

SHOT WITH CRIMSON

BY GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

GRAUSTARK

CASTLE CRANEYCROW

BREWSTER'S MILLIONS

THE SHERRODS

THE DAY OF THE DOG

BEVERLY OF GRAUSTARK

THE PURPLE PARASOL

NEDRA

COWARDICE COURT

JANE CABLE

THE FLYERS

THE DAUGHTER OF ANDERSON CROW

THE HUSBANDS OF EDITH

THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S

THE ALTERNATIVE

TRUXTON KING

THE BUTTERFLY MAN

THE ROSE IN THE RING

WHAT'S-HIS-NAME

MARY MIDTHORNE

HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

THE HOLLOW OF HER HANDS

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

BLACK IS WHITE

THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK

MR. BINGLE

THE LIGHT THAT LIES

FROM THE HOUSETOPS

GREEN FANCY

SHOT WITH CRIMSON



“VERY GOOD, CAPTAIN! ORDERS IS ORDERS, SIR.” SHE
STOOD OFF AND SALUTED HIM WITH MOCK SOLEMNITY
(Page 66)

SHOT WITH CRIMSON

BY

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

Author of "Graustark," "The Hollow of Her Hand,"
"Brewster's Millions," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. R. GRUGER



NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1918

To file in Librarian's Office

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

177644

PS3525
.A187S5

COPYRIGHT, 1918
BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.

RECEIVED
APR 26 1918
LIBRARY

ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>“Very good, Captain! Orders is orders, sir.” She stood off and saluted him with mock solemnity. (Page 66)</p> | <p><i>Frontispiece</i> FACING PAGE</p> |
| <p>Carstairs took up the receiver. He realized that his hand trembled. He had never known it to happen before, even in moments of great stress</p> | <p>36</p> |
| <p>They did not speak until they reached a deserted corner of the hotel lobby</p> | <p>94</p> |
| <p>Carstairs sprang to his feet. For an instant a flash of joy transfigured his face</p> | <p>150</p> |

SHOT WITH CRIMSON

SHOT WITH CRIMSON

CHAPTER I

FOR thirty seconds no one moved.

An odd sort of paralysis seemed to have gripped every one in the room,—paralysis of the mind as well as of the body.

Then puzzled, wondering looks were exchanged.

A man sitting near the fireplace glanced sharply, apprehensively at the huge beams in the ceiling and muttered:

“What was it? Sounded as though something had smashed in the roof. There’s a tremendous wind. It may have got that big tree at the corner of the locker room.”

“It *couldn’t* have been thunder,—not at this time of the year,” said one of the women, sending a nervous, frightened look at her husband who sprawled ungracefully in a big Morris chair at the end of a table littered with newspapers and magazines.

"'Gad, did you feel the house rock?'" exclaimed he, sitting up suddenly, his eyes narrowing as with pain. "Like an earthquake or—"

"It *couldn't* have been an earthquake," interrupted his wife, starting up from her chair.

"Why couldn't it?" he demanded crossly, and then glanced around at the other occupants of the room,—ten or a dozen men and women seated in a wide semi-circle in front of the huge logs blazing in the fireplace. "What do you think it was, Zimmie?"

"We'll find part or all of the roof gone," answered the man addressed. As he spoke, he rose quickly and started across the room in the direction of the door leading to the steward's pantry. "I'll have a look from the back of the—"

He stopped short. The dull, ripping crash that had startled them was repeated, this time a little louder and more prolonged than before. The club-house shook. Several of the men sprang to their feet in alarm. A look of comprehension shot among them.

"By Gad! An explosion!" cried one of them. "The damned beasts!"

"The Reynolds Works!" cried another, gripping the back of his chair with tense fingers. "Sure as you're alive! It's only a few miles from here. Nothing else could have—"

"Let's go home, Ned. The children—something may have happened—you never can tell—"

"Don't get excited, Betty," cried the man in the Morris chair. She was shaking his arm. "The children are in New York, twenty miles away. They're all right, old girl. Lord! What a smash it was!"

The group was silent, waiting with bated breath for the third and perhaps more shocks to come.

The club steward came into the room, bearing a tray of bottles and glasses. His face was ashen; there was a set expression about it, as one who controls his nerves with difficulty.

"Did you hear it, Peter?" was the innocuous inquiry of one of the men, a dapper young fellow in corduroys.

"Yes, Mr. Cribbs. I thought at first it was the roof, sir. The chef said it was the big chimney—"

"Never mind the drinks, Peter," said a tall, greyish man as the steward placed the glasses on the table. "We've lost what little thirst we had. Where are the Reynolds Works from here?"

Peter looked surprised. "South, sir,—beyond the hills. About five miles, I should say, Mr. Carstairs."

"And which way is south?" inquired one of the women. "I am always turned around when I am in the country." She was a singularly pallid, clear-featured woman of perhaps forty-five. One might surmise that at twenty she had been lovely, even exquisite.

"This way, Mrs. Carstairs," said the steward, starting toward the windows at the lower end of the lounge.

The man who had been addressed as Zimmie was already at one of the broad windows, peering out into the black, windy night.

"Can't see a thing," he said, as the others

crowded about him. "The shops are off there in a direct line with the home green, I should say."

"I happen to know that the Allies have a fifteen million dollar contract with the Reynolds people," said Carstairs, looking hard into the blackness.

"If they'd string up a few of these infernal—There! See the glow coming up over the hill? She's afire! And with this wind,—'gad, she'll go like waste paper! My God, I wish the whole German Army was sitting on top of those buildings right now." It was little Mr. Cribbs who spoke. He was shaking like a leaf.

"I'd rather see a million or two of these so-called German-Americans sitting there, Cribbs," said Carstairs, between his teeth. "There'd be some satisfaction in that."

His wife nudged him sharply. He turned and caught the warning look in her eye and the slight movement of her head in the direction of the man called Zimmie.

"Oh, that's all right," cried Carstairs carelessly. "You needn't punch me, dear. Zim-

mie's as good an American as any of us. Don't think for a moment, Zimmie, old chap, that I include you in the gang I'd like to see sitting on that pile of shells over there."

The man at the window turned, and smiled affably.

"Thanks, old man. Being, as you say, as good an American as any of you, I may be permitted to return the compliment. I shouldn't like to see Mrs. Carstairs sitting on that pile of shells."

Carstairs flushed. An angry light leaped to his eyes, but it was banished almost instantly. Mrs. Carstairs herself replied.

"I can't imagine anything more distasteful," she drawled.

"But Mrs. Carstairs isn't a German," put in little Mr. Cribbs, somewhat tartly for him.

"You're always saying the wrong thing, Cribbs,—or the right thing at the wrong time," said Carstairs. "Mrs. Carstairs is not German. Her father and mother were, however. She's in the same fix as Zimmerlein, and she isn't ashamed of it any more than Zimmie is,"

"I had—er—no idea that Mrs. Carstairs was—"

"What were your parents, Mr. Cribbs?" asked Mrs. Carstairs calmly.

"Nebraskans," said Cribbs, stiffening. "My grandfather was a Welshman."

"And so you have absolutely nothing to reproach yourself with," said she. "How fortunate in these days."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Carstairs, if I—"

"I was born in the United States," she said, without a trace of annoyance, "but not in Nebraska. You have the advantage of me there, I fear. And of poor Mr. Zimmerlein, too. He was born in Boston,—were you not?"

"In Marlborough Street," said Zimmerlein, drily. "My father was Irish, as you can tell by me name, and me poor mither was Irish too. Her name before marriage was Krausshof."

Mr. Cribbs's face was scarlet. To cover his confusion, he wedged his way a little closer to the windows and glared at the dull red light that crept slowly out of the darkness off to the south. The crests of the hills were beginning

to take shape against a background shot with crimson.

"Just the same," he muttered, "I'd like to see the men who are responsible for that fire over there burning in hell."

"I think we can agree on that point, at least, Mr. Cribbs," said Zimmerlein, with dignity.

"Who wants to run over there with me in my car?" cried the other, excitedly. "It's only a few miles, and it must be a wonderful sight. I can take six or seven—"

"Stay where you are, Cribbs," said Carstairs sharply. "When those shells begin to go off—Why, man alive, there's never been anything on the French front that could hold a candle to it. Don't forget what happened when Black Tom pier was blown up. Pray do not be alarmed, ladies. There isn't the slightest danger here. The shells they are making at the Reynolds plant are comparatively small. We're safely out of range."

"What size shells were they making, Carstairs?" inquired one of the men.

"Three inch, I believe—and smaller. A lot

of machine-gun ammunition, too. Cox, the general manager, dined with us the other night. He talked a little too freely, I thought,—didn't you, Frieda?"

"He boasted, if that is what you mean," said Mrs. Carstairs.

"Well," said a big, red-faced man on the outer edge of the group, "it's time some of these blooming fools learned how to keep their mouths shut. The country's full of spies,—running over with 'em. You never know when you're talking to one."

Silence followed his remark. For some time they all stood watching the crimson cloud in the distance, an ever-changing, pulsing shadow that throbbed to the temper of the wind.

They represented the reluctant element of a large company that had spent the afternoon and early evening at the Black Downs Country Club,—the element that is always reluctant to go home. There had been many intimate little dinner parties during the evening. New York was twenty miles or more away, and there was the Hudson in between. The clock above the

huge fireplace had struck eleven a minute or two before the first explosion took place. Chauffeurs in the club-garage were sullenly cursing their employers. All but two or three waiters had gone off to the railway station not far away, and the musicians had made the 10:30 up-train. Peter, the steward, lived on the premises with the chef and several house employés.

The late-staying guests were clad in sport clothes, rough and warm and smart,—for it was one of the smartest clubs in the Metropolitan district.

A fierce October gale was whining, cold and bitter and relentless, across the uplands; storm-warnings had gone out from the Weather Bureau; coast-wise vessels were scurrying for harbours and farmers all over the land had made snug their livestock against the uncertain elements.

If it turned out to be true that the vast Reynolds munitions plant had been blown up, the plotters could not have chosen a more auspicious night for their enterprise. No human force could combat the flames on a night like this;

caught on the wings of the wind there would be no stopping them until the ashes of ruin lay wet and sodden where the flight had begun.

Mrs. Carstairs was the first to turn away from the windows. She shuddered a little. A pretty, nervous young wife sidled up to her, and laid a trembling hand on her arm.

“Wouldn’t it be dreadful if there were a lot of people at work over there when—when it happened?” she cried, in a tense, strained voice. “Just think of it.”

“Don’t think about it, Alice dear. Think of what they are going through in France and Belgium.”

“But we really aren’t fighting them yet,” went on the other, plaintively. “Why should they blow up our factories? Oh, these dreadful, terrible Germans.” Then suddenly, in confusion: “I—I beg your pardon.”

Mrs. Carstairs smiled pleasantly. “That’s all right, my dear. A good many of us suffer for the sins of the fathers. Besides, we are in the war, and have been for six months or more.”

"We all hate the Kaiser, don't we?" pleaded the younger woman.

Mrs. Carstairs pressed her arm. "None more so than those of us whose parents left Germany to escape such as he."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Beg pardon," said Peter the steward, at Mrs. Carstairs' elbow. "I think this is yours. You dropped it just now."

"Thank you, Peter," said she, taking the crumpled handkerchief he handed her. "I shan't drop it again," she went on, smiling as she stuffed it securely in the gold mesh bag she was carrying.

"Peter is such a splendid man, isn't he?" said her young companion, lowering her voice. "So much more willing and agreeable than old Crosby. We're all so glad the change was made."

"He is most efficient," said Mrs. Carstairs.

The admirable Peter approached Mr. Carstairs and Zimmerlein, who were pouring drinks for themselves at the table.

"Preparedness is the word of the hour," Car-

stairs was saying, as he raised his glass. "It's a long, cold ride home."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, shall I call up Central at Bushleigh and see if they can give us any news?" asked Peter.

"You might try. I don't believe you can get a connection, however. Everything must be knocked galley-west over on that side of the ridge."

"I think your wife is signalling you, Carstairs," said Zimmerlein, looking over the other's shoulder.

Carstairs tossed off the contents of the glass, and reached out his hand for the check. Zimmerlein already had it in his fingers.

"I'll sign it, old chap," he said. "Give me your pencil, Peter."

"None of that, Zimmie. I ordered the—"

"Run along, old man, your wife— He's coming, Mrs. Carstairs," called out Zimmerlein.

As Carstairs turned away, Zimmerlein scratched his name across the check, and handed it back to the steward.

"Under no circumstances are you to call up

Bushleigh," fell in low, distinct tones from his lips. "Do you understand?"

Peter's hand shook. His face was livid.

"Yes, sir," he muttered. "What shall I say to Mr. Carstairs?"

"Say that no one answers," said the other, and walked away.

The company had recovered its collective and individual power of speech. Every one was talking,—loudly, excitedly, and in some cases violently. Some were excoriating the Germans, others were bitterly criticizing the Government for its over-tenderness, and still others were blaming themselves for not taking the law in their own hands and making short work of the "soap-boxers," the "pacifists," and the "obstructionists." Little Mr. Cribbs was the most violent of them all. He was for organizing the old-time Vigilantes, once so efficacious in the Far West, and equipping them with guns and ropes and plenty of tar and feathers.

"Nothing would please me more than to lead such a gang," he proclaimed. "Lead 'em right

into these foul nests where— What's that, Judge?"

"I repeat—How old are you, Cribbs?"

"Oh, I guess I'm old enough to shoot a gun, or pull a rope or carry a bucket of tar," retorted the young man.

"I'll put it the other way. How young are you?"

"I'm twenty-nine."

"I see. And how did you escape the draft?"

"They haven't reached my number yet," said Mr. Cribbs, with dignity.

"Well, that's good. There's still hope," said the Judge, grimly. "They need just such fire-eaters as you over there in France with Pershing."

Carstairs turned to Zimmerlein, who was being helped into his fur-coat by one of the attendants.

"Can't we take you to the city, Zimmerlein? There is plenty of room in the car."

"No, thank you, Carstairs. I'm going in by train. Mr. and Mrs. Prior will drop me at the

station. Good night. Oh, here's Peter. What did you hear?"

"I could get no answer, Mr. Zimmerlein," said the steward steadily. "Wires may be down, sir."

"Good night, Mrs. Carstairs." Zimmerlein held out his hand. She hesitated an instant, and then took it. Her gaze was fixed, as if fascinated, on his dark, steady eyes.

CHAPTER II

HOARSE, raucous-voiced newsboys were crying the "extras" soon after midnight. They were doing a thriving business. The destruction of the great Reynolds plant, more spectacular and more appalling than any previous deed perpetrated by the secret enemies of the American people, was to drive even the most sanguine and indifferent citizen to a full realization of the peril that stalked him and his fellow-man throughout the land. Complacent security was at last to sustain a shock it could not afford to scorn. Up there in the hills of Jersey a bombardment had taken place that rivalled in violence, if not in human toll, the most vivid descriptions of shell-carnage on the dripping fronts of France.

Huge but vague headlines screamed into the faces of quick-breathing men and wide-eyed women the first details of the great disaster across the River.

Night-farers, threading the streets, paused in

their round of pleasure to gulp down the bitter thing that came up into their throats—a sick thing called Fear. From nearly every doorway in the city, some one issued forth, bleak-eyed and anxious, to hail the scurrying newsboys. The distant roar of the shells had roused the millions in Manhattan; windows rattled, the frailer dwellings rocked on thin foundations. It was not until the clash of heavy artillery swept up to the city on the wind from the west that the serene, contemptuous denizens of the greatest city in the world cast off their mask of indifference and rose as one person to ask the vital question: Are the U-Boats in the Harbour at last?

An elderly man, two women, and a sallow-faced man of thirty sat by the windows at the top of a lofty apartment building on the Upper West Side. For an hour they had been sitting there, listening, and looking always to the west, out over the dark and sombre Hudson. Father, mother, daughter and son. The first explosion jarred the great building in which they were securely housed.

“Ah!” sighed the old man, and it was a sigh of relief, of satisfaction. The others turned to him and smiled for the first time in hours. The tension was over.

Farther down-town two men in one of the big hotels silently shook hands, bade each other a friendly good-night for the benefit of chance observers, and went off to bed. The waiting was over.

