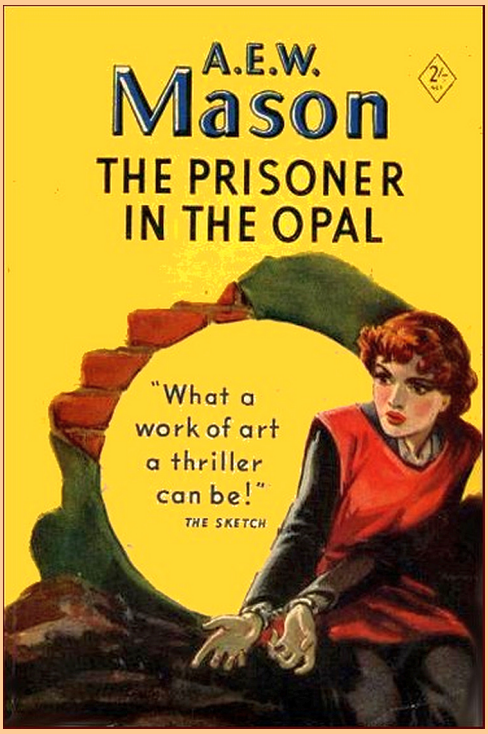


THE PRISONER IN THE OPAL

A.E.W. Mason (1865–1948)

Erstausgabe: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1928

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A.E.W. Mason

Alfred Edward Woodley Mason (1875-1948) war ein englischer Autor, Schauspieler, Cricket-Spieler und Politiker. Nach dem Studium in Oxford widmete er sich zunächst der Schauspielerei, bevor er 1895 seinen ersten Roman „A Romance of Wastdale" veröffentlichte. Insgesamt brachte er es auf mehr als 30 Bücher. Sein in England bekanntester Roman dürfte „The Four Feathers" sein, der zu den am meisten verfilmten Werken der britischen Literatur gehört.

Von 1906 bis 1910 saß Mason als liberaler Abgeordneter für Coventry im House of Commons. Während des Ersten Weltkriegs diente er zunächst als Captain in britischen Armee, bevor 1915 zu den Royal Marines wechselte, wo er 1917 zum Major aufstieg. Er wurde insbesondere im Marinenachrichtendienst eingesetzt und wirkte am Aufbau eines Gegenspionagenetzwerks in Spanien und Mexiko mit.

Den Krimi-Freunden auf der gesamten Welt ist Mason aber durch seine fünf Romane und zwei Kurzgeschichten um den französischen Inspektor der Sûreté Gabriel Hanaud ans Herz gewachsen, eine (für seine Fans viel zu kurze) Serie, die immerhin von 1910, als „At the Villa Rose" erschien, bis 1946 währte. Masons Intention war von Anfang an, einen Detektiv zu schaffen, der sich so viel wie möglich von Sherlock Holmes unterscheiden sollte (der 1910 ja gerade von seinem Tod in den Reichenbachfällen „auferstanden" war): Hanaud war untersetzt, Holmes hager, war Polizeibeamter, kein Amateur, gehörte der französischen Sûreté an und stammte nicht aus dem viktorianischen England, und vor allem verließ er sich mehr aus psychologische Einsichten als auf materielle Beweise.

Hanauds Watson ist ein ehemaliger Tee- und/oder Gewürzhändler namens Julius Ricardo, nur in dem zweiten Roman „The House of the Arrow" (1923) wird diese Rolle von einem jungen englischen Rechtsanwalt übernommen.

Hanauds Bedeutung und des Romans „At the Villa Rose" wird bereits von dem amerikanischen Literaturhistoriker Howard Haycraft in seinem Werk „Murder for Pleasure. The Life and Times of the Detective Story" (New York–London: 2. Aufl. 1941, S. 72) treffend beschrieben: "For a good generation after HOLMES, virtually every fictional detective of consequence was either an outright amateur or, at the least, a private consulting agent, engaged in outshining and humilating the minions of the law. With A.E.W. Mason's M. HANAUD, of the Sûreté, we come for the first time since Gaboriau to a really notable *police* detective. In this single sense HANAUD may loosely he called a descandant of Lecoq. But there the resemblance ends, for in contrast to the lumpish sensationalism of Gaboriau, the HANAUD adventures are among the most subtly conceived and described in the genre, Mason, though he chooses a Gallic mise-enscène, and though he handles French judiciaire procedure like a native, is an Englishman, and is thus not under the compulsion most French writers of detection seem to feel of following literally in the footsteps of the feuilletonist."Eine humorvolle Note bekommen die Erzählungen u. a. auch durch Hanauds ständigen Kampf mit den englischen Idiomen. Bei dieser Gelegnheit sei erwähnt, dass Hanaud als eines der Vorbilder von Agatha Christies belgischem Detektiv (und ehemaligem Polizeibeamten) Hercule Poirot gilt, dessen erstes Abenteuer, „*The Mysterious Affair At Styles*" (dt. „Das fehlende Glied in der Kette"), 1916 geschrieben wurde und sogar erst 1920 erschien.

Bei aller Modernität hat "At the Villa Rose" durchaus auch noch Züge der Kriminalromane aus der Epoche zuvor. Wie in drei der vier Holmes-Romane (die Ausnahme ist „The Hound of the Baskervilles") wird die Geschichte in zwei Teilen erzählt: Im ersten werden die Verbrecher gejagt und zum Schluss auch gestellt, im zweiten (ebenso umfangreich wie der erste) werden die Geschehnisse aus ihrer Sicht und der ihres überlebenden Opfers geschildert. Dies ist in den folgenden Werken nicht mehr so, lediglich im letzten Roman „The House in Lordship Lane" (1946) wird in den letzten Kapiteln das Tagebuch eines der Beteiligten zitiert.

