"I don't know. Madame Jacomet was told by her husband, who heard it in Ciro's this morning."

"How terrible!" remarked Hugh, striving to remain calm.

"Yes. But women of her class invariably come to a bad end," remarked the widow. "How pleased I am, Dorise, that you never spoke to her. She's a most dreadful person, they say."

"Well, she evidently knows how to win money at the tables, mother," said the girl, lifting her clear blue eyes to those of her lover.

"Yes. But I wonder what the scandal is all about?" said the widow of the great engineer.

"Oh! don't trouble to inquire Lady Ranscomb," Hugh hastened to remark. "One hears scandal on every hand in Monte Carlo."

"Yes. I suppose so," replied the elder woman, and then the subject was dropped.

So the ugly affair was being rumoured. It caused Hugh a

good deal of apprehension, for he feared that his name would be associated with that of the mysterious Mademoiselle. Evidently one or other of the servants at the Villa Amette had been indiscreet.

At that moment, in his private room at the bureau of police down in Monaco, Superintendent Ogier was carefully perusing a dossier of official papers which had been brought to him by the archivist.

Between his thin lips was a long, thin, Swiss cigar—his favorite smoke—and with his gold-rimmed pince-nez poised upon his aquiline nose he was reading a document which would certainly have been of considerable interest to Hugh Henfrey and his friend Walter Brock could they have seen it.

Upon the pale yellow paper were many lines of typewriting in French—a carbon copy evidently.

It was headed: “Republique Francaise. Department of Herault. Prefecture of Police. Bureau of the Director of Police. Reference Number 20197.B.,” and was dated nearly a year before.

It commenced:

“Copy of an ‘information’ in the archives of the Prefecture of the Department of Herault concerning the woman Marie Mignot, or Leullier, now passing under the name of Yvonne Ferad and living at the Villa Amette at Monte Carlo.

“The woman in question was born in 1884 at Number 45 Rue des Etuves, in Montpellier, and was the daughter of one Doctor

Rigaud, a noted toxicologist of the Faculty of Medicine, and curator of the University Library. At the age of seventeen, after her father's death, she became a school teacher at a small school in the Rue Morceau, and at nineteen married Charles Leullier, a good-looking young scoundrel who posed as being well off, but who was afterwards proved to be an expert international thief, a member of a gang of dangerous thieves who committed robberies in the European express trains.

“This fact was unknown to the girl, therefore at first all went smoothly, until the wife discovered the truth and left him. She then joined the chorus of a revue at the Jardin de Paris, where she met a well-to-do Englishman named Bryant. The pair went to England, where she married him, and they resided in the county of Northampton. Six months later Bryant died, leaving her a large sum of money. In the meantime Leullier had been arrested by the Italian police for a daring robbery with violence in a train traveling between Milan and Turin and been sentenced to ten years on the penal island of Gorgona. His wife, hearing of this from an Englishman named Houghton, who, though she was unaware of it, was following the same profession as her husband, returned to France. She rented an apartment in Paris, and afterwards played at Monte Carlo, where she won a considerable sum, with the proceeds of which she purchased the Villa Amette, which she now occupies each season.”

“Extracts of reports concerning Marie Leullier, alias Yvonne Ferad, are herewith appended:

“Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, London—to the Prefecture of Police, Paris.

“Mademoiselle Yvonne Ferad rented a furnished house at Hove, near Brighton, in June, 1918. Afterwards moved to Worthing and to Exeter, and later took a house in the Cromwell Road, London, in 1919. She was accompanied by an Italian manservant named Cataldi. Her conduct was suspicious, though she was undoubtedly possessed of considerable means. She was often seen at the best restaurants with various male acquaintances, more especially with a man named Kenworthy. Her association with this person, and with another man named Percy Stendall, was curious, as both men were habitual criminals and had served several terms of penal servitude each. Certain suspicions were aroused, and observation was kept, but nothing tangible was discovered. It is agreed, however, that some mystery surrounds this woman in question. She left London quite suddenly, but left no debts behind.”

“Information from the Borough Police Office, Worthing, to the Prefecture of Police, Department of Herault.