Two night watchmen met in front of one of the biggest office buildings in New York, within hearing of the bells of Trinity and almost within sound of the sobbing waters of the Bay. Their faces, rendered almost invisible behind the great collars that protected them from the shrill winds coming up the canyons from the sea, were tense and drawn and white, but their eyes glittered brightly, fiercely, in the darkness. They too had been waiting.

In a dingy apartment in Harlem, three shifty-eyed, nervous men, and a pallid, tired, frightened woman rose suddenly from the lethargy of suspense and grinned evilly, not at each other but at the rattling, dilapidated window

looking westward across the sagging roofs of the squalid district. One of the men stretched forth a quivering hand and, with a hoarse laugh of exultation, seized in his fingers a strange, crudely shaped metallic object that stood on the table nearby. He lifted it to his lips and kissed it! Then he put it down, carefully, gingerly,—with something like fear in his eyes. Scraps of tin, pieces of iron and steel, strands of wire, wads of cotton and waste, and an odd assortment of tools littered the table. Harmless appearing cans, and bottles, and dirty packages, with a mortar and pestle, a small chemist's scales, funnels and graduates stood in innocent array along a shelf attached to the wall, guarded,—so it seemed,—by sinister looking tubes and retorts.

The woman, her eyes gleaming with a malevolent joy that contrasted strangely with the dread that had been in them a moment before, lifted her clenched hands and hissed out a single word:

“Christ!”

They, too, had been waiting.

Thousands there were in the great city whose eyes glistened that night,—thousands who had not been waiting, for they knew nothing of the secret that lay secure and safe in the breasts of the few who were allowed to strike. Thousands who rejoiced, for they knew that a great and glorious deed had been done! They only knew that devastation had fallen somewhere with appalling force,—it mattered not to them where, so long as it had fallen in its appointed place!

Many a glass, many a stein, was raised in stealthy tribute to the hand that had rocked the city of New York! And in the darkness of the night they hid their gloating faces, and whispered a song without melody.

Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief! In spirit, at least, they touched hands and thrilled with a common exaltation!

It was after one o'clock when the Carstairs' motor crept out of the ferry-house at 130th Street, and whirled up the hill toward the Drive. A rough-looking individual who loitered unmo-

lested in the lee of the ferry-house, peered intently at the number of the car as it passed, and jotted it down in a little book. He noted in the same way the license numbers of other automobiles. When he was relieved hours afterward, he had in his little book the number of every car that came in from Jersey between half past eleven at night and seven o'clock in the morning. It was not his duty to stop or question the occupants of these cars. He was merely exercising the function of the mysterious Secret Eyes of the United States Government.

Mr. and Mrs. Carstairs were admitted to their Park Avenue apartment by a tall, beautiful girl, who threw open the door the instant the elevator stopped at the floor.

"Thank goodness!" she cried, a vibrant note of relief in her voice "We were so dreadfully—"

"What are you doing up, Louise?" cried Mrs. Carstairs quickly. Her husband frowned, as with annoyance.

"Where is Hodges?" he demanded. He

stood stock-still for a moment before following his wife into the foyer.

“He went out some time ago to get an ‘extra.’ The boys were in the street calling new ones. He asked if he might go out. How—how terrible it is, Uncle Davvy. And it was so near the Club, I—I—oh, I was dreadfully worried. The papers say the shells fell miles away—Why, I couldn’t go to bed, Aunt Frieda. We have been trying for hours to get the Club on the telephone.” She was assisting Mrs. Carstairs in removing her rich chinchilla coat. Carstairs studied the girl’s white face with considerable anxiety as he threw off his own fur coat. The worried frown deepened.

“Could you hear the explosions over here, Louise?” he asked.

“Hear them? Why, Uncle dear, we all thought the city was being bombarded by war-ships in the river, it sounded so near and so terrible. Alfie and I ran to the windows. It was just after eleven, I think. He called up Central at once, but the girl was so frightened

she could hardly speak. She didn't know what had happened, but she was sure the Germans were destroying the city. She said another girl had seen the Zeppelins. Alfie went out at once. Oh, dear, I am so glad you are home. I was so anxious—"

"My dear child, you should be in bed," began her uncle, taking her hand in his. He laid his other hand against her cheek, and was relieved to find it cool. "You say Alfred went out—at eleven?"

"A few minutes after eleven. He waited until all the noise had ceased. I assured him I was not the least bit nervous. He had been working so hard all evening in your study over those stupid physics."

"And he hasn't returned? Confound him, he shouldn't have gone off and left you all alone here for two solid hours—"

"Don't be angry with him, Uncle Davvy," pleaded the girl. "He was so excited, poor boy, he simply couldn't sit here without knowing what had happened. Besides, Hodges and two of the maids were up,—so I wasn't all

alone." She followed them into the brilliantly lighted drawing-room. "Here are the first extras. The doorman sent them up to me."

Mrs. Carstairs dropped heavily into a chair. Her face was very white.

"How terrible," she murmured, glancing at the huge headlines.

"I say, Frieda," exclaimed her husband; "it's been too much for you. A drop of brandy, my dear,—"

"Nothing, thank you, Davenport. I am quite all right. The shock, you know. We were so near the place, Louise,—don't you see? Really, it was appalling."

"What beasts! What inhuman beasts they are!" cried the girl, in a sort of frenzy. "They ought to be burned alive,—burned and tortured for hours. The last extra says that the number of dead and mutilated is beyond—"

"Now, now!" said Carstairs, gently. "Don't excite yourself, child. It isn't good for you. You've been too ill, my dear. Run along to bed, there's a sensible girl. We'll have all the details by tomorrow,—and, believe me, things

won't be as bad as they seem tonight. It's always the case, you know. And you, too, Frieda,—get to bed. Your nerves are all shot to pieces,—and I'm not surprised. I will wait for—”

A key grated in the door.

“Here he is now. Hello, Alfred,—what's the latest?”

His son came into the room without removing his overcoat or hat. His dark eyes, wet from the sharp wind without, sought his mother's face.

“Are you all right, Mother? I've been horribly worried—thank the Lord! It's a relief to see that smile! You're all right? Sure?”

He kissed his mother quickly, feverishly. She put her arm around his neck and murmured in his ear.

“I am frightfully upset, of course, dear. Who wouldn't be?”

He stood off and looked long and intently into her eyes. Then he straightened up and spoke to his father.

“I might have known you wouldn't let any-

thing happen to her, sir. But I was horribly worried, just the same. Those beastly shells went everywhere, they say. The Club must have been—”

“Nowhere near the Club, so far as I know,” said his father cheerfully. “We were all perfectly safe. Have they made any arrests? Of course, it wasn’t accidental.”

“I’ve been downtown, around the newspaper offices,” said the young man, throwing his coat and hat on a chair. “There are all sorts of wild stories. People are talking about lynchings, and all that sort of rot. Nothing like that ever happens, though. We do a lot of talking, and that’s all. It all blows over as soon as the excitement dies down. That’s the trouble with us Americans.”

“America will wake up one of these days, Alfred,” said his father slowly, “and when she does, there will be worse things than lynchings to talk about.”

“Are your feet cold, Alfred dear?” inquired his mother, a note of anxiety in her voice. “You’ve been tramping about the streets, and

—You must have a hot water bottle when you go to bed. There is so much pneumonia—”

“Always mothering me, aren’t you, good Frieda?” he said, lovingly. He pronounced it as if it were Friday. It was his pet name for her in the bosom of the family. “Warm as toast,” he added. He turned to Louise. “You didn’t mind my running away and leaving you, did you, Louise?”

“Not a bit, Alfie. I tried to get Derrol on the long distance, but they said at the Camp it was impossible to call him unless the message was very important. I—I—so I asked the man if there had been any kind of an accident out there and he said no, there hadn’t. I—asked him if Captain Steele was in bed, and he said he should hope so. Don’t laugh, Alfie! I know it was silly, but—but it *might* have been an ammunition depot or something at the Camp. We didn’t know—”

“Ammunition, your granny! They haven’t sufficient ammunition in that Camp,—or in any of ’em, for that matter,—to make a noise loud enough to be heard across the street. How can

you expect me to keep a straight face when you suggest an *explosion* in an Army Camp?"

"It's high time we stopped talking about explosions and went to bed," said Carstairs, arising. He put his arm across his wife's shoulders. "We've had all the explosions we can stand for one night, haven't we, dear? Come along, everybody. Off with you!"

"Hodges should be back any moment with the latest 'extra,' " said Louise. "Can't we wait just a few minutes, Uncle Davvy? He has been gone over an hour."

The telephone bell in Mr. Carstairs' study rang. So taut were the nerves of the four persons in the adjoining room that they started violently. They looked at each other in some perplexity.

"Probably Hodges," said Alfred, after a moment. "Shall I go, dad?"

"See who it is," said Carstairs.

"Wrong number, more than likely," said his wife, wearily. "Central has been unusually annoying of late. It happens several times every day. The service is atrocious."

Young Carstairs went into the study and snatched up the receiver. Moved by a common impulse, the others followed him into the room, the face of each expressing not only curiosity but a certain alarm.

“Yes, this is Mr. Carstairs’ residence. . . . What? . . . All right.” He sat down on the edge of the library table and turned to the others. “Must be long distance. They’re getting somebody.”

Alfred Carstairs was a tall, well-built young fellow of twenty. He bore a most remarkable, though perhaps not singular, resemblance to his mother. His eyes were dark, his thick hair a dead black, growing low on his forehead. The lips were full and red, with a whimsical curve at the corners denoting not merely good humour but a certain contempt for seriousness in others. He was handsome in a strong, bold way despite a strangely colourless complexion,—a complexion that may be described as pasty, for want of a nobler word. His voice was deep, with the guttural harshness of youth; loud, unmusical, not yet fixed by the processes of maturity. A

big, dominant, vital boy making the last turn before stepping into full manhood. He was his mother's son,—his mother's boy.

His father, a Harvard man, had been thwarted in his desire to have his son follow him through the historic halls at Cambridge,—as he had followed his own father and his grandfather.

Sentiment was not a part of Alfred's make-up. He supported his mother when it came to the college selection. Together they agreed upon Columbia. She frankly admitted her selfishness in wanting to keep her boy at home, but found other and less sincere arguments in the protracted discussions that took place with her husband. She fought Harvard because it was not democratic, because it bred snobbishness and contempt, because it deprived the youth of this practical age of the breadth of vision necessary to success among men who put ability before sentiment and a superficial distinction. She urged Columbia because it was democratic, pulsating, practical.

In the end, Carstairs gave in. He wanted to

be fair to both of them. But he was not deceived. He knew that her chief reason, though spoken softly and with almost pathetic simplicity, was that she could not bear the separation from the boy she loved so fiercely, so devotedly. He was not so sure that filial love entered into Alfred's calculations. If the situation had been reversed, he was confident,—or reasonably so,—that Alfred would have chosen Harvard.

He had the strange, unhappy conviction that his son opposed him in this, as in countless other instances, through sheer perversity. His mother's authority always had been supreme. She had exercised it with an iron-handed firmness that not only surprised but gratified the father, who knew so well the tender affection she had for her child. Her word was law. Alfred seldom if ever questioned it, even as a small and decidedly self-willed lad. Paradoxically, she both indulged and disciplined him by means of the same consuming force: her mother-love.

On the other hand, Carstairs,—a firm and

positive character,—received the scantiest consideration from the boy on the rare occasions when he felt it necessary to employ paternal measures. Alfred either sulked or openly defied him. Always the mother stepped into the breach. She never temporized. She either promptly supported the father's demand or opposed it. No matter which point of view she took, the youngster invariably succumbed. In plain words, it was *her* command that he obeyed and not his father's.

As time went on, Carstairs came to recognize the resistless combination that opposed him, and, while the realization was far from comforting, his common-sense ordered him to accept the situation, especially as nothing could be clearer than the fact that she was bringing her son up with the most rigid regard for his future. She had her eyes set far ahead; she was seeing him always as a man and not as a boy. That much, at least, Carstairs conceded, and was more proud of her than he cared to admit, even to himself. He watched the sturdy, splendid, earnest development of his boy un-

der the influence of a force stronger than any he could have exercised.

Sometimes he wondered if it was the German in her that made for the rather unusual strength which so rarely rises above the weakness of a mother's pity. Once he laughingly had inquired what she would have done had their child been born a girl.

"I should have been content to let *you* bring her up," said she, with a twinkle in her eye.

While she was resolute, almost unyielding in regard to her growing son, her attitude toward her husband was in all other respects amazingly free from assertiveness or arrogance. On the contrary, she was submissive almost to the point of humility. He was her man. He was her law. A simple, unwavering respect for his strength, his position, his authority in the home of which he was the head, rendered her incapable of opposing his slightest wish. An odd timidity, singularly out of keeping with her physical as well as her mental endowments, surrounded her with that pleasing and,—to all men,—gratifying atmosphere of femininity so

dear to the heart of every lord and master. She made him comfortable.

And she was, despite her social activities, a good and capable house-wife,—one of the old-fashioned kind who thinks first of her man's comfort and, although in this instance it was not demanded, of his purse. He was her man; it was her duty to serve him.

As her boy merged swiftly,—almost abruptly into manhood,—her long-maintained grip of iron relaxed. Carstairs, noting the change, was puzzled. He was a long time in arriving at the solution. It was very simple after all: she merely had admitted another *man* into her calculations. Her boy had become a man,—a strong, dominant man,—and she was ready, even willing, to relinquish the temporary power she had exerted over him.

She was no longer free to command. Alfred had come into his own. He was a man. She was proud of him. The time had come for her to be humble in the light of his glory, and she was content to lay aside the authority with which she had cloaked her love and ambition for

so long. *His* word had become her law. She had two men in her family now. Slowly but surely she was giving them to understand that she was their woman, and that she knew her place. She had been for twenty-two years the wife of one of them, and for twenty years the mother of the other.

Carstairs was rich. He was a man of affairs, a man of power and distinction in the councils of that exalted class known as the leaders of finance. He represented one of the soundest vertebræ in the back-bone of the nation in these times of war. With a loyalty that incurred a tremendous amount of self-sacrifice, he had offered all of his vital energy, all of his heart, to the cause of the people. He was on many boards, he was in touch with all the great enterprises that worked for the comfort, the support and the encouragement of those who went forth to give their lives if need be in the turmoil of war. Davenport Carstairs stood for all that was fine and strong in practical idealism, which, after all, is the basis of all things truly American.



CARSTAIRS TOOK UP THE RECEIVER. HE REALIZED THAT HIS HAND TREMBLED. HE HAD NEVER KNOWN IT TO HAPPEN BEFORE, EVEN IN MOMENTS OF GREAT STRESS.

As he stood inside the study door, watching with some intensity the face of his son, he was suddenly conscious of a feeling of dread, not associated with the recent grave event, but something new that was creeping, as it were, along the wire that reached its end in the receiver glued to Alfred's ear. He glanced at his wife. She suddenly exhaled the breath she was holding and smiled faintly into his concerned eyes.

"Yes,—” said Alfred, impatiently, after a long pause,—“Yes, this is Mr. Carstairs' home. . . . I am his son. . . . What? . . . Yes, he's here, but can't you give me the message? . . . Who are you? . . . What? . . . Certainly I'll call him, but . . . Here, father; it's some one who insists on speaking to you personally.”

He set the receiver down on the table with a sharp bang, and straightened up to his full height as if resenting an indignity.

Carstairs took up the receiver. He realized that his hand trembled. He had never known it to happen before, even in moments of great stress.

“Yes, this is Davenport Carstairs. Who are you, please?” He started slightly at the crisp, business-like reply. “Bellevue Hospital? Police surgeon— What? Just a moment, please. Now, go ahead.” He had seated himself in the great library chair at the end of the table. “Yes; my butler’s name is Hodges. . . . An Englishman. . . . What? . . . What has happened, officer? . . . Good God! . . . I— Why, certainly, I shall come down at once if necessary. I—can identify him, of course. . . . Yes, tomorrow morning will suit me better. . . . Hold the wire a moment, please.”

He turned to the listeners. “Hodges has been injured by an automobile,” he said quietly. “I gather he is unconscious. You are nervous and upset, Frieda, so you’d better retire. Leave this to—”

“Is he dead, Davenport?” she asked in a low horror-struck voice.