Schon früh wurde unter den Kennern diskutiert, welcher der ersten beiden Romane, "At the Villa", der ebenfalls mehrmals verfilmt worden ist, oder „The House of the Arrow", der bessere sei. Für beide Seiten gibt es Befürworter. Lassen wir hier noch einmal H. Haycraft zu Wort kommen (S. 73): "A favorite topic of debate among the cognoscenti is whether *At the Villa Rose* or *The House of the Arrow* is the greater achievement. Granting the former the advantages of priority, the present writer nevertheless alines himself with those who hold that the reader must go to *The House of the Arrow* to experience the full flavor of the Mason-HANAUD combination: the wealth of atmosphere, the effortless portrayal

of character, the brooding sense of evil, the mordant and brilliant humor. But whichever title we choose, it will be amply evident that Mason was the first writer after Collins to make significant use of the *psychological* element in the detective story. Like R. Austin Freeman—whom he resembles in no other respect—he was far ahead of his time. Mr. Mason is still writing to-day[1], at well past seventy. It is surely permissible to hope for at least one more of the matchless HANAUD tales before he chooses to lay down his pen."

Unabhängig, welchen der beiden Romane man bevorzugt, sind Mason und Hanaud auf jeden Fall eine Wiederentdeckung wert.

Quelle: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._E._W._Mason

Die Hanaud-Romane und -Kurzgeschichten:

- *At the Villa Rose*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1910 (eine deutsche Übersetzung ist unter dem Titel „Die Tote in der Villa Rose", Heyne, München, 1971 erschienen)
- *The Affair at the Semiramis-Hotel*, Kurzgeschichte, zuerst veröffentlicht in: „The Four Corners Of The World", Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1917
- *The House of the Arrow*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1923
- *The Prisoner in the Opal*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1928
- *They Wouldn't Be Chessmen*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1934
- *The Ginger King*, Kurzgeschichte, zuerst veröffentlicht in THE STRAND MAGAZINE, August 1940
- *The House in Lordship Lane*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946

[1] Der Text wurde 1940 oder 1941 geschrieben, also noch bevor der letzte Roman „The House in Lordship Lane (1946) erschienen ist. Wahrscheinlich war Haycraft auch die Novelle „The Ginger King" noch nicht bekannt, die 1940 im STRAND MAGAZINE publiziert worden ist.

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Chapter 1

Red Wine

When Mr. Julius Ricardo spoke of a gentleman—and the word was perhaps a thought too frequent upon his tongue—he meant a man who added to other fastidious qualities a sound knowledge of red wine. He could not eliminate that item from his definition. No! A gentleman must have the great vintage years and the seven growths tabled in their order upon his mind as legibly as Calais was tabled on the heart of the Tudor Queen. He must be able to explain by a glance at the soil why a vineyard upon this side of the road produces a more desirable beverage than the vineyard fifty yards away upon the other. He must be able to distinguish at a first sip the virility of a Château Latour from the feminine fragrance of a Château Lafite. And even then he must reckon that he had only learnt a Child's First Steps. He could not consider himself properly equipped until he was competent to challenge upon any particular occasion the justice of the accepted classification. Even a tradesman might contend that a Mouton Rothschild was unfairly graded amongst the second growths. But the being Mr. Ricardo had in mind must be qualified to go much farther than that. It is probable indeed that if Mr. Ricardo were suddenly called upon to define a gentleman briefly, he would answer: "A gentleman is one who has a palate delicate enough and a social position sufficiently assured to justify him in declaring that a bottle of a good bourgeois growth may possibly transcend a bottle of the first cru."

Now Julius Ricardo was a man of iron conscience. The obligations which he imposed upon others in his thoughts, he imposed in his life upon himself. He made it a point of honour to keep thoroughly

up to date in the matter of red wine; and he mapped out his summers to that end. Thus, on the Saturday of Goodwood week he travelled by the train to Aix-les-Bains. There he found his handsome motor-car which had preceded him, and there for five or six weeks he took his absurd cure. Absurd, for the only malady from which he suffered was that he was a bad shot. He shot so deplorably that his presence on a grouse-moor invariably provoked ridicule and sometimes, if his host wanted a big bag, contumely and indignation. Aix-les-Bains was consequently the only place for him during the month of August. His cure ended, he journeyed with a leisurely magnificence across France to Bordeaux, planning his arrival at that town for the end of the second week of September. At Bordeaux he refitted and reposed; and after a few days, on the eve of the vintage, he set out on a tour through the hospitable country of the Gironde; moving by short stages from château to château; enjoying a good deal of fresh air and agreeable company; drinking a good deal of quite unobtainable claret from the private cuvees of his hosts; and reaching early in October the pleasant town of Arcachon with a feeling that he had been superintending the viniculture of France. This was the curriculum. But as he was once dipped amongst agitations and excitements at Aix, so on another occasion he was shaken to the foundations of his being during his pilgrimage through the vineyards. He was even spurred by the touch of the macabre in these events to a rare poetic flight.

"The affair gave me quite a new vision of the world," he would declare complacently. "I saw it as a vast opal inside which I stood. An opal luminously opaque, so that I was dimly aware of another world outside mine, terrible and alarming to the prisoner in the opal. It was what is called a fire opal, for every now and then a streak of crimson, bright as the flash of a rifle on a dark night, shot through the twilight which enclosed me. And all the while I felt that the ground underneath my feet was dangerously brittle just as an opal is brittle—" and so on and so on. Mr. Ricardo, indeed, embroidered and developed and expounded his image of an opal to a degree of tediousness which even in him was phenomenal. However, the crime did make a stir far beyond the placid country in which it ran its course. The records of the trial do stand wherein may be read the doings of Mr. Ricardo and his friend Hanaud, the big French detective, and all the other people who skated and slipped and stumbled and shivered in as black a business as Hanaud could remember.