“Mademoiselle Yvonne Ferad has been identified by the photograph sent as having lived in Worthing in December, 1918. She rented a small furnished house facing the sea, and was accompanied by an Italian manservant and a French maid. Her movements were distinctly mysterious. A serious fracas occurred at the house on the evening of December 18th, 1918. A middle-aged gentleman, whose name is unknown, called there about

seven o'clock and a violent quarrel ensued between the lady and her visitor, the latter being very seriously assaulted by the Italian. The constable on duty was called in, but the visitor refused to prosecute, and after having his injuries attended to by a doctor left for London. Three days later Mademoiselle disappeared from Worthing. It is believed by the Chief Constable that the woman is of the criminal class."

Then Charles Ogier, inspector of the detective police of Monaco, smiled, laid down his cigar, and took up another and even more interesting document.

FIFTH CHAPTER

ON THE HOG'S BACK

Three days later. On a cold afternoon just as the wintry light was fading a tall, dark, middle-aged, rather handsome man with black hair and moustache, and wearing a well-cut, dark-grey overcoat and green velour hat, alighted from the train at the wayside station of Wanborough, in Surrey, and inquired of the porter the way to Shapley Manor.

“Shapley, sir? Why, take the road there yonder up the hill till you get to the main road which runs along the Hog’s Back from Guildford to Farnborough. When you get on the main road, turn sharp to the left past the old toll-gate, and you’ll find the Manor on the left in among a big clump of trees.”

“How far?”

“About a mile, sir.”

The stranger, the only passenger who had alighted, slipped sixpence into the man’s hand, buttoned his coat, and started out to walk in the direction indicated, breasting the keen east wind.

He was well-set-up, and of athletic bearing. He took long strides as with swinging gait he went up the hill. As he did so, he muttered to himself:

“I was an infernal fool not to have come down in a car! I hate these beastly muddy country roads. But Molly has the telephone

—so I can ring up for a car to fetch me—which is a consolation, after all.”

And with his keen eyes set before him, he pressed forward up the steep incline to where, for ten miles, ran the straight broad highway over the high ridge known as the Hog’s Back. The road is very popular with motorists, for so high is it that on either side there stretches a wide panorama of country, the view on the north being towards the Thames Valley and London, while on the south Hindhead with the South Downs in the blue distance show beyond.

Having reached the high road the stranger paused to take breath, and incidentally to admire the magnificent view. Indeed, an expression of admiration fell involuntarily from his lips. Then he went along for another half-mile in the teeth of the cutting wind with the twilight rapidly coming on, until he came to the clump of dark firs and presently walked up a gravelled drive to a large, but somewhat inartistic, Georgian house of red brick with long square windows. In parts the ivy was trying to hide its terribly ugly architecture for around the deep porch it grew thickly and spread around one corner of the building.

A ring at the door brought a young manservant whom the caller addressed as Arthur, and, wishing him good afternoon, asked if Mrs. Bond were at home.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply.

“Oh! good,” said the caller. “Just tell her I’m here.” And he proceeded to remove his coat and to hang it up in the great

flagged hall with the air of one used to the house.

The Manor was a spacious, well-furnished place, full of good pictures and much old oak furniture.

The servant passed along the corridor, and entering the drawing-room, announced:

“Mr. Benton is here, ma’am.”

“Oh! Mr. Benton! Show him in,” cried his mistress enthusiastically. “Show him in at once!”

Next moment the caller entered the fine, old-fashioned room, where a well-preserved, fair-haired woman of about forty was taking her tea alone and petting her Pekinese.

“Well, Charles? So you’ve discovered me here, eh?” she exclaimed, jumping up and taking his hand.

“Yes, Molly. And you seem to have very comfortable quarters,” laughed Benton as he threw himself unceremoniously into a chintz-covered armchair.

“They are, I assure you.”

“And I suppose you’re quite a great lady in these parts—eh?—now that you live at Shapley Manor. Where’s Louise?”

“She went up to town this morning. She won’t be back till after dinner. She’s with her old school-fellow—that girl Bertha Trench.”

“Good. Then we can have a chat. I’ve several things to consult you about and ask your opinion.”

“Have some tea first,” urged his good-looking hostess, pouring him some into a Crown Derby cup.

"Well," he commenced. "I think you've done quite well to take this place, as you've done, for three years. You are now safely out of the way. The Paris Surete are making very diligent inquiries, but the Surrey Constabulary will never identify you with the lady of the Rue Racine. So you are quite safe here."