“Run along, Louise,—skip off to bed. I’ll get the details and tell you in the morning.”

The girl swayed slightly. Her eyes were wide with anguish.

“I—I shouldn’t have allowed him to go out,” she stammered. “I—Oh, Uncle Davvy!”

Mrs. Carstairs put her arm about the girl’s waist and led her from the room. Carstairs looked up at his son.

“I guess you can stand it, Alfred. He’s dead. Instantly killed.” He spoke into the transmitter. “Tell me how it happened, please.”

He hung up the receiver a moment or two later.

“Run down at the corner of Madison Avenue and 48th Street. There were two witnesses, and both say that he was standing in the street waiting for a car. The automobile was going forty miles an hour. He never knew what hit him. Poor devil! Have you ever heard him mention his family, Alfred? We must notify some one, of course.”

“No, sir,” said his son. “He seemed a quiet sort. The other servants may know. Mother says his references were of the highest order,—that’s all I know. What a terrible thing to have—”

“We must not worry your mother with this tonight, my son. She’s had enough for today.”

“I should say so,” exclaimed Alfred, clenching his hands. He choked up, and said no more.

CHAPTER III

PAUL ZIMMERLEIN was a mining engineer. His offices were off Fifth Avenue, somewhere above 34th Street. He stood well in his profession, he stood high as a citizen. No one questioned his integrity, his ability or his loyalty. He was a good American. At least, a great many good Americans said he was, which amounts to the same thing.

One entered his offices through a small ante-chamber, where a young woman at the telephone-desk made perfunctory inquiries, but always in a crisp, business-like manner. She was the first cog in a smooth-running piece of machinery. Her name was Mildred,—Mildred Agnew, and she had a brother in the British navy, from whom she received infrequent letters of a most unilluminating character,—letters omitting date, place and ship: in which he said he was well and happy and hoped to God

the Germans would come out into the open to see what the weather was like.

If your business was important, or you had an appointment, you would be conducted by a smart-looking boy into a rather imposing corner room, from whose windows you could look down fourteen storeys to the roof of an eight storey building below. Presently you would be invited into Mr. Zimmerlein's private office. Beyond this snug little office was the drafting room, where several actively studious men of various ages bent over blue-prints and estimate sheets.

They all appeared to be good, industrious Americans; you could see them quite plainly through the glass upper half of the intervening door.

You were at once aware of an impression that this was not the place to come if you were engaged in a secret or shady enterprise,—such as the exploitation of a “get-rich-quick” mining proposition or any kindred opening for the unwary. You always said to yourself that you

felt quite safe in the hands of Mr. Paul Zimmerlein,—and his associates.

You went about saying that you wished all men with German blood in them were like Mr. Paul Zimmerlein. He became one of your pet hobbies. You invariably referred to him when you declared that you knew at least one man of German extraction who was “absolutely on the level,” and you would unhesitatingly go about proving it if any one had the effrontery to even discuss the point with you. All you would have to do would be to point in triumph to the men who were his associates professionally, commercially and socially. The list would include many of the really significant figures in public life. Among them, for instance, you would mention several United States senators, at least two gentlemen high up in Administrative circles, practically all of the big financiers, certain members of the English Cabinet, and,—in a pinch,—the presidents of three South American Republics. He was on record as being violently opposed to Von Bernstorff,—indeed, he had

said such bitter and violent things about the ex-ambassador that even the most conservative German-Americans,—those who actually were opposed to the Kaiser and his policies,—felt that he was going much too far.

He was about forty years of age, tall and powerfully built, with surprisingly mobile features for one whose face at a glance suggested heaviness and stolidity. His smile was ever ready and genial; his manner courtly; his eyes, which were honest and unwavering, had something sprightly in them that invited confidence and comradeship. The thick, dark hair was touched with grey at the temples, and there was a deep scar on his left cheek, received—not in a German university, as you might suppose,—but during a fierce and sanguinary encounter with Yaqui Indians in northern Mexico,—a tragedy which cost the lives of several of his companions and brought from the people of the United States a demand that the government take drastic action in the matter. Altogether, a prepossessing, substantial figure of a man, with a delightful personality.

Shortly before noon on the day following the destruction of the great Reynolds plant by alien plotters, Zimmerlein was seated in his office, awaiting the arrival of two well-known New York merchants and a gentleman from Brazil. Half-a-dozen morning newspapers, with their sinister head-lines, lay upon his desk, neatly folded and stacked with grave orderliness. He had read them, and was lolling back in his big leather chair with a faint smile on his lips, and a far-off, frowning expression in his eyes.

The gentleman from Brazil came first.

"Sit down," said Zimmerlein curtly. "They will be here in a few minutes."

"That was a terrible thing last night, Zimmerlein," said the Brazilian, nervously glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the drafting-room.

Zimmerlein made no response. He resumed his set, faraway expression, his gaze directed at the upper sash of the broad, high window, beyond which a distant, grey cloud glided slowly across a blue-white sky.

"Most shocking," went on the Brazilian, after a moment. He had not removed his overcoat. The fur collar was still fastened closely about his neck.

Zimmerlein turned toward his visitor.

"Take off your coat, Riaz. Make yourself comfortable," he said, affably. "Help yourself to a cigar."

Riaz,—Sebastian Riaz, diamond merchant and mine-owner of Rio Janeiro,—removed his coat. "The appointment was for eleven o'clock, Mr. Zimmerlein," he said, looking at his watch. "They are late. It is nearly twelve."

"Permit me to remind you that you also were late. Everything is in order, my dear sir. The deal may be closed in ten minutes,—or even less time than that,—if there is no further haggling on your part." He closed one eye slowly. "The contracts, the estimates, the plans are ready. Nothing is lacking except the signatures."

"Just as they have been ready for nearly two months," observed Riaz, also closing an eye.

"All ready—except the signatures and the *date*."

"We shall date them,—and sign them,—in our extremity," said Zimmerlein, going to a safe which stood invitingly open in a corner of the room. He removed a small but important-looking package of papers and tossed them carelessly on the table. "Such as a visit from on high," he added, with a smile.

"Yes," said Riaz, and sat down again, frowning.

"We shall never be caught napping. Here are the papers, as they would say in the melodrama. By the way, do you go in for melodrama in Rio? Or are you above that form of amusement?"

Riaz remained unsmiling. "It is not as popular with us as it is with you Americans," said he. "We see through it too readily."

Zimmerlein unfolded and spread out several of the documents. "There!" he said. "Let him come who will. Under the sharpest eyes in America you may transfer property valued at ten millions, and no one will question the valid-

ity of the transaction. You see, my dear Riaz, you *do* own these mines and they are exactly what they are represented to be. To save their lives, they can't go behind the facts. And the purchasers are prepared to hand over the cash at any moment. Could anything be simpler?"

"Nothing," said the Brazilian, sententiously,—"except the damned little slip that sometimes comes between the cup and the lip."

"Ah, but our cup is always at the lip," said Zimmerlein buoyantly. "Don't be a kill-joy, old chap."

"All well and good, Zimmerlein, unless some one's lip splits." He shot an uneasy glance into the drafting-room.

"This is the most perfect machine in the world, Riaz. Have no fear. Every cog has been tested and is of the staunchest steel. Every part has been put in its proper place by the greatest genius alive."

"I don't have to remind you that a few cogs in the Foreign office have slipped badly."

The door opened to admit two brisk, prosperous-looking gentlemen.

"I fear we are late," said the foremost. "It was unavoidable, I assure you."

"It is never too late," said Zimmerlein, advancing to shake hands with the new-comers. Then, while they were laying aside their overcoats, he stepped swiftly to the door of the drafting-room and called out: "Thorsensel! Come here, please. And you also, Martin."

One of the men in the outer room, laid down the instrument with which he was working over a huge blue-print; with a sigh of resignation, he removed his green eye-shield, smoothed out his wrinkled alpaca coat, and came slowly, diffidently into the private office. He was a middle-aged, stoop-shouldered, sunken-faced man, with a drooping moustache that lacked not only in pride but in colour as well. The ends were gnawed and scraggly, and there were cigarette stains along the uneven edges. Otherwise, this sickly adornment was straw-coloured. Thick spectacles enlarged his almost expressionless blue eyes; as one looked straight into them, the eyeballs seemed to be twice the normal size.

This man was John Thorsensel, civil engineer, American—born of Norwegian parentage, graduate of one of the greatest engineering universities in the country. You would go many a league before encountering a more unimposing, commonplace person,—and yet here was the most astute secret servant in the German Kaiser's vast establishment. Not Zimmerlein, nor Riaz, nor any of the important-looking individuals who skulked behind respectable names, not one of them was the head and heart of the sinister, far-reaching octopus that spread its slimy influence across the United States of America. John Thorsensel, an insignificant toiler, was the master-mind, the arch-conspirator. It was his hand that rested on the key, his thought that covered everything, his infernal ingenuity that confounded the shrewdest minds on this side of the Atlantic. The last man in the world to be suspected,—such was John Thorsensel, bad angel.

Martin, the other man called to the conference, was a brisk young fellow who left a roll-top desk in the corner of the drafting-room

and presented himself with stenographer's note-book and pencil. It is worthy of mention that this book already contained the stenographic notes of the preliminary verbal discussion between the three principals to a transaction involving the sale of great mining properties in South America. Everything was perfectly prepared, even to the abrupt termination of the conference that would come naturally in case agents of the government took it into their heads to appear. Martin's notes, jotted down weeks beforehand, broke off in the most natural way. There is no telling how many times he had sat with the note-book on his knee in just such a conference as this, without adding a single word to what already appeared on the pages. It is safe to say, however, that the notes were never transcribed.

It would have been impossible to find in the offices of Paul Zimmerlein a single incriminating line, or article, or suggestion of either,—for the simple reason that no such thing existed. Nothing ever appeared in tangible form. Visitors were always welcome.

Once and once only had the slightest symptom of a creak appeared in the well-ordered machine. One man was suspected,—merely suspected. There was no actual evidence against him in the hands of the conspirators, but the fact that a *possibility* existed was enough for them. He was an ordinary window-washer who came twice a month to the office,—not oftener,—in his regular round of the building. Always it was the same man who washed Zimmerlein's windows, and always a few words passed between him and the engineer,—words that no one else heard. One day the device to which his safety belt was attached gave way and he fell fourteen storeys to the roof of the building below. He was to be trusted after that.

The six men gathered in the office of Mr. Paul Zimmerlein formed a combination of intelligence, wealth, energy and evil sufficient to satisfy even the most exacting of masters. Here were the shrewdest, the safest, the soundest agents of the cruelest system in all the world. No small, half-hearted undertaking in frightfulness ever grew out of their deliberations; no

sporadic, clumsy botch in the shape of needless violence; no crazy, fore-doomed project; no mistakes. They were the *big* men,—the men who did the *big* things.

Out of every nook and cranny in the land oozed constant and reliable reports from the most trustworthy sources, from agents of both sexes; sly, secret, mysterious forces supplied them with facts that no man was supposed to know; the magic of the Far East was surpassed by these wizards who came not out of Egypt but from commonplace, unromantic circles in the Occident.

The departures of vessels from every port, the nature of their cargoes; the sailings of transports and the number of troops; the conditions in all the munitions plants and cantonments; the state of mind of the millions of workers and idlers throughout the land; the very *thoughts* of the people in control of the country's affairs, it would seem. Everything! Everything was known to this resourceful clique. They were the backbone of the unrest, the uneasiness, the scepticism that swept the

land. Their agents, loyal unto death, were everywhere. The secrets of sea, land and air were theirs. They could buy,—buy anything they wanted with the wealth that was theirs for the asking.

Information came to them and commands were issued by them in a thousand different ways, but never in circumstances that invited suspicion. A casual meeting on the street; the passing of the time of day; a hand-shake in restaurant or club; brief and seemingly innocuous exchanges of pleasantries at the theatre; perfunctory contact with stenographers, employés, and customers in the course of a day; thus, under the eyes of all observers the secret word was given and received. With these men no word was written, no visible message was exchanged. And the German language was never spoken.

“Trains from the West are all late,” said one of the late arrivals, an elderly, grey-whiskered man. “Rhine did not get in from Chicago till nearly eleven. It was imperative that I should see him before coming here, gentlemen.”

"Well?" demanded Thorsensel.

"He says the time is not yet ripe. He has studied the situation, has had reports from many sources. It is too soon. A partial success would be far worse than a total failure. He is very positive."

"All right," said Thorsensel crisply. The matter was thus summarily disposed of. He did not believe in wasting time or words. He turned, with a questioning look, to the other prosperous-looking citizen.

"He died very suddenly last night," said that worthy, responding to the unspoken query.

Thorsensel nodded his head with lively satisfaction.

"Anything else?"

"That young fellow we were speaking of the other day dropped in at the store this morning. He appears to be interested in a very good-looking shop-girl on the second floor. I don't know how many pairs of gloves he has bought of her in the past few weeks."

"I know, I know," impatiently. "Miss Group."

"We're making no mistake about this fellow, are we, Elberon?" demanded Zimmerlein.

"No,—absolutely no. I'll stake my life on him."

"Go on," said Thorsensel curtly.

"The British and French Commission sails tomorrow on the *Elston*. There is no question about it. He had it from the same source that reported their arrival last month."

"Martin, see that this information is on the wing immediately," said Thorsensel. "We may accept it as authentic."

"I should think we might," said Zimmerlein, "when you stop to consider that no one in the United States or England is supposed to know, even now, that this Commission is in the country,—that is, no one outside a very restricted circle in Washington. I've never known anything to be kept so completely under cover. Some of the biggest men in France and England land on our shores, transact the most important business conceivable, and get out again without so much as a whiff of the news reaching the public. Somebody deserves the Iron Cross

for this, Thorsensel. It is the cleverest, smartest piece of work that has been done up to date."

"I venture the opinion that the *Elston* with its precious cargo will never see land again," was Thorsensel's remark.

"The Kitchener job all over again, eh?" said Riaz, admiringly.

"Or the *Lusitania*," amended Elberon.

"Don't speak of the *Lusitania*," exclaimed Thorsensel, irritably. "You know how I feel about that piece of stupidity."

"You were against it all the time, I know," began Elberon.

"Of course I was. It was the gravest blunder in history. But this is no time to talk about it. Every one has reported on last night's business. There were no casualties and no one is missing."

"Good!" exclaimed the grey-whiskered plotter, his piggish eyes sparkling. "No one killed or injured or missing, eh? That seems all that could be expected of Providence."

"Every man has reported," said Thorsensel

succinctly. "Even Trott, from whom we had heard nothing for two whole days. It appears he was trapped and had to lie hidden in an empty bin. He got away just in time, and without being seen. Yes, luck and God were with us last night, gentlemen. Not a life lost, nor a man scratched."

"If we come out half as well next week, I will say that God is with us," said Zimmerlein.

"Where were you last night, Elberon?" demanded the gaunt leader abruptly.

"I dined with some friends and went to the theatre afterwards, Thorsensel."

"Who were they?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Heidel—"

"You needn't finish the name," broke in Thornsensel. "I want to warn you again not to take them into your confidence,—not even in the smallest of matters."

"His brother is a general in the Bavarian—"

"It doesn't matter. I know all that. And one of her brothers is in the Reichstag. But you must not overlook the fact that a great many of these people are loyal to America.

That is a point you don't seem able to get through your head, Elberon. The worst enemy, the direst peril we have to contend with is the American-German, if you grasp the distinction. No one seems to have used the hyphen in just that way, Elberon, but there is such a thing as the American-German, and we've got to steer clear of him. He's not as uncommon as you may think, either. This man you were with last night is one. He would turn you over to the authorities in a flash if he got a breath of the truth. A word to the wise, Elberon, means a word to you."

"A man is one thing or the other," said the other, flushing. "He's either a German or an American. There's nothing in the hyphen."

"You're quite right," agreed Thorsensel. "The man you were with last night is an American in spite of his name and his antecedents. I happen to know. Somewhere in this city there is a list of the people I define as American-Germans. It is a rather formidable list, let me tell you. They happen to be traitors, damn them."

“Traitors? I thought you said they were loyal.”

“You’d see what would happen to them if they ever set foot on German soil,” said Thorsensel, and it was not difficult, even for the stolid Elberon, to see what he meant by loyalty.