Chapter 2

Joyce Whipple

For Mr. Ricardo, the trouble began in a London drawing-room during the week which preceded Goodwood races. The men had just come up from the dining-room and were standing, as is their custom, uncomfortably clustered near to the door. Mr. Ricardo looked up and caught a distinct smile of invitation from the prettiest girl in the room. She was seated deliberately apart from her companions on a couch made for two, and no less deliberately she smiled. Mr. Ricardo could not believe his eyes. He certainly knew the young lady. She was a girl from California with a name as pretty as herself, Joyce Whipple, and from time to time in London, and in Paris, and in Venice, he had enjoyed the good fortune of being freshly introduced to her. But what in the world had he, a mere person who would never become a personage, the amateur of a hundred arts and the practitioner of none of them, a retired tea-broker from Mincing Lane—what qualities had he that could interest so radiant a creature during the hours before a dinner-party could decently disperse? For radiant she was from her sleek small head to her slender brocaded shoes. Her hair was dark brown in colour, parted in the middle and curved in the neatest of ripples over her ears. Her face was pale without being sallow; her forehead low, and she had that space between her large grey eyes which means real beauty; her nose was just a trifle tip-tilted, her upper lip short, and her mouth if anything on the large side, her lips healthily red. She had a small firm chin, and she was dressed in an iridescent frock shot with pale colours which blended and separated with every movement which she made. She was so trim and spruce that the first impression which she provoked was not so much that she was beautiful as that she was exquisitely finished

down to the last unnoticeable detail. She had apparently been sent straight to the house in a bandbox and set on her feet by the most careful hands. Mr. Ricardo could not believe that smile was meant for him. He had merely intercepted it, and was beginning to look round for the fortunate youth for whom it was intended, when the young lady's face changed. A look of indignation swept over it first, that he should be so reluctant to approach her. The indignation was succeeded by an eager appeal as his hostess bore down upon him. Mr. Ricardo hesitated no longer. He slipped quickly across the room, and Joyce Whipple at once made room for him on the couch by her side.

"We must talk very earnestly," she said. "Otherwise you will be snatched away from me, Mr. Ricardo." She bent forward urgently and with the air of one speaking of life and death babbled about the first thing which came into her head.

"One of your great ladies, shrewd as your great ladies are, told me, when I first came to England, that if I ever wanted particularly to speak to a man, my moment would come when he and the other men joined the ladies. She said that there were always a few seconds when they stood rather self-conscious and embarrassed in a silly group, wondering to whom they'd be welcome and to whom they would not. If at such a time a girl directed the least tiny beckoning glance to one of them, he would be gratefully at her feet for the rest of the evening. But the plan almost missed fire tonight, although I gave you a ploughman's grin."

"I thought that there must be some Adonis just behind my shoulder," Mr. Ricardo replied; and the hostess, who had not quite abandoned her chase, hesitated.

Mr. Ricardo had a certain value of an evening. He had no wish to run away and dance at night clubs. So he could be depended upon to play bridge until the party broke up. And though, alas, he did occasionally say with a giggle, "Now, where shall we go for honey?" or perpetrate some such devastating jest, he played a sound, unenterprising game. But it was evident to his hostess that tonight he was winged for higher flights. She turned away, and Joyce Whipple drew a little breath of relief.

"You know a friend of mine, Diana Tasborough," she said.

"She is kind enough to nod to me across a ballroom when she remembers who I am," Mr. Ricardo answered modestly.

Joyce Whipple betrayed a little impatience.

“But you are going to stay with her, of course, at the Château Suvlac when you go wine-hunting in the autumn.”

Mr. Ricardo winced. He could not have imagined a phrase so unsuitable to his dignified pilgrimage through the Medoc and the Gironde.

“No,” he replied rather coldly. “I shall be staying in the neighbourhood, but with the Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol.”

He is not to be blamed if he rolled the name rather grandly upon his tongue. It belonged undoubtedly to the first cru among names, and had a delicate fine flavour of the Crusades. However, Mr. Ricardo was honest and, after only the slightest possible struggle with his vanity, he added: “But I have not yet made the acquaintance of the Vicomte, Miss Whipple. There is illness in the house where I was to have stayed and I have been passed on in the hospitable way people have there.”

“I see.” Joyce Whipple was clearly disappointed and almost aggrieved. “I made certain, since I have met you at Diana’s house, that you would be breaking your journey at Suvlac.”

Mr. Ricardo shook his head. “But I shall be no more than a mile away, and if I can do anything for you I certainly will. As a matter of fact, I haven’t seen either Miss Tasborough or her aunt for at least six months.”

“No. They have been all the summer at Biarritz,” said Joyce.

“I have never stayed at the Château Suvlac,” Mr. Ricardo continued naively, “though I should have liked to. For from the outside it is charming. A rose-pink house of one story in the shape of a capital E, with two little round towers in the main building and a great stone-paved terrace at the back overlooking the river Gironde—”

But Joyce Whipple was not in the least interested in his description of the rose-pink country house, and Mr. Ricardo broke off. Joyce Whipple was leaning forward, her elbow on her knee and her chin propped in the cup of her hand, and a look of anxiety upon her face.

“Yes—after all,” said Mr. Ricardo on quite a new note of interest, “it is a little odd.”

“What’s odd?” asked Joyce Whipple, turning her face to him.

“That the Tasboroughs should have spent the whole summer at Biarritz. For if anywhere was anybody’s spiritual home, London was Miss Diana’s.”

Rich by the inheritance of the Suvlac vineyards, and chaperoned by a submissive aunt, Diana Tasborough was the heart and pivot of one of those self-contained sets into which young London is subdivided. A set of people, youthfully middle-aged for the most part, who had already reached distinction or were on the way to it. Diana, it is true, fished a river in Scotland and hunted in the Midlands, but London was her home and the headquarters of the busy company of her friends.

"She has been ill?" Mr. Ricardo suggested.

"No. She writes to me and there's never a word about any illness. All the same, I am troubled. Diana was terribly kind to me when I first came over to England and knew nobody at all. I should hate anything to happen to her—anything, I mean—evil."

Joyce pronounced the word slowly, not because she had any doubt that it was the right word to use, but so that Mr. Ricardo might not make light of it. Mr. Ricardo, indeed, was startled. He looked about the room. The banks of roses, the brightness of the illumination, the smartly dressed people, were not in accord with so significant a word.

"Do you really think that something evil is happening to her?" he asked. He was thrilled, even a little pleasurably thrilled.