"Are you sure of that, Charles?" she asked, fixing her big grey eyes upon him.

"Certain. It was the wisest course to get back here to England, although you had to take a very round-about journey."

"Yes. I got to Switzerland, then to Italy, and from Genoa took an Anchor Line steamer across to New York. After that I came over to Liverpool, and in the meantime I had become Mrs. Bond. Louise, of course, thought we were travelling for pleasure. I had to explain my change of name by telling her that I did not wish my divorced husband to know that I was back in England."

"And the girl believed it, of course," he laughed.

"Of course. She believes anything I tell her," said the clever, unscrupulous woman for whom the Paris police were in active search, whose real name was Molly Maxwell, and whose amazing career was well known to the French police.

Only recently a sum of a quarter of a million francs had fallen into her hands, and with it she now rented Shapley Manor and had set up as a country lady. Benton gazed around the fine old room with its Adams ceiling and its Georgian furniture, and reflected how different were Molly's present surroundings from that stuffy little flat *au troisieme* in the Rue Racine.

"Yes," he said. "You had a very narrow escape, Molly. I dared not come near you, but I knew that you'd look after the girl."

"Of course. I always look after her as though she were my own child."

Benton's lip curled as he sipped his China tea, and said:

"Because so much depends upon her—eh? I'm glad you view the situation from a fair and proper stand-point. We're now out for a big thing, therefore we must not allow any little hitch to prevent us from bringing it off successfully."

"I quite agree, Charles. Our great asset is Louise. But she must be innocent of it all. She must know absolutely nothing."

"True. If she had an inkling that we were forcing her to marry Hugh she would fiercely resent it. She's a girl of spirit, after all."

"My dear Charles, I know that," laughed the woman. "Ever since she came home from school I've noticed how independent she is. She certainly has a will of her own. But she likes Hugh, and we must encourage it. Recollect that a fortune is at stake."

"I have not overlooked that," the man said. "But of late I've come to fear that we are treading upon thin ice. I don't like the look of affairs at the present moment. Young Henfrey is head over ears in love with that girl Dorise Ranscomb, and—"

"Bah! It's only a flirtation, my dear Charles," laughed the woman. "When just a little pressure is put upon the boy, and a sly hint to Lady Ranscomb, then the affair will soon be off, and he'll fall into Louise's arms. She's really very fond of him."

"She may be, but he takes no notice of her. She told me

so the other day. He's gone to the Riviera—followed Dorise, I suppose," Benton said.

"Yvonne wrote me a few days ago to say that he was there with a friend of his named Walter Brock. Who's he?"

"Oh! a naval lieutenant-commander who served in the war and was invalided out after the Battle of Jutland. He got the D.S.O. over the Falklands affair, and has now some post at the Admiralty. He was in command of a torpedo boat which sank a German cruiser, and was afterwards blown up."

"They are both out at Monte Carlo, Yvonne says. And Henfrey is with Dorise daily," remarked the woman.

"Yvonne is always apprehensive lest young Henfrey should learn the secret of the old fellow's end," said Benton. "But I don't see how the truth of the—well, rather ugly affair can ever come out, except by an indiscretion by one or other of us."

"And that is scarcely likely, Charles, is it?" his hostess laughed as she pushed across to him a big silver box of cigarettes and then reclined lazily among her cushions.

"No. It would certainly be a very sensational affair if the newspapers got hold of the facts, my dear Molly. But don't let us anticipate such a thing. Fortunately Louise, in her girlish innocence, knows nothing. Old Henfrey left his money to his son upon certain conditions, one of which is that Hugh shall marry Louise. And that marriage must, at all hazards, take place. After that, we care for nothing."

The handsome woman who was rolling a cigarette between

her well-manicured fingers hesitated. Her countenance assumed a strange look as she reflected. She was far too clever to express any off-hand opinion. She had outwitted the police of Paris, Brussels, and Rome in turn. Her whole career had been a criminal one, punctuated by periods of pretended high respectability—while the funds to support it had lasted. And upon her hands had been placed Louise Lambert, the child Charles Benton had adopted ten years before.