An hour later the meeting came to an end, and the men went their several ways, unsuspected by the troubled, harassed watch-dogs of the nation. In that hour they had confidently, almost contemptuously, forwarded the consummation of other enterprises even more startling than the blowing up of the Reynolds plant. Remote assassinations were drawn a trifle nearer; plans leading to the bombing of New York by aeroplanes that were to rise up out of the sea from monster submarines; a new and not to be denied smashing of the Welland Canal; well-timed collisions of ships in the lower Hudson, and other basins, with results more stupendous than anything yet conceived; deceptive peace propaganda for the guileless and unwary American proletariat; subtle interference in the Halls of Congress; almost everything, it may

be said, except the transfer of valuable mines in Brazil. That trifling detail was left to another day.

Within the next hour, a message was on its way through the air to far-off Berlin, giving in singularly accurate figures the military losses sustained by the Allies at a spot in New Jersey recently occupied by the great Reynolds concern.

CHAPTER IV

AT the end of ten days the excitement and horror occasioned by the blowing up of the Reynolds plant had succumbed to the great American curse: indifference. Amateur secret service men brazenly proclaiming themselves, went about more actively than ever, showing their badges and looking up clues at the same time, doing more harm than good, for while professional intelligence men were compelled to accept them as liabilities, the grateful aliens quite properly regarded them as assets.

The burning of two grain warehouses in Chicago, the wrecking of a train loaded with motor trucks, three dock fires in Brooklyn, and the partially suppressed account of an explosion on board a man-of-war in home waters, provided the public with its daily supply of pessimism. Scores of alien suspects were seized, examined and interned. Others were caught with "the goods," so to speak, and were flung into prison

to await, in most cases, the minimum penalty for maximum intentions. But at no time was the finger of accusing Justice levelled at any one of the men or women who made the wheels go round.

Late in the afternoon of a cold, blustering day a young man presented himself at the Carstairs home. He was a smart-looking, upstanding chap in the uniform of a captain of Infantry. The new butler announced that Miss Hansbury was at home and was expecting Captain Steele.

You would go far before finding a manlier, handsomer fellow than this young American soldier. Lithe, and tall, and graceful, he was every inch a man and a thoroughbred. Only a few months before, he had given up a splendid position down town, with a salary that few young men commanded and prospects that even fewer entertained, and eagerly offered himself, heart and soul, to the army that was to lift his country out of the pit of commercialism and give it a place among the proud.

He had won his sword and his shoulder straps with the ease of one who earnestly strives, and

at the same time he had conquered in an enterprise sweetly remote from the horrors of war. Louise Hansbury, beautiful and gifted, was wearing the emblem of surrender on the third finger of her left hand.

He was to dine with the Carstairs that evening; as a privileged person, he came long ahead of the other guests of the evening. There was to be a distinguished company. A Cabinet officer, a prominent Southern Senator, an Admiral of the Navy, a Foreign Ambassador, to say nothing of more than one potentate in the realm of finance. And women whose names were not more widely-known than their deeds in these days of great endeavour,—women who had put aside frivolity and selfishness and social gluttony for the cold, hard business of making the country safe.

Mrs. Carstairs, herself, was the chairman of one of the most important of the Relief Organizations controlled and operated exclusively by women; far from being a mere figure-head, she was an active, zealous worker, an inspiration to her associates.

One of the guests of the evening was to be an Italian Countess whose labours in the war hospitals of her native land had made her one of the most conspicuous women in all Europe.

Louise Hansbury was the daughter of Davenport Carstairs' only sister, now deceased. Since the death of her mother,—her father had died when she was a small child,—the girl had made her home with this adoring uncle. She possessed a somewhat meagre fortune,—sufficient to guarantee independence, however, if she chose to care for herself,—a circumstance that would have excited resistance in Davenport Carstairs had it ever come up for discussion.

“How are you, dearest?” inquired the young officer, holding her off to look anxiously, searchingly into her eyes. The colour of health was just beginning to flow in her cheeks.

“Gorgeous,” she replied, her eyes agleam with love and happiness.

“Go slow,” he said gently. “Don't tax yourself too much. It's a serious job, this business of getting well.”

"But I *am* well, you goose. I never felt better in my life."

"You never were more beautiful," he said softly.

"I'd much rather hear you say that than something really serious," she cried, smiling divinely into his dazzled eyes.

"You've had pneumonia," he said sternly, after the moment it took to regain a temporarily lost air of authority. "Mighty sick you've been, darling,—and—"

"And I'm not to get my feet wet, or sit in a draft, or— Very good, Captain! Orders is orders, sir." She stood off and saluted him with mock solemnity. "I'm so glad you came early, Derrol," she cried, abruptly abandoning her frivolous air. "I've—I've wanted you so much. This has been a long—oh, an age, dear. You knew that poor Hodges was killed by an automobile, didn't you? I never know what I put in my letters. And there is all this talk about Belgium being a nest of spies at the outset, and—oh, *that* would be too much. Sit here with me, Derrol, and—you might hold me close

to you,—just for a little while. It—yes, it does give me strength to feel your arms about me.”

After a few moments, the troubled look that had been lurking in his eyes for a long time, reappeared. A light frown clouded his brow. He glanced over his shoulder, and, when he spoke, his voice was even lower than it had been before.

“Louise dear, something very strange and mysterious has happened. Don’t be alarmed, dear. It has turned out all right. But,—’gad, it might have resulted very seriously. Do you remember that I told you about ten days ago,—in this very room,—that I suspected a certain officer in our camp of being—well, crooked?”

“Yes,—I remember quite well, Derrol. Is—is he?”

He smiled grimly. “That remains to be seen. I had observed one or two things about him that excited my suspicions, but I mentioned the matter to no one. The next day after I spoke to you about it, I decided to go to headquarters with my fears. As a matter of fact, by that time I really had something tangible to

report. I was received by the general himself. He was dumbfounded. Instantly an investigation was started. The officer I mentioned was missing from camp. It was found that he had gone to New York the night before, but was expected back in the morning—just as I was. That was ten days ago. He has never returned. It has been proved beyond all question that he was a spy. There is no doubt in my mind that he got a tip while in New York, and beat it for parts unknown. Now the infernal part of the business is that I never mentioned my suspicions to a soul except to you,—never even breathed them outside of this room until the next day.”

She was staring at him in perplexity. “But—but, Derrol dear, what does it all mean? You—you certainly cannot think that I repeated—”

“Of course not, dear,—certainly not. I—”

“In the first place, I had not been outside the apartment,” she went on in suppressed excitement. “And I give you my word of honour that I did not mention the matter to a soul in this house. Not one word, Derrol. If you—”

“Calm yourself, Louise,” he urged, pressing her hands. “The chances are that he found out he was suspected before he left camp, and even as I was telling you he may have been on his way to safety. I have not told any one that I spoke of the matter here,—you may be quite sure of that. That would bring trouble and annoyance to you and—well, I couldn’t allow that, you know. Just the same, he has disappeared, completely, utterly. He got the scent somehow, and didn’t lose a minute. Saved himself from facing a firing squad, you may be sure. So far as we have been able to discover, I am the only man who knew that he was up to something wrong. That’s the maddening part of it. I—you see, I actually had the goods on him.”

“You looked over your shoulder just now, Derrol,” she said, the colour ebbing from her cheek. “Do you—do you suspect any one here? Any one of the servants? They have all been with us for years,—except poor Hodges, and he is dead,—and I know that Uncle Davenport trusts them implicitly.”

He held her a little closer. His lips were close to her ear, and the half-whispered words were fraught with the deepest meaning.

“See here, Louise, it’s a desperately serious thing to say,—and I know I’m a fresh, half-baked upstart, and all that sort of thing,—but I just can’t help feeling that if I hadn’t spoken of that matter here last week, we would have nabbed Mr. Spy practically red-handed.”

“Oh, Derrol!” she whispered, aghast. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“It’s the way I feel, just the same,” said he stubbornly.

“Then you *do* think the warning came from this house?” She attempted to withdraw herself from his arms.

“God bless you, darling,—I don’t think it came from you, or in any way through you,” he cried miserably.

“Then, whom do you suspect?” she demanded.

“It might have been Hodges,” he said, his eyes narrowing as he looked away from her.

"But Hodges was an Englishman, and violently anti-German. It couldn't have been Hodges."

"In any event, he's dead and can't defend himself," said he. "I trust you, dearest, not to repeat a word of what I've just been saying, —*not a word to any one.*"

"You are very foolish, Derrol,—but I promise. Not even to Uncle Davenport or Aunt Frieda. They would be shocked beyond words if they knew you—"

"That's right, dear,—not even to Mr. or Mrs. Carstairs,—or that bustling young son of theirs."

"It would be far more sensible to suspect me than either of them," she said.

A latch-key turned in the front door, and a moment later young Alfred Carstairs came whistling into the hall.

"Hullo!" he called out, peering in upon them from the dimly lighted hallway. He was shedding his overcoat. "How's the camp, Derrol? Getting into shape?"

“Getting shapelier every minute,” said Derrol Steele, crossing over to shake hands with the youth.

“Where’s mother?” inquired Alfred, looking over the officer’s shoulder at his cousin, who had not risen.

“Lying down, Alfie. She has been on the go all day. Much beauty is required for this evening. She’s giving it a chance to catch her napping.”

“By golly, it’s the only thing that ever does catch her napping,” said Alfred warmly. “She’s a wonder, Derrol. She’d be a field-marshal if she ever got into the army.”

“I haven’t the least doubt of it,” said Captain Steele, smiling. Even as he uttered the jesting words, a strange, uncanny sense of their importance took root in his mind.

Very serious topics were discussed by the guests at Mrs. Carstairs’ dinner that evening. No one felt the least restraint, nor the slightest hesitancy in speaking freely of matters that never were mentioned in the open. Questions that could not have been answered outside the

most secret recesses of the State department were frankly asked here,—and answered by some one who spoke with authority. No man feared his neighbour, nor his neighbour's wife, for here were assembled only those to whom the Government itself could look with confidence. These were the people on the inside of everything, the spokes of the inner wheel,—the people who knew what was going on in Washington, in London, and in Paris. No alien ears were here to listen, no alien eyes to watch; sanctuary for the true and loyal.

One man there held his tongue, and spoke not of the things that were vital: Captain Derrol Steele. It was not modesty alone that kept him silent in this imposing group, nor the recognition of his own insignificance. He had had his lesson. He was young enough to profit by it.

True, the wine may have had something to do with it. It usually does. A beguiling lubricant is this thing that gets into the rustiest of brains and produces a smooth combination of thought and thoughtlessness. In any case, tongues wagged loosely and wits were never keener than

in this atmosphere of ripe security. A good many secrets were out for an airing. They were supposed, in good time, to get back into their closets and lie there as snugly as if they had never been disturbed.

Mrs. Carstairs was never more brilliant than on this particular evening. Always clever,—but never witty,—she was at her best when surrounded by personalities such as these; when confronted by problems which permitted her profound mentality to rise to its highest level and her singularly clear-headed vision to project itself across spaces that defy even the most far-seeing of men. She went below the surface of everything; she saw nothing from a superficial point of view. What men liked in her, and what other women envied and sometimes hated, was the rare faculty of saying little unless she was prepared to say a great deal more.

More than one great statesman had said, on occasion, that it was too bad she wasn't a man! With a mind like that, well, there's no telling! No wonder Davenport Carstairs was proud of her!

And yet, with all this unstinted praise, with all this respectful admiration, there was not a man among them who would have exchanged places with Davenport Carstairs. Despite her beauty, her no uncertain charm of manner, her strangely old-fashioned femininity, no man coveted her. As a matter of fact, they were a little bit awed by Frieda Carstairs.

The foreign ambassador was leaving early. He explained to his hostess that a very important conference was to be held that night in his rooms at the hotel. He was profoundly apologetic, but if she knew how much depended on the outcome of this very, *very* important meeting,—and so on, and so on. She said she understood perfectly; affairs of state, she went on to say, always lead up to a state of affairs, and that, of course, was hopeless unless taken in time.

He was a little bewildered. Fearing that she had not fully grasped his meaning, he proceeded to elaborate a little. It wasn't really a state of affairs, nor, for that matter, an affair of state. Time, of course,—yes, time was the es-

sence of everything in these bitter days. She was quite right; the whole trouble with the Allies had been the wasting of time; now they realized the importance of doing things promptly. She said she was glad that they were not letting the grass grow under their feet. He mumbled something about winter and the nothing much growing outside the tropics, and floundered with further confidences.

Leaning quite close to her he whispered something in her ear. It left her perfectly calm.

“This, you understand, my dear madam, is not to be repeated,—strictly confidential,—absolutely—ah—on the quiet, as you say over here.”

“I sha’n’t even repeat it to my husband,” said she.

The ambassador looked relieved. “I fear he would not approve of my mentioning a matter that he seems to have withheld from you himself.”

She smiled.

“Possess your soul in peace, my dear Ambassador. I am as good as he at keeping a secret.”

"It is—ah—most imperative that this shouldn't—ah—get out, so to speak," said he, wishing in his soul that he had not let it out himself.

"You have spoken to the Sphinx," said she gravely.

She happened to glance down the table at this juncture. Something hypnotic drew her gaze directly to Captain Steele. He was regarding her steadily. There was a queer, intent look in his eyes. For an instant their gaze held, and then he looked away. She turned to speak to the man on her left. If he had been an observing person, he would have noticed the tired look that suddenly clouded her eyes,—briefly, flittingly, it is true, but remaining long enough to have been detected by one less absorbed in himself than he. No doubt his pride would have been hurt had he observed it.

The little Italian Countess spoke very frankly of conditions in her country, of specific needs that called for immediate action on the part of the American government, of plots and counter-plots in the very heart of the army, of political

and ecclesiastical intrigue that sapped the courage of the people, and of the serious situation on the Isonzo where victorious Italian armies were in constant danger of collapse because of an utter lack of support from behind the lines. She went so far as to say that in the event of a supreme assault by the Austro-Germans, the Italian armies would have to relinquish their hard-earned gains and fall back,—perhaps in actual defeat.

“But the Austrians are down and out themselves,” declared the cabinet member. He spoke loudly, for he was at the far end of the table. “They haven’t a good solid kick left in them, much less anything like a supreme assault, Countess.”

“Let us hope you are right,” returned the Italian woman, the line deepening between her eyes. “I only know that the Italians are in no condition to withstand a great offensive if it should come. Oh, if only England, and France,—and you, gentlemen,—could but be made to realize the importance of a real victory over the Austrians,—if you could only be made to see

how desperately we are in need of all the support you can give us in men, and guns, and food, and—aye, in confidence, too. If the German Emperor knew the truth about our position on the Isonzo and in Trentino, he—ah, *he* would not wait, he would not hesitate. He would move like lightning. He would send a million men to the aid of the Austrians. He would strike with all his might,—and then, when it was all over, you,—all of you,—would grate your teeth while he laughed over another of your blunders.”

The men all smiled tolerantly. She was a woman. That was just the way a high-strung, emotional woman would talk.

“It would be quite simple, Countess,” said Davenport Carstairs, “if the Kaiser had even half a million men to spare. He is being kept pretty busy in France and Flanders just now.”

“Ah, but in Russia,” she cried vehemently. “What of the damned Russians?” In her excitement she spoke the language of the army. Of her hearers, the men seemed a little more shocked than the women. “Are they keeping

him pretty busy? No! Are they holding his vast armies in check? No! They are doing more than that. They are shoving him back, driving him and all of his men and guns out of Russia. Driving them down into Italy and over to Flanders, that is what they are doing. And you,—you and France and England,—will not wake up until it is too late. When the beastly Russians have driven the Germans into Paris, and across the English Channel, and down to Rome, then you will understand.”

“But the Italians will hold the ground they have gained,” protested one of the men. “I talked with members of the commission before they sailed the other day, and there wasn’t one of them who expressed the slightest uneasiness about the Italian front. On the other hand, they were of the opinion that the Italians would continue to advance. The Austrians are shot to pieces.”

“Italy was not represented in that secret mission, my dear sir,” said the Countess, a trifle curtly. “You do not know what the Italians know, and what they are actually dreading.

They know they cannot resist a great offensive."