"I am sure," Joyce Whipple declared.

"Why are you sure?"

"Diana's letters to me," said Joyce, and turning towards Mr. Ricardo, she fixed her big grey eyes upon his face. "I tell you frankly that I can't find in any one of them a single sentence, even a single phrase, which taken by itself is alarming. I know that, for I have analysed them carefully over and over again. And I want you to believe that I am not imaginative, or psychic—no, not the least bit in the world. And yet I never read a letter from Diana without going through the most horrible experience. I seem to see"—and she broke off to correct herself—"no, there's no seeming about it. I do see underneath the black-ink letters, swinging backwards and forwards somehow between the written words and the white paper they are written on, a chain of faces, grotesque, unfinished and dreadful. And they are always changing. Sometimes they—how shall I describe it?—flatten out into featureless, pink round discs with eyes which are alive. Sometimes they quiver up again into distorted human outlines. But they are never complete. If they were, I feel sure that they would be utterly malignant. And they

are never still. They float backwards and forwards, like"—and she clasped her hands over her eyes for a moment and shivered so that a big fire-opal on a plain gold bracelet flamed against her wrist—"like the faces of drowned people who have been swinging to and fro with the tides for months."

Joyce Whipple was no longer concerned with the effect of her narrative upon Mr. Ricardo. She had almost forgotten his presence. Her eyes, too, though they moved here and there from a bridge table to a group of people talking, saw really nothing of the room. She was formulating her strange experience for the hundredth time to herself, in the hope that somewhere, in her story, by some chance word, she would be led to its explanation.

"And I am afraid," she continued in a low but—very distinct voice. "I am afraid that sooner or later I shall see all those cruel dead faces complete and alive, the faces of living people."

"Living people who are threatening Diana Tasborough," said Mr. Ricardo gently, so that he might not break the train of Joyce Whipple's thoughts.

"More than threatening her," said Joyce. "Harming her—yes, now already doing her harm which already it may be too late to repair. No doubt it sounds mediaeval and—and—ridiculous, but I have a horrible dread that utterly evil spirits—the elementals are fighting in the darkness for her soul, that she herself isn't aware of it, but that by some dispensation the truth is allowed to break through to me."

Joyce threw up her hands suddenly in a little gesture of despair. "But, you see," she cried, "the moment I begin to piece my fears together into a pattern of words, they just shred away into little wisps too elusive to mean anything at all to anybody except myself."

"No," Mr. Ricardo objected. It was his proud thought that he was a citizen of the world with a very open mind. There were thousands of strange occurrences, of intuitions, for instance, subsequently justified, which science could not explain and only the stupid could deride. "I would never say that the shell of the world mightn't crack for any one of us and let some streak of light come through, misleading perhaps, true perhaps—a will-o'-the-wisp, or a sunbeam."

It seemed to him that to no one might this hint of a revelation be more naturally vouchsafed than to this girl with the delicate, sensitive face and the grey eyes to which her long silken eyelashes, with their upward curve, lent so noticeable a look of mystery.

"After all," he continued. "Who knows enough to deny that there may come messages and warnings?"

"Yes." Joyce Whipple caught at the word. "Repeated warnings. For if I put the letters away, and after a time take them out and read them again, I have just the same dreadful vision. I see just the same heave and surge of water with the unfinished faces washing to and fro."

Mr. Ricardo began to rebuild his recollections of Diana Tasborough, fitting one in here, and another in there, until he had a fairly clear picture of the girl. She was tall, with hair of the palest gold, very pretty but a trifle affected in strange company. She had a way of fluttering her eyelids and pursing her mouth as she spoke, as if each word that she dropped was a pearl of rarest price. There was another quality too.

"She was always a little aloof," he said.

Joyce took him up at once. "Yes, but sedately aloof. Not as if she was living some mysterious secret life of her own all the time. I know what you mean. But it really only signified that she was just a little bit more her own mistress than were most of her friends. She—what shall I say?—she romped without romping. And don't you see that precisely that extra hold she had upon herself increases my fears? She is the last person for whose soul and body the powers of evil should be fighting in the shadows."

A movement amongst the guests diverted Mr. Ricardo's thoughts. The evening was growing late. One of the bridge tables had already broken up. Mr. Ricardo was a practical man.

"But what in the world can I do about it?" he asked.

"You will be in the neighbourhood of the Château Suvlac in September?"

"Yes."

"And Diana always has a party for the vintage."

Mr. Ricardo smiled. Diana's parties were famous in the Gironde. For ten nights or so the windows of that old rose-pink château of the sixteenth century blazed out upon the darkness until dawn. The broad stone terrace was gay with groups of young people dancing, and the music of their dances and even their laughter were heard far out upon the river, by the sailors in their *gabare*s waiting

upon the turn of the tide. The hour at which the guests retired precluded early rising, except perhaps upon the first day. But somewhere about twelve o'clock the next day they might be seen picking grapes in attractive costumes and looking rather like the chorus of a musical comedy whose action took place in a vineyard of France.

"Yes, she certainly has a party for the vintage," he said.

"Well then, you see what I want you terribly to do," said Joyce, turning again towards him and plying him—oh, most unfairly!—with all the glamour of a lovely girl's confidences and appealing eyes. "If you will, of course. It's a little prayer, of course. I have no claim. But I know how kind you are—" Did she see the poor man flinch, that she must pile flattery upon prayer and woo him with the most wistful, plaintive voice? "I want you to spend as much time as you can at the Château Suvlac. You will be welcome, of course"—she dismissed the ridiculous idea that he could ever be unwelcome with a flicker of her fingers. "You could watch. You can find out what is happening to Diana—whether there is anybody really dangerous to her amongst her associates and then—"

"And then I shall write to you, of course," Mr. Ricardo said, as cheerfully as these arduous duties so confidently laid upon him enabled him to do. He was surprised, however, to discover that letters to Joyce Whipple upon the subject were not to be included in his duties.