“We shall have to exercise a good deal of discretion and caution in regard to Louise,” she declared. “The affair is not at all so plain sailing as I at first believed.”

“No. It is a serious contretemps that you had to leave Paris, Molly,” agreed her well-dressed visitor. “The young American was a fool, of course, but I think—”

“Paris was flooded by rich young men from the United States who came over to fight the Boche and to spend their money like water when on leave in Paris. Frank was only one of them.”

Benton was silent. The affair was a distinctly unsavoury one. Frank van Geen, the son of the Dutch-American millionaire cocoa manufacturer of Chicago, had, by reason of his association with Molly, found himself the poorer by nearly a quarter of a million francs, and his body had been found in the Seine between the Pont d’Auteuil and the Ile St. Germain. At the inquiry some ugly disclosures were made, but already the lady of the Rue Racine and her supposed niece had left Paris; and though the affair was one of suicide, the police raised a hue and cry, and the

frontiers had been watched, but the pair had disappeared.

That was several months ago. And now Molly Maxwell the adventuress in Paris had been transformed into the wealthy and highly respectable widow Mrs. Bond, who having presented such excellent references had become tenant of that well-furnished mansion, Shapley Manor, and the beautiful grounds adjoining. For nearly two centuries it had been the home of the Puttenham, but Sir George Puttenham, Baronet, the present owner, had found himself ruined by war-taxation, and as one of the new poor he had been glad to let the place and live upon the rent obtained for it. His case, indeed, was only one of thousands of others in England, where adventurers and war-profiteers were ousting the landed gentry.

“Yvonne is evidently keeping a good watch upon young Hugh,” remarked Benton presently, as he blew a ring of cigarette smoke towards the ceiling.

“Yes,” replied the woman, her eyes fixed out of the big window which commanded a glorious view of Gibbet Hill, at Hindhead, and the blue South Downs towards the English Channel. But all was dark and lowering in the winter twilight, now fast darkening into night.

In old-world Guildford, the county town of Surrey, with its steep High Street containing many seventeenth-century houses, its old inns, and its balconied Guildhall—the scene of so many unseemly wrangles among the robed and cocked-hatted borough councillors who are, *par excellence*, outstanding illustrations of

the provincial petty jealousies of bumbledom—Mrs. Bond was welcomed by the trades-people who vied with each other to “serve her.” Almost daily she went up and down the High Street in her fine Rolls-Royce driven by Mead, an ex-soldier and a worthy fellow whom she had engaged through an advertisement in the *Surrey Advertiser*. He had been in the Queen’s West Surrey, and his home being in Guildford, Molly knew that he would serve as a testimonial to her high respectability. Molly Maxwell was an outstandingly clever woman. She never let a chance slip by that might be taken advantageously.

Mead, who went on his “push-bike” every evening along the Hog’s Back to Guildford, was never tired of singing the praises of his generous mistress.

“She’s a real good sort,” he would tell his friends in the bar of the Lion or the Angel. “She knows how to treat a man. She’s a widow, and good-looking. I suppose she’ll marry again. Nearly all the best people about here have called on her within the last week or two. Magistrates and their wives, retired generals, and lots of the gentry. Yes, my job isn’t to be sneezed at, I can tell you. It’s better than driving a lorry outside Ypres!”

Mrs. Bond treated Mead extremely well, and paid him well. She knew that by so doing she would secure a good advertisement. She had done so before, when four or five years ago she had lived at Keswick.

“Do you know, Charles,” she said presently, “I’m really very apprehensive regarding the present situation. Yvonne is, no

doubt, keeping a watchful eye upon the young fellow. But what can she do if he has followed the Ranscomb girl and is with her each day? Each day, indeed, must bring the pair closer together, and—”

“That’s what we must prevent, my dear Molly!” exclaimed the lady’s visitor. “Think of all it means to us. You are quite safe here—as safe as I am to-day. But we can’t last out without money—either of us. We must have cash-money—and cash-money always.”

“Yes. That’s so. But Yvonne is wonderful—amazing.”

“She hasn’t the same stake in the affair as we have.”

“Why not?” asked the woman for whom the European police were in search.

“Well, because she is rich—she’s won pots of money at the tables—and we—well, both of us have only limited means. Yours, Molly, are larger than mine—thanks to Frank. But I must have money soon. My expenses in town are mounting up daily.”