"Well, as long as the Germans are ignorant of the true state of affairs, I can't see that there is much to worry about," said Carstairs pleasantly.

"But the Germans will not remain in ignorance for ever, Mr. Carstairs," exclaimed the Countess. "They find out everything,—everything, in time."

"Not everything," said the Admiral of the navy, blandly. "Their marvellous spy system failed completely in the case of the Franco-British special mission. The members of the party came, remained here for more than a fortnight, sailed for home last week, and Germany never had so much as an inkling of the visit. By this time the *Campion* is no doubt safely through the danger zone. I call that beating the devil with his own stick."

"The *Campion*?" fell sharply from the lips of Mrs. Carstairs.

"You are mistaken, Admiral. They sailed on the *Elston*," said her husband.

The Admiral beamed. "My dear sir, the entire party was transferred to the *Campion* ten hours after the *Elston* sailed out of this port. The Secretary took no chances. He had that devilish Kitchener betrayal in mind. There was the possibility, you know, of a leak somewhere. One never can tell. So everything that could be thought of was done to frustrate the 'system.' The destruction of the *Elston* with those men on board would have been a greater disaster to the Allies than the loss of Kitchener or half the battle front in France. I happen to know the transfer was made safely and according to plans. The *Elston* continued her voyage in convoy, but she was laden with nothing more precious than food for the Germans."

"Food for the Germans?" cried the Italian Countess, aghast.

The Admiral's smile broadened. "The most indigestible food that is made in America," said he. After a moment's perplexity, she smiled and clapped her hands.

Once more Mrs. Carstairs' gaze was drawn irresistibly to the young captain half way up

the table. His eyes were fixed on her again, and again, as before, after an instant they were averted. Something in his steady look seared her like a hot iron. He seemed to be searching the innermost recesses of her brain,—and she quailed. His face grew suddenly pale and drawn,—paler even than her own.

The Admiral, having come sharply into prominence, continued to play his high cards. He leaned back in his chair, neglecting a dessert of which he was especially fond, and with considerable bumptiousness rambled on sonorously.

“We’ve been expecting word all day from Admiral Sims. The convoy is a swift one. Both the *Campion* and the *Elston* should reach port today,—or at the very latest tomorrow. I confess we’ve all been anxious. They are wiring me from Washington as soon as— By the way, Mrs. Carstairs, I took the liberty of instructing my aide to telephone me here in case the report comes tonight. Hope you don’t mind. I thought—”

“Of course I don’t mind, Admiral,” she said warmly. “On the contrary, I am glad you

thought of it. We are all terribly interested."

Late in the evening,—in fact, just as the guests were preparing to depart,—the Admiral was called to the telephone. When he rejoined the group a few minutes afterward, his expression was serious.

"Our precautions were well taken, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "The *Elston* was torpedoed this morning. Practically everybody on board was lost."

There was a moment's silence. Then Captain Steele spoke.

"So the Germans *did* know that the Commission sailed out of New York harbour on the *Elston*. It would seem, Admiral, that the spy sits pretty close to the head of your board,—I mean, of course, your board of strategy."

"By Gad!" growled the distressed sailor-man. "It—it is absolutely incredible. There *couldn't* have been a leak down there."

"Have you an idea how many people actually knew that the party was sailing on the *Elston*?" inquired the young man. His face was very white.

The Admiral glanced around the room, rather helplessly. "Of course the fact was known to quite a number of people,—such as we are here,—but, what are we to do if we can't trust *ourselves*? Nothing could have been more carefully guarded. Not a line in the newspapers, not a word uttered in public, not a—"

"The information could not have come from any one directly connected with the Navy department, Admiral," said Steele slowly.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, sir," said the Admiral, stiffening.

"For the simple and obvious reason that it was the *Elston* and not the *Campion* they went after. A spy in such a position would have known of the transfer."

"On the other hand, it may have been pure chance that they attacked the *Elston*," said Davenport Carstairs, a queer huskiness in his voice. "Coincidence, and nothing more. Thank heaven, they didn't get the *Campion*."

Steele was the last to leave. He said good night to Louise Hansbury in the little hall outside. He had rung for the elevator. The

door, on the latch, had been closed behind them and they were quite alone for a few minutes.

“Louise,” he said, and suddenly his voice,—scarcely more than a whisper,—sounded strange and unnatural to her, “it’s a horrible thing to say, but the—the trouble is right here in this house. You heard what the Admiral said? I can’t explain how it all happened, but suddenly I had a—well, a revelation. A great, flaring light seemed to flash in my face. I give you my word, it was actually blinding. I thought my heart would never beat again. I saw through everything. It is all as plain as day to me. God help us all, dearest,—it’s—it’s unspeakable. I’ve just got to tell you,—so that you may be on your guard. Tomorrow—or as soon as possible, at any rate,—you must make an excuse to get away from here,—for a visit, or anything you can think of. But get away you must!”

“Do you know what you are saying, Derrol?” she whispered, clutching his arm. She was trembling like a leaf, and swayed. An ex-

pression of the utmost dread and horror filled her eyes.

“Yes,—yes, I do. It is terrible,—but, by heaven, it’s true,—as true as we live and breathe.”

She covered her face with her hands. “Oh, Derrol,—I felt it too,—tonight. What are we to do? What can be done?”

“Hush! Here is the elevator. I can’t say anything more tonight. I don’t have to go back to Camp till tomorrow night. Tomorrow morning,—I’ll call up. I must see you alone—and not here.”

“I go out every morning for a walk,—about eleven,” she breathed.

The elevator door slid open.

“Good night,” said he. She clasped his hand in silence. Then she went back into the apartment, and, as one drugged, passed the drawing-room door and staggered down the hall toward her bedroom.

Mrs. Carstairs, alone in the drawing-room, saw the girl pass, and stepped quickly to the door.

“Louise, dear,—are you ill?” she called out.

“No,—Aunt Frieda. I—I’m all right. Good night.”

“Good night, dear. Sleep late.”

The door down the long hall closed softly, and Frieda Carstairs turned back into the drawing-room with a sigh. Her husband was looking over the night mail that had been piled on his desk in the study. She went in to him.

“I wonder if poor, dear Alfred is struggling with that abominable nightmare of his,” she said. “Really, Davenport, the boy is wearing himself out. I don’t see why physics should be so difficult for him.”

“They were difficult for me, my dear,” said he, looking up. Their eyes met, and she smiled gently, lovingly. He took her firm, steady hand and pressed it to his cheek.

“I think I’ll run in and shoo him off to bed. If only he wouldn’t smoke that dreadful pipe while he studies. He breathes nothing but smoke.”

“Doesn’t hurt him a bit,” said he. “They’ve

got sheet-iron lungs, you see,—these sophomores.”

She left him and went down to her son's room. Carstairs was staring fixedly, intently into space when she returned,—he knew not how long afterwards. He came out of his reverie with a start when she spoke to him from the door.

“Alfie is going out for a breath of fresh air,” she said. “It seemed to me his room was stuffer and smokier than I've ever known it to be before. Really, dear, he is dreadfully trying. He—”

“My dear, you've never been a boy,” said he, collecting himself and smiling. “You don't know what it is to be completely self-satisfied.”

“I'll be back in a few minutes,” said Alfred, coming up behind his mother. “Are you going to sit up much longer, mother?”

“A little while. Hurry back, dear. Don't go out without your overcoat. There is quite a chill in the air.”

CHAPTER V

MR. PAUL ZIMMERLEIN'S telephone rang shortly before midnight. He lived in a small, exclusive hotel on one of the cross-town streets, near Fifth Avenue. A brief conversation over the wire ensued. A few minutes later he appeared at the desk in the office downstairs, dressed for the street. He was very angry.

“Why was I not informed when I came in this evening that Mr. Prince had called up and was expecting me to join his party at the Helvetia for supper, Mr. Rogers? He rang me up at nine o'clock and instructed you to put the message in my box.”

“I have no recollection of—”

“Of course you haven't. You never do have any recollection. None of you. I shall take the matter up with the manager in the morning, Rogers. It has happened before. The least

you could have done was to stick the message in my box."

"I will inquire of the telephone operator. The regular boy is off tonight. If there has been any carelessness, Mr. Zimmerlein, it has been with her,—not with us, sir," said the clerk, with the servility that is sometimes mistaken for civility on the part of hotel clerks.

"I haven't time to listen to her excuses. They have been waiting for me since eleven o'clock, and I have been in my room since ten."

"I know, sir. It was a little before ten when you came in."

"Well, be good enough to investigate. I warn you that I intend to complain in the morning."

"I'm sorry, sir," began the clerk, but Zimmerlein was already on his way to the street.

The night-clerk scowled after him, and then retired behind the key-rack to consult the operator.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Zimmerlein's sore as a crab about not getting

a message that came in at nine,—he says,—and he's going to raise hell about it."

"Nobody called him up,—not till just a few minutes ago. It's the old gag. I heard what the guy said to Zimmerlein,—about calling up at nine and giving directions and all that bunk,—and I had to hold my tongue between my teeth to keep from butting in and telling him he was a liar, and—"

"Tell that to Mr. Coxhorn in the morning," broke in the clerk, and moved languidly away. That was the extent of his investigations.

The Helvetia was a brisk five minutes' walk from Zimmerlein's hotel. He did it in three.

"Is Mr. Prince entertaining in his rooms or in the café?" he inquired at the desk.

"In the café, Mr. Zimmerlein."

"Thanks."

Fifteen minutes later, he sauntered up to a table at which a party of seven or eight people were seated. Nodding and smiling in his most amiable manner to the ladies, he laid his hand on the shoulder of one of the men.

"Sorry, old man, but they didn't give me your

message. I should have been sitting on the doorstep waiting for you, if I'd known you really wanted me. Thanks for calling me up again. It was good of you, and I'll try to make up for all the lost time and trouble by being as agreeable as I know how to be." He added an encircling smile. The ladies appeared to cheer up measurably.

The man addressed, a huge individual with a tremendous expanse of white shirt front, betrayed not the slightest sign of surprise or confusion. With all the profound affability of a far-Westerner, he made the newcomer welcome. If his steel-grey eyes bored inquiringly into Zimmerlein's for the briefest instant, no one else at the table was aware of the fact. Nor did any one observe the warning that shot back from the narrowing eyes of the belated guest.

A waiter produced a chair for Zimmerlein, and placed it between two of the ladies, who, with evident eagerness, made room for him. His smile deepened as he shook his head, affecting dismay.

"Not yet, but soon," he pleaded. "I ran

across an old friend of yours out in the lobby, Prince. Stillwell. I told him you'd be happy to have him join you, but as he's just off the train, he says he's filthy."

"Where is he?" cried Prince, starting up. "I wouldn't miss seeing him for anything in the world. An old pal of mine in Japan," he explained to his guests.

"If you will excuse us both, we'll—" began Zimmerlein apologetically.

"Come along," interrupted Prince, grabbing the other's arm. "Good old Still! We'll bring him back with us if we have to drag him in. You'll *love* him," he added boisterously.

The two men hurried from the café. They did not speak until they reached a deserted corner of the hotel lobby.

"What's up?" demanded Prince.

"I've just had some damnably disturbing news. It's pretty bad, but I think I've got word to the right people in time to head off—trouble. I was just going to bed when I was called up on the 'phone. By God, he's cool-headed, I'll say that for him. Said he was you, and wanted to



THEY DID NOT SPEAK UNTIL THEY REACHED A DESERTED
CORNER OF THE HOTEL LOBBY

know why the devil I hadn't showed up over here. I was wise in a second. We met in the most casual manner at the corner. He will go a long way, that chap will, mark my words. He's as keen as a fox and as resolute as the devil. I can't explain here, Prince. We must get back to your party. My alibi lies there, you know, if I should happen to need it. You understand, don't you?"

"Certainly. I knew something was in the wind. Is it serious? Tell me that."

"It *can* be serious,—desperately serious. But we can't do anything now. At one o'clock I shall ask you to excuse me, Prince. Engagement very early in the morning. Much-needed rest,—and so on. And, by the way, we were unable to locate Folwell. He—"

"Stillwell, wasn't it?"

"So it was. 'Gad, my nerves must be shot up worse than I thought. At any rate, he had vanished."

"Have you managed to get in touch with any one else?"

"I've sent word to—Jehovah!" Zimmerlein

permitted himself what was meant to be a smile, but was instead an ugly grin.

"About the only name that's safe to utter in these days," said Prince, looking over his shoulder.

"You've done your bit tonight, my friend, by simply being who and what and where you are. Nothing more is required of you."

"I'm not asking questions," said Prince, scowling.

"You have asked *one*," snapped Zimmerlein.

"Oh, Lord! Haven't I a right to—"

"There is nothing more to be said on the subject," said the other, fixing the big man with a look that caused him to quail. "You know as well as I just what our law is, Prince. I am not above it,—nor are you. Now, let us return."

Shortly after one o'clock, Zimmerlein said good night to the host and the guests upon whom he had deliberately imposed himself, and went forth into the night. A short distance down the street, he was hailed by a lone taxi-driver, who called out in the laconic, perfunctory manner of his kind:

“Taxi?”

Zimmerlein walked on a few paces, and then, apparently reconsidering, turned back.

“Take me to the Pennsylvania,” he said, and got into the cab.

When he took his seat, it was between two men who slunk down in the corners and kept their faces and bodies well out of sight from the occupants of passing cars and pedestrians on the sidewalk.

An unusual amount of clatter attended the getting under way of the car. The exhaust roared, the gears grated and snarled, and the loose links of tire-chains banged resoundingly against the mud-guards.

A quarter of an hour elapsed. Zimmerlein did most of the talking. Then, as the taxi drew up in front of the little hotel in the cross-town street, he got down and handed the driver a bank-note. His last words, before leaving the car, were:

“Remember, now. There must be no mistake, no slip-up. Be dead sure before you do a thing. He is to disappear,—that’s all. There

must be no trace,—absolutely no trace.”

As he sauntered into the hotel, the taxi rattled swiftly off in the direction of Broadway, its remaining occupants silent and white-faced, but with lips and jaws rigidly set.

“No complaint after all, Rogers,” said he to the night clerk, rather jauntily. “My friend confessed that he hadn’t called me up at all. It was his nice little way of stringing me. Asuage the poor girl’s grief if you know how, Rogers. Tell her it’s all right, and she can sleep soundly at the switch. Also, be good enough to say to her that I apologize for myself and for my friend.”

Rogers watched him enter the elevator, and once more strolled back to the switchboard.

“Hey! Wake up. Zimmerlein’s just come in. He’s stewed and says his friend’s a liar. There won’t be any court-martial.”

The girl yawned. “Say, has that darned old clock stopped, or is it still only ten minutes of two? It’s been that for an hour. Never again for me. Next time Pilcher wants to get off till

half-past 'leven, he needn't leave a call for me. I'm through accommodating that mutt. My Gawd! Two o'clock, and he swore he'd be here by eleven. I ought to report him. Do a guy like that a favour and he— What was that you said about old Zim-zim? D'you say he was soused?"

"No. I said stewed. He's carryin' an egg on an oyster fork. I never saw him drunk before."

At his usual hour for breakfasting, Mr. Zimmerlein briskly entered the dining-room the next morning and seated himself at his customary table near the window. Two morning newspapers lay beside his plate of sliced oranges. His eyes swept the headlines on the front page. A slight frown darkened his brow. He looked again, a little more closely. Then he took up the other paper. A certain eagerness that had been in his eyes when he sat down gave way to something bordering on astonishment. His interest passed quickly to the second, third and fourth pages.

There wasn't a line,—not a solitary line about the sinking of the *Elston*!

He had encountered Elberon late in the afternoon of the preceding day. He was going into the club as the other came out.

"You will read something great in the morning papers," Elberon had said guardedly. "Perhaps in the extras tonight."

"I am always reading something great in the newspapers," he had replied.

"They got the *Elston*. Report came about two o'clock. No details. I doubt whether it is known in Washington yet."

But the morning papers had no account of the sinking. Not a word. What did it mean? Could it be possible that *their* news travelled so much faster than that obtained by the eager, avid Press? Were they even ahead of Washington? Elberon was in a position to know. He never went off half-cocked. There wasn't the least doubt in Zimmerlein's mind that the *Elston* had been sunk,—but why this amazing failure of the newspapers to— He started suddenly. Comprehension flooded his brain. His

eyes lighted up again. He understood in a flash. Suppressed! The news of the destruction of the *Elston* with all those vitally important men on board,— Why, of course! It *had* to be suppressed!