"No," she answered with a trifle of hesitation. "Of course I should love to hear from you—naturally I should, and not only about Diana—but I can't quite tell where I shall be towards the end of September. No, what I want you to do is, once you have found out what's wrong, to jump in and put a stop to it."

Mr. Ricardo sat back in his chair with a very worried expression on his face. For all his finical ways and methodical habits he was at heart a romantic. To play the god for five minutes so that a few young people stumbling in the shadows might walk with sure feet in a serene light—he knew no higher pleasure than this. But romance must nevertheless be reasonable, even if it took the shape of so engaging a young lady as Joyce Whipple. What she was proposing was work for heroes, not for middle-aged gentlemen who had retired from Mincing Lane. And as he ran over in his mind the names of more suitable champions, a tremendous fact leaped into his mind.

"But surely," he stammered in his eagerness. "Diana Tasborough is engaged. Yes, I am sure of it. To a fine young fellow too. He was

in the Foreign Office and went out of it and into the City, because he didn't want to be the poor husband of a rich wife." Mr. Ricardo's memory was working at forced draught, now that he saw the way of escape opening in front of him, a passage between the Scylla of refusal and the Charybdis of failure. "Bryce Carter! That's his name! That is his business. You must describe your experiences to him, Miss Whipple, and—"

But Miss Whipple cut him short, very curtly, whilst the blood mounted curiously over her throat and painted her cheeks pink. "Bryce Carter has crashed."

Mr. Ricardo was shocked and disappointed. "In an aeroplane? I hadn't heard of it. I am so sorry. Crashed? Dear me!"

"I mean," said Joyce patiently, "that Diana has broken off the engagement. That's another reason why I think something ought to be done about it. She was very much in love with him and it all went in a week or two—she gave him no reason. So he's barred out, isn't he? I feel that I can't really stand aside—not, of course, that I have anything to do with it—" Joyce Whipple was rapidly becoming incoherent, whilst the colour now flamed in her cheeks. "So unless you can help—"

But Mr. Ricardo felt that his position was more delicate than ever. He was not at all attracted by his companion's confusion; and since the hoped—for avenue of escape was closed for him, he cast desperately about for another; and found it.

"I have got it," he said, shaking a finger at her triumphantly.

"What have you got?" Joyce asked warily. "The only possible solution of the problem." He was most emphatic about it. There was to be no discussion at all. His arrangement must just go through.

"You are the one person indicated to put the trouble right," he declared. "You are Diana's friend. You know all her other friends. You can propose yourself for her party at the Château Suvlac. You have influence with her. If there is anyone—dangerous—wasn't that the word you used?—no one is so likely as you to discover who it is—yes."

He looked her over. There was a vividness about her, a suggestion of courage and independence which went very well with the straight, slim figure and the delicate tidiness of her appearance. She seemed purposeful. This was the age of young women. By all means let one of them, radiant as Joyce Whipple, blow the trumpet and have the intense satisfaction of seeing the walls of this new

Jericho collapse. He himself would look on without one pang of envy from the house of the nobleman with the resonant name, the Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol.

"You! Of course, you!" he exclaimed admiringly.

Suddenly the positions were reversed. So great a discomfort was visible in Joyce Whipple's movements and in her face that Mr. Ricardo was astonished. He had chanced upon a quite unexpected flaw in her armoury. It was she who now must walk delicately.

"No doubt," she admitted with a great deal of embarrassment. "Yes, and I have been asked to Suvlac … and I shall go if—I can. But I don't think that I can." She broke out passionately: "I wish with all my heart that I could! But I shall probably be out of reach. In America. That's why I said that it was of no use to write to me, and why I wanted to unload the whole problem upon you. You see"—she looked at Mr. Ricardo shyly and quickly looked away again—"you see, Cinderellas must be off the premises by midnight," and with a hurried glance at the clock, "and it's almost midnight now."

She rose quickly as she spoke, and with a smile and a pleasant word, she joined a small cluster of young people by the flower-banked grate. These had obviously been waiting for her, for they wished their hostess good night and immediately went away.

Mr. Ricardo certainly had the satisfaction of knowing that he had not committed himself to Joyce Whipple's purposes. But the satisfaction was not very real. The odd story which she had told him was just the sort of story which appealed to him; for he had a curious passion for the bizarre. And even then he was less intrigued by the narrative than by the narrator. He tried indeed to fix his mind upon the problem of Diana Tasborough. But the problem of Joyce Whipple popped up instead. Almost before he realized his untimely behaviour, he had got her dressed up like some wilful beauty of the Second Empire. There she was, sitting in front of him, as he drove back to his house in Grosvenor Square, her white shoulders rising entrancingly out of one of those round, escalloped gowns which kept up heaven knows how, and spread in voluminous folds about her feet. Yet even so, with her thus attired before his eyes, as it were, he began to doubt, to wonder whether he was not growing a trifle old-fashioned and prejudiced. For after all, could Joyce Whipple, with her straight, slender limbs, her wrists and hands and feet and ankles as fragile seemingly as glass, have looked more lovely in any age than she had looked in the short shimmering frock which she had worn that night? Her

voice certainly supported the argument that her proper period was the Second Empire. For instead of the brisk high notes to which he was accustomed, it was soft and low and melodious and had a curiously wistful little drawl which it needed great strength of character to resist. There were, however, other points which affected him less pleasantly. Why had his two suggestions thrown her into so manifest a confusion? What had she to do with Bryce Carter that she must blush so furiously over the rupture of his engagement to Diana Tasborough? And —

"Bless my soul," he cried, in the solitude of his limousine, "what was all this talk of Cinderella?" The glass-slipper portion of that pretty legend was all very appropriate and suitable. But the rest of it? Miss Joyce Whipple had come over from the United States with a sister a year or two older than herself, and almost as pretty—yes. The sister had married recently and had married well—yes. But before that event, for two years wherever the fun of the fair was to be found, there also were the Whipple girls. Deauville and Dinard had known them and the moors of Scotland, from which Mr. Ricardo was excluded. He himself had seen Joyce Whipple flaming on the sands of the Lido in satin pyjamas of burnt orange. For Mr. Ricardo was one of those seemly people who from time to time looked in at the Lido in order that they might preach sermons about its vulgarities with a sound and thorough knowledge. Joyce Whipple had certainly looked rather dazzling in her burnt orange pyjamas—but at that moment Mr. Ricardo's car stopped at his front door and put an end to his reflections. Perhaps it was just as well.