“But your rooms don’t cost you very much! Old Mrs. Evans looks after things as she has always done.”

“Yes. But everything is going up in price, and remember, I dare not cross the Channel just now. At Calais, Boulogne, Cherbourg, and other places, they have my photograph, and they are waiting for me to fall into the trap. But the rat, once encaged, is shy! And I am very shy just now,” he added with a light laugh.

“You’ll stay and have dinner, won’t you?” urged his hostess.

Benton hesitated.

"If I do Louise may return, and just now I don't want to meet her. It is better not."

"But she won't be back till the last train to Guildford. Mead is meeting her. Yes—stay."

"I must get a car to take me back to town. I have to go to Glasgow by the early train in the morning."

"Well, we're order one from one of the garages in Guildford. You really must stay, Charles. There's lots we have to talk over—a lot of things that are of vital consequence to us both."

At that moment there came a rap at the door and the young manservant entered, saying:

"You're wanted on the telephone, ma'am."

Mrs. Bond rose from the settee and went to the telephone in the library, where she heard the voice of a female telephone operator.

"Is that Shapley Manor?" she asked. "I have a telegram for Mrs. Bond. Handed in at Nice at two twenty-five, received here at four twenty-eight. 'To Bond, Shapley Manor, near Guildford. Yvonne shot by some unknown person while with Hugh. In grave danger.—S.' That is the message. Have you got it please?"

Mrs. Bond held her breath.

"Yes," she gasped. "Anything else?"

"No, madam," replied the telephone operator at the Guildford Post Office. "Nothing else. I will forward the duplicate by post." And she switched off.

SIXTH CHAPTER

FACING THE UNKNOWN

That the police were convinced that Hugh Henfrey had shot Mademoiselle was plain.

Wherever he went an agent of detective police followed him. At the Cafe de Paris as he took his aperitif on the *terrasse* the man sat at a table near, idly smoking a cigarette and glancing at an illustrated paper on a wooden holder. In the gardens, in the Rooms, in the Galerie, everywhere the same insignificant little man haunted him.

Soon after luncheon he met Dorise and her mother in the Rooms. With them were the Comte d'Autun, an elegant young Frenchman, well known at the tables, and Madame Tavera, a very chic person who was one of the most admired visitors of that season. They were only idling and watching the players at the end table, where a stout, bearded Russian was making some sensational coups *en plein*.

Presently Hugh succeeded in getting Dorise alone.

"It's awfully stuffy here," he said. "Let's go outside—eh?"

Together they descended the red-carpeted steps and out into the palm-lined Place, at that hour thronged by the smartest crowd in Europe. Indeed, the war seemed to have led to increased extravagance and daring in the dress of those gay Parisiennes,

those butterflies of fashion who were everywhere along the Cote d'Azur.

They turned the corner by the Palais des Beaux Arts into the Boulevard Peirara.

"Let's walk out of the town," he suggested to the girl. "I'm tired of the place."

"So am I, Hugh," Dorise admitted. "For the first fortnight the unceasing round of gaiety and the novelty of the Rooms are most fascinating, but, after that, one seems cooped up in an atmosphere of vicious unreality. One longs for the open air and open country after this enervating, exotic life."

So when they arrived at the little church of Ste. Devote, the patron saint of Monaco, that little building which everyone knows standing at the entrance to that deep gorge the Vallon des Gaumates, they descended the steep, narrow path which runs beside the mountain torrent and were soon alone in the beautiful little valley where the grey-green olives overhang the rippling stream. The little valley was delightfully quiet and rural after the garish scenes in Monte Carlo, the cosmopolitan chatter, and the vulgar display of the war-rich. The old habitue of pre-war days lifts his hands as he watches the post-war life around the Casino and listens to the loud uneducated chatter of the profiteer's womenfolk.

As the pair went along in the welcome shadows, for the sun fell strong upon the tumbling stream, Hugh was remarking upon it.

He had been at Monte Carlo with his father before the war,

and realized the change.

"I only wish mother would move on," Dorise exclaimed as they strolled slowly together.

She presented a dainty figure in cream gabardine and a broad-brimmed straw hat which suited her admirably. Her clothes were made by a certain famous *couturiere* in Hanover Square, for Lady Ranscomb had the art of dressing her daughter as well as she did herself. Gowns make the lady nowadays, or the fashionable dressmakers dare not make their exorbitant charges.