Nevertheless, he decided to drop in and see Elberon on his way down town.

As for last night's business, if it came to a head at all, it was after the papers had gone to press. Still, he took the time to run through both papers with unusual thoroughness. It was barely possible that a paragraph,—one of those widely spaced paragraphs that always exact attention,—might have stopped the presses at the last minute.

He slid indifferently over the account of a disastrous fire along the water-front of an American port from which heavily laden ships departed almost daily for French and English destinations. He knew all about *that*.

Elberon was not at his place of business. This defection on the part of Elberon exasperated him. It was a new sensation. He could not account for the sudden and admittedly un-

reasonable sense of irritation that assailed him, for, after all, Elberon regulated his actions according to the demands of his own business. The merchant's secretary announced that he doubted if his employer would be in the office before noon. He thought he had gone Christmas shopping with his wife.

"Damn Christmas!" muttered Zimmerlein as he closed the door behind him and stalked off into the counter-lined aisles that led by rectangular turns to the street.

The business of the night just ended had got on his nerves. His hand shook a little as he paused inside the doors to light a cigarette. It was a bad "business"; there was no use trying to make light of it.

Miss Mildred Agnew welcomed him with a cheery "Good morning," and the alert office-boy went her one better by adding the information that it was "a fine day, sir."

"Any messages, Miss Agnew?" inquired Zimmerlein.

"A telephone call, sir, from the steward of the Black Downs Country Club. He says there

is a leak and wants to know if you, as chairman of the house committee, will do something about it right away."

"A leak?" he demanded, stopping short.

"So he said, Mr. Zimmerlein."

"Get him on the telephone and ask him to come in and see me at once."

He was frowning darkly as the office-boy relieved him of his hat and coat and hung them up in the closet. His mail received scant attention. As a matter of fact, he swept the pile aside and touched a button on the corner of the desk.

Thorsensel came into the private office, carrying a roll of blue-prints.

"Any word?" asked Zimmerlein, as the other carefully and deliberately spread the prints on the desk and weighted one end of them down with a heavy steel ruler.

"No. Not a word."

"It's—it's rather queer, don't you think?"

"You are nervous, Zimmerlein," said Thorsensel, after a moment in which he studied the other with a keen and soul-searching eye. "It won't do, my friend. Nervousness tends to irri-

tation, and irritation leads to impatience. You know what happens to the impatient, Zimmerlein."

"Damn it all, I *am* nervous. I admit it. Don't lecture me. I'm not going to lose my grit,—or my head either."

"You can't lose one without the other, you know," remarked Thorsensel sententiously.

"What do you suppose has happened?"

"Nothing,—nothing at all," said the other.

"You mean that—that they didn't pull it off? God, that is the very worst that could have happened."

"That is exactly what I mean. You need not worry, however. Trust Scarf to play it safe. If he saw that there was the slightest chance of failure, he would have taken no risk. That's Scarf, my friend. Calm yourself. We will hear from him before noon. He will have worked out another plan, you may be sure."

It may be mentioned here and now that Zimmerlein had consulted Thorsensel—the master-mind,—before taking a step in the affair of the night just past. He had gone directly from his

hotel to the little French café down the street. He knew that it was the unvarying habit of the strange, silent engineer to drop in at this quaint place for a bite of something to eat and a bottle of red wine at midnight. Thorsensel never missed doing this. There was method in his continence.

A big and vital problem confronted Zimmerlein. He did not dare act without consulting his pseudo-subordinate. Thorsensel took the matter out of his hands. It was he who laid the plans. Zimmerlein became merely an instrument, with certain functions to perform, and nothing more.

"I hope you are right," said Zimmerlein, absorbing some of the other's fatalistic assurance. "God help us if you are wrong."

"My dear man, God helps us because we are right, not because we are wrong," said Thorsensel, laying his big, clenched fist upon the desk,—not violently but with a gentleness that suggested vast strength held under control by the power of a vaster will.

Zimmerlein drew a long, deep breath.

“You’ve heard about the *Elston*, I suppose?”

“Yes. They got her. I knew they would. That was the greatest tip we’ve ever had. Our report is that not one of the big bugs on board was saved. A number of the crew got off in boats, but they had to hurry. She went down in eight minutes. They made a good job of it, bless ’em. No wonder the night wind weeps! Now, we’ll see what old England has to say for the invincibility of her fleet, and what she’ll say to the United States for letting the cat out of the bag.” He laughed aloud,—for the first time in the memory of Zimmerlein. Several of the men in the drafting-room looked up. They stared unblinkingly at the laughter.

The forenoon wore away. Thorsensel shuttled between the drafting-room and the private office. He no longer laughed. The pleased, confident look had left his eyes; in its stead lurked something that finally developed into real, undisguised anxiety. An atmosphere of restraint settled down like a cloud over the offices. The uneasiness of the two principal figures in the place was acutely infectious.

The report of Peter Hooge, the steward of the Black Downs Country Club, who arrived shortly after noon, neither increased nor lessened the strain. He was unnecessarily alarmed. What if secret service men did visit the club-house and question the employés? That was not an unusual proceeding. They were doing something of the sort all the time. But, said Peter, they obtained a list of all the members and guests of the club present on the premises at the time of the Reynolds explosion. Naturally, said both Zimmerlein and Thorsensel: That was just what they *would* do. Precious little good it would do them, however.

"I was obliged to show them my passports and papers from the Swiss Government," said Peter.

"Well, they were all in order, weren't they?"

"Perfectly. That isn't the point. The mere fact that they asked for them proves something, doesn't it?"

"You are too old a bird to be frightened by pop-guns, Hooge," said Thorsensel, gnawing at his moustache. "These fellows, from what I

know of them, couldn't catch the scent of a polecat."

"I'm not so sure of that," put in Zimmerlein. "They've landed some pretty big fish."

"They've landed a pack of blatant asses," snapped Thorsensel. "Good God, man, you don't put Reistelen and others of his stripe in the class with—well, with a few I could mention, do you? They've only touched the surface, my friend. It is very deep,—very deep indeed—where the big fishes lie. Go back to your work, Hooge,—and don't worry us again with trifles."

Late in the afternoon Scarf came in. He came as a stoop-shouldered, consumptive-looking, unwashed District Messenger of uncertain age and stability.

"Well?" cried Zimmerlein, glaring at the man.

"Where in hell have you been?" grated Thorsensel.

"That's just where I have been," replied the messenger, straightening his bent figure and drawing a long, full breath. He passed his hand across his brow. "Or rather, I've been

close enough to get an unpleasant whiff of it."

"Don't sit down!" exclaimed Zimmerlein, as the man prepared to sink into a chair.

"I'm all in, I've got to," and down he flopped. After a moment he leaned forward and fixed the others with burning, bitter eyes. "In the first place, do you know what's happened to Elberon?"

"No," fell in unison from the lips of the two men.

"Well, he's sitting up in the United States Attorney's office with half a dozen experts trying to pump intelligence out of him."

An imprecation ground its way out between Thorsensel's teeth. Zimmerlein's lower lip tightened against his teeth.

"I had it from Zumpe. They went to Elberon's house early this morning,—on the quiet, of course,—nothing for the public,—and took him down for a grilling. Zumpe says old Elberon has been getting pretty gabby with one or two people who ought to be good Germans but ain't."

"The infernal fool! I have warned him repeatedly," snarled Thorsensel. "He has been very thick lately with Kleinhans, the banker. I told him to take no chances with that man. I mentioned a few others too."

"Some of 'em are straight, eh?" queried Scarf, a twist at the corner of his mouth that went for a sneer.

"Straight? No! Crooked as rattlesnakes! I wouldn't trust a man like Kleinhans out of my sight. He actually thinks he's an American,—and God knows that makes him worse than one. Well? Go on. What else?"

"That's all I know about Elberon. As for that other little matter,—” He stopped to wet his lips.

Zimmerlein muttered hoarsely: "Little matter!"

"I'm lucky, that's all," said Scarf, and again passed his hand over his brow.

"Get on with it. You can't stay here all afternoon," commanded Thorsensel.

"We came within an ace of dropping into a pit—a bottomless pit at that. Why didn't you

tell me that secret service men were trailing him, Zimmerlein?"

"What? What's that you say?"

"Why, damn your eyes, Zimmerlein, that guy was suspected of giving information to the enemy. He's been watched like a hawk. We got onto it just in time. Don't you see what would have happened if they had followed us to his room? You don't, eh? Well, I'll tell you. We would have been nabbed with him,—before anything could have happened,—caught in the very net they were laying for him. His *pals*,—that's what they would have made of us,—his comrades, mind you, not his enemies. How the devil could we have explained? And would they have believed him, no matter what he said about us? Not on your life. The very thing they were watching for would have hampered. A rendezvous! They would have had him dead to rights,—delivering information received earlier in the night to two German agents,—oh, what a diabolical joke it would have been on him, and what a devil of a mess we would have been in! God, I shiver every time I think of it,

—and I've been shivering all day, let me tell you."

"Secret service men after *him*?" muttered Thorsensel, incredulously. "What's the angle, Zimmerlein,—what's the angle? You are supposed to be on the inside up there. What do you know about this?"

"I am completely in the dark. I can't understand it, Thorsensel. It—are you sure, Scarf?"

"Absolutely. They got Blechter,—yanked him off the taxi when he stopped around in the next block, according to plans. He was to wait for us there,—fixing his engine as a blind,—stalling for time. He put up a fight,—poor fool. They got him just the same."

"Will he squeal?" demanded Zimmerlein, pacing the floor.

"You ought to know. He's your protégé," said Scarf succinctly.

"Better dead than alive, I'd say," said Thorsensel unfeelingly. "Go on."

"Well, from all I could learn, two of them waited outside the building and two of 'em were inside—I don't know just where. I think one

of them was running the front elevator. All I know is that Ruddy and I barely had time to get out of the window and onto a little balcony and drop down to the one below, before they smashed in the door. Twelve foot drop, too,—and the balcony wasn't more than three feet wide. If we'd missed—Lord!”

“You were in his room?” cried Thorsensel.

“Sure. We got in through the building next door, sneaked up ten flights of stairs to the top. Got out on the roof through the ‘dog-house,’ and dropped down to the other roof. Sort of pent-house arrangement up there. Very simple after that. We had his apartment pretty well marked. Ninth floor front. It's closed except when he comes up occasionally from camp for a night or two. Family in the South somewhere, servants dismissed. We didn't waste any time. Had it all doped out. Went to his door and rang the bell. Pretty soon he came and opened it and asked what we wanted. We told him right off the reel that we were in the secret service and had to have a talk with him at once about a certain party he knows. He told us to

go to hell. Then I showed him my badge and mentioned a name that bowled him over. He said: 'My God!' and drew back into the room. We went in and closed the door.

"I asked him first if there was anybody in the apartment—anybody that would be likely to hear our conversation. He said he was alone,—his people were out of town for the winter. Ruddy asked him point blank just what he knew about a certain party,—all of it. He came back with a question. 'Has there been an arrest?' 'Yes,' says I. He sat down, limp as a rag. 'My God, it's terrible—horrible,' he says. 'Who put you wise? How much is actually known?' That was enough for Ruddy. He stuck the gun under his ear and let him have it. He never knew what hit him. Ruddy dropped the revolver on the floor beside the chair,—just where he would have dropped it himself,—and then we started out to see if we could find anything in the apartment that oughtn't to be lying around loose. I forgot to say there was a Maxim silencer on the gun. We had just entered the first bed-room when his

door bell rang. Two hearts stopped beating right there and then. For a minute we were paralysed. Then there was pounding on the door, and we heard some one say, 'Open up, or we'll smash it in!'

"No use wasting time on minor details. After we got onto the balcony below, we opened the French windows and sneaked into a big apartment,—darker than Egypt except when the light from a big electric sign down the street flashed every few seconds. We got out into the hall without rousing anybody and started down the stairs. Of course, we thought it was the elevator man pounding on the door up there,—he might have heard the muffled report if he happened to be near that floor. God was with us. We got down to the ground floor all right, but there we struck something worse than a stone wall. Two men were standing right in front of the passenger elevator. We jumped behind a curtain they have hanging there to hide the stairway. They didn't hear us. They were talking about Blechter. We knew in a second what they were.

“There was a cubby hole under the stairs where they keep mops and brooms and such stuff. We got in there, leaving a crack through which we could hear. After awhile the front elevator came down. We heard ’em all talking. They said he had shot himself, and they cursed their luck because they hadn’t been able to take him alive. He must have been warned that they were after him. That’s what they were roaring about. After a while we got out of the mop-hole and sneaked down to the basement. The doors were locked, and there were men in the engine room—a night fireman and a friend of his who was drunk and had come in to sleep it off. Somebody was walking up and down in the little court outside. We didn’t dare risk a dash for it, so we hid under a pile of last summer’s awnings for a couple of hours. When we couldn’t stand it any longer, we decided to put on a bold front and pass ourselves off as plainclothes-men. It was dead easy. The employés about the place were scared stiff. All we had to do was to look hard at the head porter and

the back elevator man, and tell 'em not to let anybody go near the storeroom for apartment E 9,—not on their lives. Here's the evening paper. You can read what it says."

CHAPTER VI

L OUISE HANSBURY did not go out for her customary "constitutional" that morning. She arose, tired and depressed after a sleepless night. Soon after she had her breakfast,—chocolate and toast and a prescribed porridge,—she complained of a sudden and violent nausea.

Mrs. Carstairs went in to see her, and was alarmed. She took the girl's temperature and then called up the doctor.

"You have a fever," she said. "You must go back to bed. It's nothing, I daresay, but we have to be on the safe side, dear."

Louise betrayed her agitation. She pleaded to be allowed to dress and go out for her walk. There were moments when actual fear lurked in her dark eyes.

"I will be all right in a little while, Aunt Frieda. Don't be cross with me. I must have

eaten something last night that disagreed with me. The lobster,—I ate a tiny bit of it.”

“Very likely,” said her aunt calmly. “All the more reason for being careful today. No, my dear, I must insist on your remaining in bed,—at least until Dr. Browne has seen you.”

“When is he coming?”

“The attendant said she could locate him and would send him here as soon as possible. He is out making his calls.”

“The chocolate tasted queerly this morning, Aunt Frieda,” said the girl, feverishly.

“Imagination. Nothing tastes right when one’s stomach is upset.”

“Oh, I want so much to get out for a breath of fresh air. It is a perfectly lovely day. I am sure Dr. Browne will say it’s the best thing in the world—”

“Dr. Browne doesn’t know everything,” interrupted Mrs. Carstairs. She laid her hand on the girl’s hot forehead. “You *must* go back to bed,—just for a little while,” she said, and there was an inexorableness in her tone that roused swift resentment in Louise. A rebelli-

ous, angry light smouldered in her eyes. "I know what is best for you. If it should turn out to be ptomaine poisoning—"

"It can't be ptomaine if it came from the chocolate I drank," sad Louise, excitement causing her voice to tremble and to take on a certain shrillness.

"I am confident it is all due to nervousness," said Mrs. Carstairs. She spoke in a patient, consoling manner. "Dr. Browne will give you something to straighten out your digestion, and you will be all right by tomorrow. You are not strong yet, you know. Just be patient, *my* dear. It takes time."

"I should like to telephone, Aunt Frieda," said the girl abruptly. Submissive to the gentle but unyielding authority of the older woman, who dominated as one with the power to scourge if resistance continued, she had begun to divest herself, rather helplessly, of the gay peignoir in which she had breakfasted. With feverish haste, she slipped her arms through the loose folds, and faced her aunt. There was defiance in her glance. For an instant it held.

The calm smile and the tolerant shake of the head, as to a pleading child, shattered her resolve; she saw that argument was useless. The robe fell from her shoulders as she turned away with a sob in her throat.

"Is it important?" inquired the older woman.

"I—this afternoon will do as well, I suppose," replied the girl, without turning her head.

"Let me call up for you, dear. It is no trouble at all. I can explain that you are ill."