Chapter 3

The Man with the Beard

A month later chance, or destiny, if so large a word can be used in connection with Mr. Ricardo, conspired with Joyce Whipple. Mr. Ricardo was drinking his morning coffee at the reasonable hour of ten in his fine sitting-room on the first floor of the Hotel Majestic, with his unopened letters in a neat pile at his elbow, when the writing upon the envelope of the top one caught and held his eye. It was known to him, but he did not recognize it. He was in a vacuous mood. The sun was pouring in through the open windows. It was more pleasant to sit and idly speculate who was his correspondent than to tear open the envelope and find out. But years ago he had received a lesson in this very room at Aix-les-Bains on the subject of unopened letters, and, remembering it, he opened the letter and turned at once to the signature. He was a little more than interested to read the name of Diana Tasborough. He read the whole letter eagerly now. The Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol did not, after all, propose to bring his servants out of Bordeaux and open up his château for the vintage. He would be amongst his vineyards himself for ten days or so, with no more attendance than his valet and the housekeeper at the château. Under these circumstances it would be more comfortable for Mr. Ricardo if he put up at the Château Suvlac.

There will only be a small party, and you will complete it, Diana wrote very politely. You will meet Monsieur de Mirandol at dinner here, and I shall look forward to your arrival on the list of September.

Mr. Ricardo had perused every word of this letter before he realized that it had provoked in him no uncanny sensations whatever;

and when he did realize that disconcerting fact, he was not a little mortified. But there it was. Not one dead drowned incomplete malignant face heaved on a tide between the ink and the paper. No, not one! It is true that the ink was purple instead of black; and for a moment or two Mr. Ricardo sought an unworthy consolation in that difference. But his natural honesty made him reject it. The colour of the ink could be only the most superficial circumstance.

"Not one dead drowned face, not a suggestion of evil, not a pang of alarm," Mr. Ricardo announced to himself as he nicked the letter away with considerable indignation. "And yet I am no less sensitive than other people."

It might be, of course, that if he suspended his mind more thoroughly he in his turn might receive the thrill of a message from the world beyond. It was certainly worth an experiment.

"My best plan," he argued, "will be to shut my eyes tight and think of nothing whatever for five minutes. Then I will read the letter again."

He shut his eyes accordingly with the greatest determination. He was modest. He did not ask for very much. If he saw something pink and round like a jelly-fish when he opened his eyes, he would be content and his pride quite restored. But he must give himself time. He allowed what he took to be a space of five minutes. Then he opened his eyes, pounced upon the letter—and received one of the most terrible shocks of his life. On the table, by the letter, rested a hand, and beyond the hand an arm. Mr. Ricardo with startled eyes followed the line of the arm upwards, and then uttering a sharp cry like the bark of a dog he slid his chair backwards. He blinked, as well he might do. For sitting over against him, on the other side of the table, sprung silently; heaven knew whence, sat a brigand—no less—a burly brigand of the most repulsive and menacing appearance. A black cloak was wrapped about his shoulders in the Spanish style, a big, unkempt, bristling beard grew like a thicket upon his face, and crushed upon his brows he wore a high-crowned, broad-brimmed soft felt hat. He sat amazingly still and gazed at Mr. Ricardo with lowering eyes as though he were watching some obnoxious black beetle.

Mr. Ricardo was frightened out of his wits. He sprang up with his heart racing in his breast. He found somewhere a shrill piercing voice with which to speak.

"How dare you? What are you doing in my room, sir? Go out before I have you flung into prison! Who are you?"

Upon that the brigand, with a movement swift as the shutter of a camera, lifted up his beard, which hung by two bent wires upon his ears, until it projected from his forehead, leaving the lower part of his face exposed.

"I am Hanaudski. The King of the Tchekas," said the alarming person, and with another swift movement he nicked the beard back into its proper position.

Mr. Ricardo sank down into his chair, exhausted by this second shock which trod so quickly upon the heels of the first.

"Really!" was all that he had the breath or the wit to say. "Really!"

Thus did Monsieur Hanaud, the big inspector of the Sûreté Generale, with the blue chin of a comedian, renew after a year's interval his incongruous friendship with Mr. Ricardo. It had begun a lustrum ago in Aix-les-Bains, and since Hanaud took his holidays at a modest hotel of this pleasant spa, each August reaffirmed it. Mr. Ricardo was always aware that he must pay for this friendship.—For now he was irritated to the limits of endurance by Hanaud's reticence when anything serious was on foot; and now he was urged in all solemnity to expound his views, which were then rent to pieces, and ridiculed and jumped upon; and again he found himself as now the victim of a sort of schoolboy impishness which Hanaud seemed to mistake for humour, and was in any event totally out of place in a serious person. In return, Mr. Ricardo was allowed to know the inner terrible truth of a good many strange cases which remained uncomfortable mysteries to the general public. But there were limits to the price he was prepared to pay, and this morning Monsieur Hanaud had stepped beyond them.

"This is too much," said Mr. Ricardo, as soon as he had recovered his speech. "You come into my room upon tiptoe and unannounced at a time when I am giving myself up to thought-concentration. You catch me—I admit it—in a ridiculous position, which is not half so ridiculous as your own. You are, after all, Monsieur Hanaud, a man of middle age—" And he broke off helplessly.

There was no use in making reproaches. Hanaud was not listening. He was utterly pleased with himself. He was absorbed in that pleasure. He kept lifting up his beard with that incredibly swift movement of his hand, saying to himself with startling violence, "Hanaudski, the Tcheka King," and then nicking down the great valance of matted hair into its original position.

"Hanaudski, the King of the Tchekas! Hanaudski from Moscow! Hanaudski, the Terror of the Steppes!"