"Then you also are tired of the place?" asked Hugh, as he strolled slowly at her side in a dark-blue suit and straw hat. They made a handsome pair, and were indeed well suited to each other. Lady Ranscomb liked Hugh, but she had no idea that the young people had fallen so violently in love with each other.

"Yes," said the girl. "Mother promised to spend Easter in Florence. I've never been there and am looking forward to it so much. The Marchesa Ruggeri, whom we met at Harrogate last summer, has a villa there, and has invited us for Easter. But mother said this morning that she preferred to remain here."

"Why?"

"Oh! Somebody in the hotel has put her off. An old Englishwoman who lives in Florence told her that there's nothing to see beyond the Galleries, and that the place is very catty."

Hugh laughed and replied:

"All British colonies in Continental cities are catty, my dear Dorise. They say that for scandal Florence takes the palm. I went

there for two seasons in succession before the war, and found the place delightful.”

“The Marchesa is a charming woman. Her husband was an attache at the Italian Embassy in Paris. But he has been transferred to Washington, so she has gone back to Florence. I like her immensely, and I do so want to visit her.”

“Oh, you must persuade your mother to take you,” he said. “She’ll be easily persuaded.”

“I don’t know. She doesn’t like travelling in Italy. She once had her dressing-case stolen from the train between Milan and Genoa, so she’s always horribly bitter against all Italians.”

“There are thieves also on English railways, Dorise,” Hugh remarked. “People are far too prone to exaggerate the shortcomings of foreigners, and close their eyes to the faults of the British.”

“But everybody is not so cosmopolitan as you are, Hugh,” the girl laughed, raising her eyes to those of her lover.

“No,” he replied with a sigh.

“Why do you sigh?” asked the girl, having noticed a change in her companion ever since they had met in the Rooms. He seemed strangely thoughtful and preoccupied.

“Did I?” he asked, suddenly pulling himself together. “I didn’t know,” he added with a forced laugh.

“You don’t look yourself to-day, Hugh,” she said.

“I’ve been told that once before,” he replied. “The weather—I think! Are you going over to the *bal blanc* at Nice to-night?”

"Of course. And you are coming also. Hasn't mother asked you?" she inquired in surprise.

"No."

"How silly! She must have forgotten. She told me she intended to ask you to have a seat in the car. The Comte d'Autun is coming with us."

"Ah! He admires you, Dorise, hence I don't like him," Hugh blurted forth.

"But, surely, you're not jealous, you dear old thing!" laughed the girl, tantalizing him. Perhaps she would not have uttered those words which cut deeply into his heart had she known the truth concerning the tragedy at the Villa Amette.

"I don't like him because he seems to live by gambling," Hugh declared. "I know your mother likes him very much—of course!"

"And she likes you, too, dear."

"She may like me, but I fear she begins to suspect that we love each other, dearest," he said in a hard tone. "If she does, she will take care in future to keep us apart, and I—I shall lose you, Dorise!"

"No—no, you won't."

"Ah! But I shall! Your mother will never allow you to marry a man who has only just sufficient to rub along with, and who is already in debt to his tailor. What hope is there that we can ever marry?"

"My dear Hugh, you are awfully pessimistic to-day," the girl cried. "What is up with you? Have you lost heavily at the tables

—or what?”

“No. I have been thinking of the future,” he said in a hard voice so very unusual to him. “I am thinking of your mother’s choice of a husband for you—George Sherrard.”

“I hate him—the egotistical puppy!” exclaimed the girl, her fine eyes flashing with anger. “I’ll never marry him—*never!*”

But Hugh Henfrey made no reply, and they went on together in silence.

“Cannot you trust me, Hugh?” asked the girl at last in a low earnest tone.

“Yes, dearest. I trust you, of course. But I feel certain that your mother, when she knows our secret, will forbid your seeing me, and press on your marriage with Sherrard. Remember, he’s a rich man, and your mother adores the Golden Calf.”

“I know she does. If people have money she wants to know them. Her first inquiry is whether they have money.”