"No, thank you, Aunt Frieda. It—it doesn't matter."

She hesitated about confiding to Mrs. Carstairs that she was going out to meet her lover. Something told her that it would be the wrong thing to do,—something that for want of another name would have to go as cunning. She shared a vague, disturbing secret with Steele. . . .

Mrs. Carstairs tucked the bedclothes about her.

"The doctor will be here soon, I am sure,"

she said. "Do you feel any better? Are you more comfortable?"

"I am in no pain,—if that's what you mean. Just this wretched nausea. What do the morning papers say about the loss of the *Elston*, Aunt Frieda?"

"Nothing, I believe. Your uncle says there was no mention of it. I daresay the news has been held up for the time being. Waiting for full details. Wasn't it fortunate,—wasn't it providential that the transfer to the *Campion* was so cleverly accomplished?"

A maid-servant came to the door.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Mrs. Carstairs. Shall I say you are engaged?"

"Who is it, Wrenn?"

"A gentleman. I couldn't catch the name, Mrs. Carstairs."

"I will see who it is."

After she had closed Louise's door behind her, Frieda Carstairs stood stockstill in the long corridor. She put her hand to her breast and held it there lightly, as if to transmit its vital strength to the organ which pounded so vio-

lently. Her tall figure was tense; her face took on the pallor of death and its rigidity. For as long as fifteen or twenty seconds, she remained motionless. Then her lips moved stiffly; they twitched as in a spasm of pain. The two words they formed but did not utter were:

“Poor girl!”

Once, as she covered the short distance to her own sitting-room, her figure swayed slightly. She even put out a hand to steady herself against the wall,—a needless precaution, for she instantly regained command of herself.

She closed the door, and, before taking up the receiver, threw in the device which cut out the instrument from other extensions in the apartment,—those in the butler’s pantry, her husband’s study, and the one that stood on the night-table at the head of his bed. Her knees suddenly became weak; they trembled as with the palsy. She sat down at the writing table and dropped her elbow heavily on the top. Again she feared that she was going to faint.

“Yes?” she murmured thickly into the transmitter, and, instantly realizing that her voice

betrayed nervousness and even alarm, repeated the word firmly, crisply. "Yes,—this is Mrs. Carstairs."

"I am speaking for the *Evening*—" (the name of the newspaper was indistinctly pronounced)—"and I called up, Mrs. Carstairs, to ask if it is true that Captain Derrol Steele was engaged to be married to your niece, Miss Louise Hansbury?"

She did not reply. Her lips parted but no sound issued forth.

Again the voice spoke in her ear. "Are you there?"

The "yes" she uttered in reply was little more than a hoarse gasp. And then: "I hear you quite distinctly." There was a click at the other end. Slowly, as in a daze, she hung up the receiver. Not another word passed.

She did not leave the apartment that day, but spent most of the time with her niece, whose indisposition was promptly diagnosed as an acute attack of indigestion by the learned and complacent physician, who dosed her and went his way. He ordered her to remain in bed; he

would run in and see her in the morning. If anything, ah!—a—alarming turned up, he murmured to Mrs. Carstairs, she was to call him at once. Not likely, of course, said he, nothing to be apprehensive about, but—well, you never can tell. Resistance not yet fully restored,—and, “after all, as I’ve said all along, Mrs. Carstairs, one’s own resistance is the best chemistry going, and one has to fill his own prescription when it comes to that sort of thing, don’t you know.”

Being a very fashionable doctor he gave her pyromedan to bring down the temperature in a hurry, and codeine to quiet the pain.

Davenport Carstairs seldom reached his home before six or half-past. It was his custom,—if business happened to be indulgent,—to drop in at his favourite club about four in the afternoon. On this afternoon, however, he drove straight home from the office. The clock in the hall was striking four as he entered the apartment. The afternoon newspapers were under his arm,—four or five of them.

“Has Mrs. Carstairs come in, Hollowell?” he asked.

“Mrs. Carstairs did not go out today, sir. Miss Hansbury is ill.”

Ordinarily Carstairs would have been disturbed by this information. He had been gravely worried over his niece’s condition. Hollowell’s supplementary statement, however, appeared to have fallen on deaf ears.

“Say that I’m home, Hollowell, and in my room.”

“Very good, sir. Is there anything I can do, sir?”

“Do? What do you mean?”

“I thought perhaps you might be ill, sir. I—”

“Not at all, not at all,” somewhat irascibly. “Ask Mrs. Carstairs to come to my room—Wait! Have you had any news here to-day?”

“No, sir,—nothink as I am aware of, sir.”

“No—er—commotion?”

“I think not, sir. It isn’t serious. Sort of—ah—what you might call stomach—ah—al-

though cook says it can't have been anything she ate last—”

“By the way, what made you think I was ill?”

“Well,—since you ask, sir,—you do look a bit seedy, sir,—that is to say pale and—”

“I wish to see Mrs. Carstairs alone. Please avoid mentioning my return in Miss Hansbury's presence.”

He went at once to his study, where, moved by the remark of the butler, he stared long and hard at his features in a mirror. His face was ashen grey, and suddenly, strangely old.

He had tossed the newspapers on the rare old Italian table in the centre of the room. After a few moments of complete abstraction, his dull, frowning gaze was raised from the floor to sweep the room,—which, for some strange, almost uncanny cause, seemed almost unfamiliar to him. And yet it was the same,—nothing had been changed. Only he had altered—his own perspective had undergone a vast, incomprehensible change. His eyes falling upon the papers, he took them up, one by one, and stared

again at a certain headline in each,—a raw caption that fascinated him and hurt him like the cut of a knife.

It did not occur to him until long afterwards, and then only in retrospective contemplation of events that filled the most important day in his life, that his wife was a long time in appearing. She came into the study at last, and, as was her unvarying custom, pressed her lips to his cheek. He noticed that her lips, always moist and soft and alive, were hot and dry and as dead as parchment. Before he spoke a word to her, he crossed the room and closed the door into the hall.

She was staring at him in amazement as he turned toward her again.

“What has happened, Davenport? You—you look so strange,—so— Oh, something dreadful has happened! Is it—is it Alfred? Tell me! For God’s sake, don’t—”

“It isn’t Alfred, my dear,” said he. There was a dull, hollow note in his voice,—a note that held to one key. “Where is Louise?”

“In bed. She hasn’t been well—”

“We must manage somehow to break this thing gently to her. It might—there is no telling what it may do to her, Frieda.”

She steadied herself against the table. Her face now was as white as his. It had been pale before; now it was livid.

“What is it, Davenport?”

He looked searchingly, anxiously into her eyes for a moment, and then said: “It will be a shock to you too, Frieda,—but I know you. You can take it like a soldier. Derrol Steele shot himself last night. He is dead. He—There, there, dearest! I shouldn’t have blurted it out like—sit down here, Frieda! That’s right! Poor old girl! Curse me for a blundering fool! I might have known it would be a dreadful shock to you. You were devoted to him. He—”

“Tell me,—tell me everything, Davenport,” she broke in, her eyes fixed on his lips. She did not look into his eyes. He was leaning over her, clasping one of her hands,—a hand that suddenly became limp after the utmost rigidity.

“Just a moment. Compose yourself. Pull

yourself together, dear. It's—it's a cruel story—an incredible story. I would have staked my soul on Derrol Steele. I've known him since he was a little boy. If I had been asked to name the most honourable, the most loyal man in the—but, Frieda, I was wrong—I was deceived in him,—just as you were—and Louise. Louise! God, how this will crush that poor, innocent, loving—”

“Tell me!” she insisted, her fingers tightening on his, her voice scarcely more than a whisper.

For answer, he placed the newspaper in her hands, and pointed to the headline at the top of the page.

“Read it, Frieda. Read this first.”

He sat on the edge of the table, his arms folded across his breast, and waited for her to finish. At last the paper fell from her fingers and she looked up into his face. Her eyes were bleak.

“I can't believe it, Davenport,—I will not believe it of Derrol Steele.”

“As soon as I saw the paper,—about two

o'clock, I should say,—I hurried over to the United States Attorney's office. The story is true, Frieda. It appears that a secret service agent—'gad, how marvellous they are!—an agent overheard scraps of a conversation between two men late last night,—in front of a little French restaurant, I think it was. Steele's name was mentioned two or three times. He was not interested, however, until he heard them speak of a man long suspected by the department. Then he pricked up his ears. The marshal did not repeat the name, for obvious reasons. The man heard enough to convince him that this suspect and one or two other men were to be at Steele's apartment before three o'clock this morning. The address was carefully, precisely given by one of the men, who was very greatly agitated. Captain Steele had vital information in his possession,—that much, at least, the listener was able to grasp. One sentence he heard distinctly. I recall it clearly. 'Tomorrow will be too late.' This was enough for the agent. He was too clever to arrest these men on the spot. The way was

clear for the seizure of at least four or five men, including an officer in the United States Army. So he—are you listening, dear?”

“Yes, yes!” she replied, as if waking from a dream.

“This agent had been set there to watch for a man and a woman, posing as French people, who are under surveillance. As soon as the speakers parted, he rushed up the street to an hotel, and called up headquarters. This was too big a thing to be sidetracked for the French couple. Several operatives were dispatched immediately to assist him. They went to the building where Derrol lives—or lived. They seized the driver of the taxi-cab, but the others evidently got wind of the raid, for when they went up to Steele’s apartment, hoping to catch them in the place with him, they found him alone. He had slipped a bath gown over his pajamas and was undoubtedly waiting for his fellow-conspirators. He realized in an instant that he was trapped. They smashed in the door. While the violent noise was going on, he shot himself. They did not hear the report,

however, due to the clatter and to the fact that there was a silencer on the revolver. There was the faintest sign of a pulse, indicating that the shot had been fired only a minute or two before they burst in and discovered him sitting in a chair not twenty feet from the door."

The tears rolled down the cheeks of Davenport Carstairs. His voice broke.

"I can't believe it of him, Frieda,—I can't believe it."

Her face was ghastly. "We have the proof, Davenport,—the indisputable proof," she murmured.

"The proof? What proof have *we*?"

"The best proof in the world. He shot himself. Only a guilty man would have taken his own life in the circumstances. We—we must believe it of him, Davenport. That poor, sick girl! How are we to tell her?"

Of the two, she was now by far the more composed. Except for the colourless lips and an almost lavender-like hue that stole slowly into her cheeks just below the temples, indicative of the vast effort she had been called upon to exert

in order to regain command of her nerves, she was visibly calm and self-contained. Her husband had sunk dejectedly into a chair. For many minutes no word passed between them. It was she who spoke first.

"You say they caught one of the men—one of the others, I mean?" she inquired.

"The taxi-driver."

Her lips parted to form another question. She withheld it. With her handkerchief she wiped away the moisture that suddenly appeared at the corners of her mouth—oozing from between close-pressed lips.

She read the accounts in the other papers, her face absolutely emotionless. After a while he looked up, and, unobserved, watched her face.

"You are a very wonderful woman, Frieda," he said as she laid the last of the papers on the table. Her answer was a faint smile and a shake of the head.

She arose and started resolutely toward the door. As she neared it, she faltered, and then turned back to him.

"Davenport, I have just had a most disturb-

ing thought. It also may have occurred to you. Derrol Steele was a trusted and familiar guest in this house. He heard many important,—let me go on, please,—I can see revulsion in your eyes. Whether we like it or not, we must look at it squarely from every point of view. Last night, for example, he heard the Admiral; he heard what the Countess had to say about the Italian situation. Going farther back, you yourself spoke in his presence of the sailing of the *Elston* with all those men on board.”

“I see what is in your mind, Frieda,” he said slowly. “You mean we may be dragged into it?”

“Not at all,” she said rather sharply. “We need not be drawn into it in the slightest degree unless we volunteer information that concerns no one but ourselves. Why should any one know that he came into possession of facts here in our home?”

“Such things are bound to leak out, my dear. The investigation will be thorough. They will go to the bottom of this. Of course, I can manage it so that we sha’n’t come in for any publicity, but we can’t escape questioning.”

“And are we to admit that we discussed these very grave and important matters in his presence?”

“We are to tell the truth, Frieda. You should not forget that we spoke of them in the presence of an officer in the United States Army.”

After a moment she said: “I daresay you are right, Davenport. You are always right. I was only thinking that in view of the fact that there is no proof against him except the few words overheard by that man in front of the café,—well, it is possible, don’t you see, that there may have been some horrid, appalling mistake. They have no other proof,—unless the United States Attorney withheld something from you.”

“They have the best proof in the world. He shot himself, as you have said.”

She half closed her eyes. A queer little spasm twisted her lips apart.

“Yes,” she said unsteadily, “yes, he shot himself.”

Her hand was on the door-knob.

"Are you going in to tell her now, Frieda?"

"I must have a little time,—just a little, dear. I am more shaken than you think. I must have time to collect myself. It will be very difficult, Davenport. Stay here. Do not come unless I call to you."

"I leave it all to you, Frieda,—God bless you and God give you strength."

The door closed behind her. He sat motionless for a long time, wondering whether he could hear her call to him with that door and doubtless another intervening. Strange that she should have closed it. He would wait a little while,—a few minutes only,—and then he would open it and—listen.

She went straight to her own room. . . . Presently she lifted the telephone receiver from the hook. The next moment she replaced it, but did not release it from her tense fingers.

She sat rigid, staring at the instrument, resolve and indecision struggling for mastery. At last she pushed the instrument away and sank back in the chair as if exhausted.

CHAPTER VII

THE doctor arrived at eight. He could not afford to disregard the summons of such a man as Davenport Carstairs. So he told his wife to go on to the Opera without him; he would join her as soon as possible,—in fact, it might be possible to get there before the overture was ended, or, at the very latest, soon after the curtain went up. Make his apologies, and all that. This was an urgent case.

Close on his heels came two men to see Mr. Carstairs. . . .

Miss Hansbury was in a pitiable condition. For the better part of two hours, Frieda Carstairs had been with her. Every one else, not excepting her uncle, was denied admission to the room. From time to time, the sound of voices came through the closed door,—one shrill and rising to the pitch of frenzy, the other firm, gentle, soothing—one that seemed to croon. A sharp-eared listener outside would have caught

an occasional sentence wailed in the despairing treble, but he would have made little of it, for it dwindled away into a smothered, inarticulate jumble of words. He might have distinguished the oft-repeated cry:

“You know it isn’t true! You know it! You know it!”

Carstairs grasped the doctor’s arm the instant he entered the apartment.

“For God’s sake, Doctor, give her something to quiet her immediately. I—I cannot endure it. We should have waited. I had no idea it would be like this. Mrs. Carstairs hasn’t left her for an instant. I can hear her moaning and—”

“Is it this—ah—news about young Steele?” inquired the doctor blandly. He rubbed his hands.

“Yes—yes! We thought it best to tell her before she got it from the servants, or the papers, or—”

“Dreadful affair,—most shocking. I knew him very slightly, but he seemed a most delightful chap. By Jove, it is really distressing, the

way the Germans have undermined our very—”

“She is in a most deplorable condition, Doctor. Don’t delay an instant, please,—and do not leave her until you are convinced there is no danger of—” He broke off abruptly.

“Ahem! Yes, yes,—ah,—I’ll remain as long as—ah,—I feel the least bit uneasy about her.”

“All right, Doctor,—if there is the remotest danger of—”

“Oh, I fancy there is n’t any real danger of *that*, Mr. Carstairs. Compose yourself. We ’ll have her sleeping like a baby in no time at all. Had you an inkling that Steele was that sort of a—”

“And will you please send Mrs. Carstairs out of the room at once?”

“Yes, yes,—immediately. Leave it to me, leave it to me,” and off he went, with a sprightliness that would have surprised his dignity if he had had the slightest notion at that moment that he still possessed such a thing.

But Mrs. Carstairs refused to be sent out of the room. She remained steadfast at the girl’s side, holding and stroking her hand.

"I cannot,—I will not leave her, Doctor Browne," she said, compressing her lips.

The butler apologetically stuck his head into Mr. Carstairs' study a few minutes after the doctor's arrival.

"Sorry, sir, but there's two gentlemen asking to see you."

"I told you I was not at home to any one, Hollowell. Is it necessary for me to repeat your instructions?"