"And how long do you propose to go on with this grotesque behaviour?" Mr. Ricardo asked. "I should really be ashamed, even if I were able to excuse myself on the ground of Gallic levity."

That phrase restored to Mr. Ricardo a good deal of his self-esteem. Even Hanaud recognized the shrewdness of the blow.

"Aha! You catch me one, my friend. A stinger. My Gallic levity. Yes, it is a phrase which punishes. But see my defence! How often have you said to me, and, oh, how much more often have you said to yourself: 'That poor man Hanaud! He will never be a good detective, because he doesn't wear false beards. He doesn't know the rules and he won't learn them.' So all through the winter I grow sad. Then with the summer I shake myself together. I say: 'I must have my dear friend proud of me. I will do something. I will show him the detective of his dreams.'"

"And instead, you showed me a cut-throat," Mr. Ricardo replied coldly.

Hanaud disconsolately removed his trappings and folded them neatly in a pile. Then he cocked his head at his companion. "You are angry with me?"

Mr. Ricardo did not demean himself to reply to so needless a question. He returned to his letter; and for a little while the temperature of the room even on that morning of sunlight was low. Hanaud, however, was unabashed. He smoked black cigarette after black cigarette, taking them from a bright blue paper packet, with now and then a whimsical smile at his ruffled friend. And in the end Mr. Ricardo's curiosity got the better of his indignation.

"Here is a letter," he said, and he took it across the room to Hanaud. "You shall tell me if you find anything odd about it."

Hanaud read the address of an hotel in Biarritz, the signature and the letter itself. He turned it over and looked up at Mr. Ricardo.

"You draw my leg, eh?" he said; and proud, as he always was, of his mastery of English idioms, he repeated the phrase. "Yes, you draw my leg."

"I don't draw your leg," Mr. Ricardo answered with a touch of his recent testiness. "A most unusual expression."

Hanaud took the sheet of paper to the window and held it up to the light. He felt it between his fingers, and he saw his companion's eyes brighten eagerly. There could be no doubt that Mr. Ricardo was very much in earnest about this simple invitation.

"No," he said at length. "I read nothing but that you are bidden to the Château Suvlac for the vintage by a lady. I congratulate you, for the Bordeaux of the Château Suvlac is amongst the most delicate of the second growths."

"That, of course, I knew," said Mr. Ricardo.

"To be sure," Hanaud agreed hastily and with all possible deference. "But I find nothing odd in this letter."

"You were feeling it delicately with the tips of your fingers, as though some curious sensation passed from it into you."

Hanaud shook his head.

"A mere question in my mind whether there was anything strange in the texture of the paper. But no! It is what a thousand hotels supply to their clients. What troubles you, my friend?"

With even more hesitation than Joyce Whipple had used, Mr. Ricardo repeated the account which she had given to him of her disquieting reactions to letters written in that hand. Joyce had confessed that even to herself, when she came to translate them into spoken words, they shredded away into nothing at all. How much more elusive they must sound related now at second hand to this hard-hearted trader in realities? But Hanaud did not scoff. Indeed, a look of actual discomfort deepened the lines upon his face as the story proceeded, and when Mr. Ricardo had finished he sat for a little while silent and strangely disturbed. Finally he rose and placed himself in a chair at the table opposite to his friend.

"I tell you," he said, his elbows on the cloth and his hands clasped together in front of him. "I hate such tales as these. I deal with very great matters, the liberties and lives of people who have just that one life in that one body. Therefore I must be very careful, lest wrong be done. If through fault of mine you do worse than lose five years out of your few, if you keep them, but keep them in hardship and penance, nothing can make my fault up to you. I must be always sure—yes, I must always know before I move. I must be able to say to myself, 'This man or that woman has deliberately done this or that thing which the law forbids,' before I lay the hand upon the shoulder. But a story like yours—and I ask myself, 'What do I know? Can I ever be sure?'"

"Then you don't laugh?" cried Mr. Ricardo, at once relieved and Impressed.

Hanaud threw wide his hands. “I laugh—yes—with my friends, at my friends, as I hope they laugh with me and at me. I am human—yes. But stories like this one of yours make me humble too. I don’t laugh at them. I know men and women who have but to look into a crystal and they see strange people moving in strange rooms, and all more vivid than scenes upon a stage. But I? I see nothing—never! Never! It is I who am blind? Or that other who is crazy? I don’t know. But sometimes I am troubled by these questions. They are not good for me. No! They make me uneasy about myself—yes, I doubt Hanaud! Conceive that, if it is possible!”

He unclasped his hands and flung out his arms with something burlesque and extravagant in the gesture. But Mr. Ricardo was not deceived. His friend had confessed the truth. There were moments when Hanaud doubted Hanaud—moments when he, like Mr. Ricardo, was aware of cracks in the opal crust.

Hanaud bent his eyes again upon that handwriting which had so alarming a message for just one person alone, and not an atom of significance for the rest.

“She has broken off her engagement—this young lady. Miss Tasborough,” he said, pronouncing the name as Tasbruff. “That is curious too.” He sat for a moment or two in an abstraction. “There are three explanations, my friend, of which we may take our choice. One. Your Miss Whipple is playing some trick on you, for some end we do not know of. To establish her credit—after some—thing has happened. To be able to say: ‘I foresaw—I tried to avert it. I warned Mr. Ricardo.’ Eh? Have you thought of that?”

He nodded his head slowly and emphatically at his friend, who certainly had not thought of anything of the kind. But the notion disturbed Mr. Ricardo a little now. He had after all been troubled on his way home after that conversation. Troubled by an excuse which Joyce Whipple had given for her own inability to interfere. “Cinderellas must be off the premises by midnight.” What sort of an excuse was that for a young lady with a pipe-well of oil in California? No, it certainly wouldn’t do!

But Hanaud, reading his thoughts, raised a warning hand. “Let us not run too fast. There are still two explanations. The second? Miss Whipple is an hysterical—she must make excitements. She is vain, as the hysterical invariably are.”