It was on the tip of Hugh’s tongue to remark with sarcasm that such ideals might well be expected of the wife of a jerry-builder in Golder’s green. But he hesitated. Lady Ranscomb was always well disposed towards him, and he had had many good times at her house and on the grouse moor she rented in Scotland each year for the benefit of her intimate friends. Though she had been the wife of a small builder and had commenced her married life in an eight-roomed house on the fringe of Hampstead Heath, yet she had picked up society manners marvellously well, being a woman of quick intelligence and considerable wit. Nevertheless,

she had no soul above money, and gaiety was as life to her. She could not live without it. Dorise had been given an excellent education, and after three years at Versailles was now voted one of the prettiest and most charming girls in London society. Hence mother and daughter were sought after everywhere, and their doings were constantly being chronicled in the newspapers.

“Yes,” he said. “Your mother has not asked me over to Nice to-night because she believes you and I have been too much together of late.”

“No,” declared Dorise. “I’m sure it’s not that, Hugh—I’m quite sure! It’s simply an oversight. I’ll see about it when we get back. We leave the hotel at half-past nine. It is the great White Ball of the Nice season.”

“Please don’t mention it to her on any account, Dorise,” Hugh urged. “If you did it would at once show her that you preferred my company to that of the Count. Go with him. I shan’t be jealous! Besides, in view of my financial circumstances, what right have I to be jealous? You can’t marry a fellow like myself, Dorise. It wouldn’t be fair to you.”

The girl halted. In her eyes shone the light of unshed tears.

“Hugh! What do you mean? What are you saying?” she asked in a low, faltering voice. “Have I not told you that whatever happens I shall never love another man but yourself?”

He drew a long breath, and without replying placed his strong arms around her and, drawing her to him, kissed her passionately upon the lips.

"Thank you, my darling," he murmured. "Thank you for those words. They put into me a fresh hope, a fresh determination, and a fearlessness—oh! you—you don't know!" he added in a low, earnest voice.

"All I know, Hugh, is that you love me," was the simple response as she reciprocated his fierce caress.

"Love you, darling!" he cried. "Yes. You are mine—mine!"

"True, Hugh. I love no other man. I hate that tailor's dummy, George Sherrard, and as for the Count—well, he's an idiotic Frenchman—the 'hardy annual of Monte Carlo' I heard him called the other day. No, Hugh, I assure you that you have no cause for jealousy."

And she smiled sweetly into his eyes.

They were standing together beneath a twisted old olive tree through the dark foliage of which the sun shone in patches, while by their feet the mountain torrent from the high, snow-clad Alps rippled and splashed over the great grey boulders towards the sea.

"I know it, darling! I know it," Hugh said in a stifled voice. He was thinking of the tragedy of that night, but dare not disclose to her his connexion with it, because he knew the police suspected him of making that murderous attack upon the famous "Mademoiselle."

"Forgive me, Hugh," exclaimed the girl, still clasped in her lover's arms. "But somehow you don't seem your old self to-day. What is the matter? Can't you tell me?"

He drew a long breath.

"No, darling. Excuse me. I—I'm a bit upset that's all."

"Why?"

"I'm upset because for the last day or two I have begun to realize that our secret must very soon come out, and then—well, your mother will forbid me the house because I have no money. You know that she worships Mammon always—just as your father did—forgive me for my words."

"I do forgive you because you speak the truth," Dorise replied. "I know that mother wants me to marry a rich man, and—"

"And she will compel you to do so, darling. I am convinced of that."

"She won't!" cried the girl. "I will never marry a man I do not love!"

"Your mother, if she doesn't suspect our compact, will soon do so," he said. "She's a clever woman. She is on the alert, because she intends you to marry soon, and to marry a rich man."

"Mother is far too fond of society, I admit. She lives only for her gay friends now that father is dead. She spends lavishly upon luncheons and dinners at the Ritz, the Carlton, and Claridge's; and by doing so we get to know all the best people. But what does it matter to me? I hate it all because—"

And she looked straight into his eyes as she broke off.

"Because," she whispered, "because—because I love you, Hugh!"

"Ah! darling! You have never been so frank with me before," he said softly. "You do not know how much those words of yours

mean to me! You do not know how all my life, all my hopes, all my future, is centred in your own dear self!” and clasping her again tightly in his arms he pressed his lips fondly to hers in a long passionate embrace.