"No, sir,—thank you, sir. But these gentlemen say they must see you, sir. They are outside, sir,—in the hall. I asked—"

"Who are they? What is their business?"

"I asked both those questions, sir," said the butler, in evident distress.

"Yes, yes,—well, and what did they say?"

"They simply said 'Never mind,' " said Hollowell, with a great deal of feeling.

Carstairs stopped suddenly in his tracks.

"I thought you said they were gentlemen."

His brow darkened. He had sensed the truth. Secret service men.

"My mistake, sir,—my mistake," mumbled

Hollowell. "Ahem! I can only add, Mr. Carstairs, that they seem to think you *are* at home, and—ah—"

"Conduct them to this room," said Carstairs. A few minutes later: "Come in, gentlemen, and be seated. I suppose you are here to ascertain if I can throw any light on the Derrol Steele affair. It is no secret, of course, that he was my niece's fiancé, and that he was a constant visitor here. I am afraid, however, that I can be of no assistance to you. Captain Steele—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Carstairs," said one of his visitors, a sharp-eyed, clean-cut man of forty, "but, as a matter of fact, our business here is really with Mrs. Carstairs. Will you be good enough to ask her to step into this room?"

His companion had closed the door, and both remained standing.

"I assure you she knows as little as I do about this distressing affair. My niece is very ill. She cannot leave her. You must allow me,—for the present, at least,—to speak for Mrs. Carstairs."

“Deeply as I regret it, Mr. Carstairs, I must insist that your wife—”

“You heard what I said, didn’t you?” demanded Carstairs coldly. Two vivid red blotches shot into his cheeks.

The two men looked at each other. Then the spokesman gave a significant jerk of his head. His companion opened the door and stepped quickly into the hall. As the door closed, the one who remained drew nearer to Carstairs.

“In the first place, Mr. Carstairs, you cannot speak for your wife. I am not here to make inquiries, sir, but to escort her to the offices of the United States Attorney, who will—”

Carstairs started up from his chair. “What infernal nonsense is this?”

“I am afraid it isn’t nonsense,” said the other quietly. “My instructions,—my orders, I may say,—are to confront Mrs. Carstairs with certain charges, in your presence, by the way,—and to remain in this apartment until further orders. There is no alternative.”

“Charges?” gasped Davenport Carstairs, in-

credulously. "What do you mean? What charges have been brought against *us*?"

"There is nothing against *you*, sir. I am instructed to exercise the greatest consideration for you. A great deal, I may add, is left to my discretion, after all. Your wife, I am compelled to inform you, is charged with a very serious offence. In plain words, we have indisputable proof that she is and has been for several years in direct communication with the German Government through—"

"It is a damned, outrageous lie!" shouted Carstairs, furiously. "How dare you come here—"

"Just a moment, please," interrupted the other sharply. "My instructions are to treat you with the utmost respect and consideration. I must ask you to accord me the same treatment. Will you send for your wife, or must I resort to the authority that—"

"For God's sake, man,—wait! Let me get this thing through my head. I—I—will try to control myself. There has been some terrible mistake. Let us discuss the matter calmly. I

can explain everything. We must spare her the mortification, the humiliation of being—Why, my dear sir, it would—kill her. She would not survive the—”

The agent held up his hand. “There is no mistake. It may be possible to spare her the disgrace, the ignominy of public exposure. That, sir, rests with her—and with you. We recognize your position, Mr. Carstairs. There is a disposition on the part of the authorities to protect you. With that object in view, I am instructed to grant Mrs. Carstairs the privilege of remaining in her own room until tomorrow morning. We are to take no definite action to-night, unless, of course, you and she decide that it is best for her to accompany me to the—er—to headquarters. It is up to you and Mrs. Carstairs, sir.”

Davenport Carstairs was a strong, virile character. He possessed the arrogance born of power and a confidence in himself that had never been shaken. His home was his stronghold, his wife its treasure. In his serene strength he could not conceive of discredit fall-

ing upon either. Instead of faltering, now that the first shock had been weathered, he drew himself up and faced the situation with a courage that excited the wonder and admiration of the man who came with evil tidings.

"Be seated," said he, indicating a chair. The man sat down. "You may be partially if not entirely ignorant of the nature of these charges. Am I right in assuming that you are not at liberty to discuss them with me?"

"On the contrary, Mr. Carstairs, I have been advised to do nothing until I have talked the matter over with you. I am in possession of all the facts."

"Is the department content to allow me to pass judgment on my wife?" inquired Carstairs, with a touch of irony. He maintained a calm exterior,—at what cost no one but he will ever know. The secret service man made no response. "In any case, I shall have to ask you to explain everything to me before permitting you to approach my wife."

The agent, who shall be called Jones, nodded his head, and then leaned forward in his chair.

“A man named Hodges was in your employ as a butler up to a fortnight ago. He had worked for you exactly seven weeks and one day. Do you know where he came from and who he really was, Mr. Carstairs?”

“No. Mrs. Carstairs engages the servants here. Are you going to tell me that he was a German spy?”

“Far from it, sir. He was a British secret service agent. His name was Bridgeford. He was killed by an automobile, but not accidentally as you have been led to believe. We have been looking for the driver of that car for two weeks. Last night we got him. He has confessed. Since six o'clock this evening three other men have been arrested,—all subordinate figures in the game. Before morning we expect to land at least one or two of the principal members of the shrewdest gang of spies operating in the name and interest of the Kaiser.”

“Including my wife,” said Carstairs, lifting his eyebrows.

Jones allowed the remark to pass without comment.

“Bridgeford,—or Hodges, as you knew him,—was sent to this city from London. For a long time he worked independently. A few days before his death, we received instructions from Washington to get in touch with him. That was the first we knew of him, I’ll confess. The British Foreign Office advised our department that he had finally got hold of something big and tangible. But evidently the German Foreign Office also was wise to him. He reported to us on the afternoon of the day he was killed. He said that the time was not yet ripe to take positive steps, but that he would soon have the goods on four or five prominent people. He gave us the names of these people. Two of them he was sure about, the others were in doubt. Believe me, they *were* prominent. We were to hold off till he said the word. That night he was killed. But they didn’t do it soon enough. We had all his data, incomplete as it was, and we’ve followed it up. That’s why I am here this evening.”

He paused; and Carstairs said, harshly:

“Well, go on,—why do you hesitate?”

"We know now, beyond all possible doubt, that information of the most vital character has reached the German Admiralty and the Foreign Office through Mrs. Carstairs," said Jones deliberately.

"I may be pardoned if I repeat that it is a damned lie," said Carstairs, gripping the arms of his chair.

"You have said just what you were expected to say, Mr. Carstairs. Before I have finished, however, you will realize that it is not a damned lie. I am authorized to exhibit certain memoranda from the Department. You will then agree with us that the information came from this house,—from this apartment, in fact."

"In the light of what happened last night, I may go so far as to concede that such may have been the case. Permit me to remind you of the suicide of Captain—"

He broke off abruptly, struck by the expression in the other's face. Jones shook his head slowly. There was genuine distress in his voice when he spoke.

“Captain Steele was murdered, Mr. Carstairs,” he said. “He did not kill himself.”

Carstairs sprang to his feet. For an instant a flash of joy transfigured his face.

“By ’gad, I knew it,—I knew it! I would have staked my soul on that boy’s honour. Murdered? My God! And for what hellish purpose is his name blackened by the foul reports given to the press by your—”

“A very grave injustice has been done an honourable gentleman,” interrupted Jones, with real feeling. “Captain Steele was murdered by assassins in the employ of persons connected with the German Government. When I have finished my story,—I shall make it brief,—you will understand that, far from being a traitor to his country, Derrol Steele was a patriot who would not have hesitated to denounce —” He withheld the words that rose to his lips in vindication of the maligned officer. “A careful search of his rooms today resulted in the discovery of a document in his own handwriting, written after he left your apartment last night, and put under lock and key some time



CARSTAIRS SPRANG TO HIS FEET. FOR AN INSTANT A FLASH OF JOY
TRANSPICUED HIS FACE

prior to the arrival of the assassins. I have a copy of it with me. You will observe that he does not make definite accusations against any one, and that he employs initials only in designating the persons involved. He goes no farther than to express his own misgivings, his suspicions and certain observations that prove how keenly alive he was to the—real situation. Sit down, Mr. Carstairs, and look over these papers. Begin here, sir,—with the data obtained by the man you knew as Hodges. I beg to assure you, in advance, that my superiors entertain no thought that you were at any time cognizant of what has been going on in your own home, and there is the profoundest desire on their part to spare you—”

“Enough, sir! Let me see the papers.”

“Just a moment, please. There is one gap in the sequence of events leading up to the death of Captain Steele. We are confident that the leaders of this great conspiracy were warned late last night that Captain Steele suspected a certain person, but we have been unable to discover by what means, or through whom, this

warning was delivered. The men under arrest, with the exception of the chauffeur, absolutely refuse to make a statement of any kind, and he, we are confident, does not know who the go-between was. All he knows,—or thinks, at least,—is that he and his pals were double-crossed last night by—well, by Mrs. Carstairs.”

Davenport Carstairs read the papers placed in his hands by the Secret Service man. One by one, they fell from his stiff, trembling fingers, fluttering to the floor, each in its succeeding turn. At the end, he looked not into Jones's eyes, but past them, and from his own the light was gone.

“Will you ask your wife to come in now, Mr. Carstairs?” said Jones, a trifle unsteadily.

Carstairs stared at him for a moment, unseeingly. Then he passed his hand over his eyes as if to clear them of something revolting. The moment was tense, spasmodic, prophetic of approaching collapse. The strength and courage and confidence of the man had sustained a shock that made ruin of them all. He won-

dered dumbly whether he would ever have the power and the desire to lift his head again and look into the eye of this man who sat there with him. The whole fabric of existence was torn to shreds by the merciless revelations contained in the papers he had read with the steel in his heart. They were complete, irrefutable indictments. There was no such thing as going behind them. Steele's blighting conjectures suddenly became truths of the most appalling nature; the astonishing record of Hodges the butler laid bare a multitude of secrets; the brief, almost laconic summing-up of facts in the possession of the Department took the heart out of his body and scorched it with conviction,—for he knew that the Secret Eye had looked into the very soul of the woman he loved and cherished and trusted. . . .

“If you do not object, I will speak with her—alone,” said he, lifelessly. He struggled to his feet, and, by the mightiest effort of the will, lifted his head and fixed his haggard eyes upon the face of the man who had cast the bomb at his

feet:—a far more potent agent of destruction than any that Germany herself had ever hurled! It was to destroy heaven and earth for him.

Jones cleared his throat.

“That is for you to decide, Mr. Carstairs,” he said, and there was something significant in his voice and manner. “Will you take these documents—”

“No. I do not wish her to see them. Be good enough to step into the drawing-room,—and wait. This way—through this door. And please call your companion. It is not necessary for him to stand guard over her. You have my word that she shall not escape.”

“We are to respect your wishes in every particular, Mr. Carstairs. The authorities appreciate your position. It is their desire to spare you, if possible, the disgrace, the pain—” He stopped.

“I think I understand,” said Davenport Carstairs slowly. A moment later he was alone.

Presently he unlocked and opened a small drawer in his desk. He took out something that glittered, examined it carefully, and then stuck

it into his coat pocket. His jaws were set; in his eyes lay the hard, cold light of steel.

He did not falter.

She had not been fair with him, but he would be fair with her. He would stand by her to the end. . . . She should have her chance. He would see to it that the newspapers,—and the world,—dealt kindly with her. He had loved her.

If possible, he would see to it that he was the only one in all the world to hate her.

He went to her room.

CHAPTER VIII

FAR in the night he said to her:

“It is the only way. I shall leave you to yourself now, Frieda. The rest is with God and you. Tomorrow morning they will take you away. They may—they probably will shoot you as a spy. I cannot save you,—nothing that I can do will be of avail in turning aside or tempering the wrath of Justice.”

She sat, limply, with bowed head. Her fine body seemed to have shrivelled; emptied of its vitality, it had shrunk as with age before his eyes. Everything that had fed her blood for years seeped away, leaving a waste of sunken flesh: pride, arrogance, defiance, and, last of all, fury,—all had gone out of the house of her soul. There was nothing left but the pitiful thing called life.

She raised her eyes.

“I cannot take *your* way out, Davenport,” she said dully.

He pointed to the revolver he had laid on her dressing-table.

“*That*, Frieda, is the only friend you have in all this world tonight.”

“Oh, my God! Are you heartless? Have you no pity, no love, no—”

“I have pity,—nothing more. Love? I have given you love for twenty years and more. You have defiled it. Do not speak of love!”

“You know I love you—you know I would die for you a thousand times over. You are my man,—my master, my—”

“Enough, Frieda! You have played a great game,—but an ignoble one,—and you have lost. You have begged me to—to become your executioner. You ask me to kill you. You—”

“I do not ask it now,” she broke in, looking him full in the eye. “Go, Davenport. Leave me to myself. Thank you for—for being kind to me tonight,—after all. I have told you the truth,—you know everything that my conscience permits me to reveal. You know more than that man who sits out there like a vulture, waiting for—waiting for *me*. What I have con-

fessed to you I would die a thousand times over rather than confess to another living soul. They could take me away tonight and torture me till I died, and not one word of what I have said to you would pass my lips. They know enough, but you alone know all. You say the world will never know what I have done. I do not care. Let the world know. I am proud of my blood—I rejoice in the little I have been able to do for—”

“Hush! Do not say it.”

“Very well. It hurts you. I do not want to hurt you now, husband. The world is to believe that I—that an accident—a sudden—” She buried her face in her hands. Her body shook.

“I would spare your son, Frieda,” said he.

She looked up, dry-eyed. A quick flash,—could it have been of joy?—lighted her haggard face.

“Yes, yes,—he must be spared,” she cried. A deep, inscrutable expression came into her eyes. She drew a deep, full breath. “Thank God! He is young,—he has a long and useful life to live. I gave it him. That is the best, the

biggest thing I have done. Now, go, Davenport. Shall we say—good-night?"

The following day,—in the noon issues—all of the New York evening papers printed, under varied headlines, the details, so far as available, of the shocking accident which resulted in the death of Mrs. Davenport Carstairs. She had fallen from a window in her bed-chamber to the brick-paved courtyard ten stories below. Death was instantaneous. "Accidental," was the prompt decision of the coroner.

Deduction readily established the fact. Mrs. Carstairs must have become ill in the night. A bottle of smelling salts was found on the floor near the window which was open to the full. Evidently, she had gone to the window for air. After opening it wide, a sudden faintness or dizziness caused her to topple forward. . . . Before retiring for the night, she had complained to her husband of a dull, throbbing headache, due, no doubt, to anxiety over the alarming illness of her niece, Miss Hansbury. . . . Sometime after one o'clock, Mr. Carstairs,

in the adjoining bed-room, heard her moaning as if in pain. He arose instantly and opened the connecting door. She was lying on her bed, and, in response to his inquiry, begged him not to worry about her. Dr. Browne, called in to attend Miss Hansbury, had decided to remain for the night. He was lying down in a guest-chamber, and had fallen asleep.

Uneasy over his wife's condition, Mr. Carstairs awoke the physician and together they returned to her room. A knock on the door brought no response,—but some relief in the thought that she was asleep. The husband opened the door slightly and listened. There was no sound. He entered the room, which was dark, and approached the bed. Then, he called out to the doctor to switch on the lights. . . . A cold icy draft,—the Night-Wind,—rushing into the room through the open window. . . .

Continuing, the papers spoke profoundly of the great loss to society, of the qualities that made Mrs. Davenport Carstairs one of the most sincerely beloved women in all the great city, of her prominence in the conduct of important

war charities and reliefs, of her unswerving devotion to the cause for which America and her sons were fighting, of her manifold charms and graces. Her untimely death created a void that could never be filled. Eulogy upon eulogy!

Among the hundreds of telegrams of condolence received by Davenport Carstairs was one from Mr. Paul Zimmerlein, couched in most exquisite terms, conveying tribute to the dead and sympathy to the living. It was sent on the second day from the smart club to which he belonged; on the third flowers went up with his card. . . .

As business went on as usual at the offices of Mr. Paul Zimmerlein, it would be sheer presumption to even suggest that this unhappy chronicle has reached

THE END