Yet within the stout heart of Hugh Henfrey, who was so straight, honest and upright a young fellow as ever trod the Broad at Oxford, lay that ghastly secret—indeed, a double secret—that of his revered father’s mysterious end and the inexplicable attack upon Yvonne Ferad at the very moment when he had been about to learn the truth.

They lingered there beside the mountain stream for a long time, until the sun sank and the light began to fail. Again and again he told her of his great love for her, but he said nothing of the strange clause in his father’s will. She knew Louise Lambert, having met her once walking in the park with her lover. Hugh had introduced them, and had afterwards explained that the girl was the adopted daughter of a great friend of his father.

Dorise little dreamed that if her lover married her he would inherit the remainder of old Mr. Henfrey’s fortune.

“Do come over to the ball at Nice to-night,” the girl urged presently as they stood with hands clasped gazing into each other’s eyes. “It will be nothing without you.”

“Ah! darling, that’s very nice of you to say so, but I think we ought to be discreet. Your mother has invited the Count to go with you.”

“I hate him!” Dorise declared. “He’s all elegance, bows and

flattery. He bores me to death.”

“I can quite understand that. But your mother is fond of his society. She declares that he is so amusing, and in Paris he knows everyone worth knowing.”

“Oh, yes. He gave us an awfully good time in Paris last season—took us to Longchamps, and we afterwards went to Deauville with him. He wins and loses big sums on the turf.”

“A born gambler. Everyone knows that. I heard a lot about him in the Travellers’ Club, in Paris.”

“But if mother telephones to you, you’ll come with us—won’t you?” entreated the girl again.

The young man hesitated. His mind was full of the tragic affair of the previous night. He was wondering whether the end had come—whether Mademoiselle’s lips were already sealed by Death.

He gave an evasive reply, whereupon Dorise, taking his hand in hers, said:

“What is your objection to going out with us to-night, Hugh? Do tell me. If you don’t wish me to go, I’ll make an excuse to mother and she can take the Count.”

“I have not the slightest objection,” he declared at once. “Go, dearest—only leave me out of it. The *bal blanc* is always good fun.”

“I shall not go if you refuse to go,” she said with a pout.

Therefore in order to please her he consented—providing Lady Ranscomb invited him.

They had wandered a long way up the narrow, secluded valley, but had met not a soul. All was delightful and picturesque, the profusion of wild flowers, the huge grey moss-grown boulders, the overhanging ilexes and olives, and the music of the tumbling current through a crooked course worn deep by the waters of primeval ages.

It was seldom that in the whirl of society the pair could get a couple of hours together without interruption. And under the blue Riviera sky they were indeed fraught with bliss to both.

When they returned to the town the dusk was already falling, and the great arc lamps along the terrace in front of the Casino were already lit. Hugh took her as far as the entrance to the Metropole and then, after wishing her au revoir and promising to go with her to Nice if invited, he hastily retraced his steps to the Palmiers. Five minutes later he was speaking to the old Italian at the Villa Amette.

"Mademoiselle is still unconscious, m'sieur," was the servant's reply to his eager inquiry. "The doctors have been several times this afternoon, but they hold out no hope."

"I wonder if I can be of any assistance?" Hugh asked in French.

"I think not, m'sieur. What assistance can any of us give poor Mademoiselle?"

Ah, what indeed, Hugh thought as he put down the receiver. Yet while she lived, there was still a faint hope that he would be able to learn the secret which he anticipated would place him

in such a position that he might defy those who had raised their hands against his father and himself.

His marriage with Dorise, indeed his whole future, depended upon the disclosure of the clever plot whereby Louise Lambert was to become his wife.

His friend Brock was not in the hotel, so he went to his room to dress for dinner. Ten minutes later a page brought a message from Lady Ranscomb inviting him to go over to Nice to the ball.

He drew a long breath. He was in no mood for dancing that night, for he was far too perturbed regarding the critical condition of the notorious woman who had turned his friend.

On every hand there were whispers and wild reports concerning the tragedy at the Villa Amette. He had heard about it from a dozen people, though not a word was in the papers. Yet nobody dreamed that he, of all men, had been present when the mysterious shot was fired, or that he was, indeed, the cause of the secret attack.

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