Here Mr. Ricardo shook his head; as emphatically as a moment ago Hanaud had nodded his. That spruce young lady with tidiness for her monomark dwelt thousands of leagues away from the country

of hysteria. Mr. Ricardo preferred explanation number one. It was more likely and infinitely more thrilling. But he must not be in a hurry.

"And your third explanation?" he asked. Hanaud pushed the letter back to Ricardo and rose from his chair, slapping his hands against his hips.

"Why, simply that she was speaking the truth. That some warning came to her through that handwriting, even though the writer knew nothing of the warning she was sending."

Hanaud turned away to the window and stood for a while looking out over the little pleasant spa, its establishment of baths down here by the park, its gay casino over there, and its villas and hotels shining amongst green streets. But he was deep in his own reflections. He might have been gazing at a wall for all that he saw. Mr. Ricardo had seen him in such a mood before, and he knew that this was a moment which it would be definitely inadvisable to interrupt. A sensation of awe stole over him. He felt the floor of the opal very brittle beneath his feet.

Hanaud turned his head towards his companion, without in any other way relaxing his attitude.

"The Château Suvlac is thirty kilometres from Bordeaux?" he asked.

"Thirty-eight and a half," Mr. Ricardo replied helpfully. He was nothing if not accurate.

Hanaud turned once again to the window. But a minute afterwards, with a great heave of his shoulders, he shook his perplexities from him.

"I am on my holiday," he cried. "Let me not spoil it! Come! Your servant, the invaluable Thomson, shall pack up my Hanaudski paraphernalia and send it back at your expense to the Odeon Theatre from which I borrowed it yesterday. You and I, we will motor in your fine car to the Lake Bourget, where we will take our luncheon, and then like good wholesome tourists we will make an excursion on the steamboat."

He was all gaiety and good-humour. But he had broken in upon the sacred curriculum of his holiday; and all that day, as Mr. Ricardo was aware, some grave speculations were with an effort held at bay.

Chapter 4

Riddles for Mr. Ricardo

Mr. Ricardo progressed in a leisurely fashion from Bordeaux, staying a day here and a night there, and arrived at the Château Suvlac at six o'clock on the evening of the twenty-first of September, a Wednesday. The day of the week is important. For the last mile he had driven along a private road which sloped gently upwards. On the top of this rise stood the house, a deep quadrangle of rose-pink stone with its two squat round turrets breaking the line of the main building at each end, and the two long wings stretching out to the road. The front of the quadrangle was open, and in the middle of this space rose a high arch completely by itself, like some old triumphal arch of Rome. This side of the house looked to the south-west, and the ground fell away from it in a slope of vineyard to a long and wide level of pasture. At the end of this plain of grass there rose a definite hill upon which, through a screen of trees, a small white house could just be seen. As Mr. Ricardo stood with his back to the Château Suvlac, stretching his legs after his long drive, he saw that a secondary road struck off at the end of the sloping vineyard, descended the incline, passed a group of farm buildings and a garage just where the vineyard joined the pasture-land, but on the opposite side of the road, and climbed again towards the small white house.

No one of the house-party was at home except the aunt and chaperon, Mrs. Tasborough, who was lying down. Mr. Ricardo was served with a cup of tea by Jules Amadee, the young manservant, in the big drawing-room, which opened on to the stone terrace and looked out over the wide Gironde to the misty northern shore. Having drunk his tea he sauntered out on to the terrace. Four shallow steps led down into a garden of lawns and flowers, and on his

right hand a closely planted avenue of trees sloped almost to the hedge at the bottom of the garden, sheltering the house and shutting out from its view the massive range of *chais* where the wine was stored and the big vats were housed.

Mr. Ricardo walked down across the lawn to the hedge and, passing through a gate on to a water meadow, saw a little to his right a tiny harbour with a landing-stage to which a *gabare*, one of those sloop-rigged heavy sailing boats which carry the river trade, was moored. A captain and two hands were engaged in unloading stores for the house. Mr. Ricardo, curious as ever, made his inquiries. The captain, a big black-bearded man, was very willing to accept a cigarette and break off his work.

"Yes, monsieur, these are my two sons. We keep the work in the family. No, the *gabare* is not mine yet. Monsieur Webster, the agent of mademoiselle, bought her and put me in charge, and when I pay off the cost she will be mine. Soon?" The captain flung out his arms in a gesture of despair. "It is difficult to grow rich on the Gironde. For half of our lives we are waiting for the tide. See, monsieur! But for those cursed tides, I could finish my work here, and start back for Bordeaux later in the night. But no! I must wait for the flow and I shall not put out until six o'clock in the morning. Ah, it is difficult for the poor to live, monsieur." He had his full share of the French peasant's compassion for himself, but he was sitting on the stout bulwark of the boat and he began to stroke and caress the wood as though there were nothing nearer to his heart. "The *gabare* is a good *gabare*," he continued. "She will last for many years, and perhaps I shall own her sooner than a lot of people think."

His little eyes, set too close together under heavy black eyebrows, gleamed unpleasantly. He had not only the self-pity of his kind but its avarice too. He was not, however, very clever, Mr. Ricardo inferred. No man could be clever who paraded such an air of cunning before a stranger. The captain, however, waked to the knowledge that his two sons had stopped working too. He thumped upon the bulwark.

"Rascals and good-for-nothings, it is not to you that the gentleman talks! To work!" he cried in a rage. "Bah! You are only fit to turn the paddles of ›*Le Petit Mousse*‹ in the public gardens."

Mr. Ricardo smiled. He had sauntered through the public gardens at Bordeaux only yesterday. He had seen ›*Le Petit Mousse*,‹ a little pleasure boat shaped like a swan, floating on an ornamental water. It had two little paddle wheels which were turned by two little

boys, and on Sundays and fete days it set out upon adventurous little voyages under the palms and chestnuts.

The youths resumed their work, and Mr. Ricardo turned away from the little dock. He noticed, without paying any particular attention to the circumstance, the name upon her bows—›*La Belle Simone*‹. He would probably never have noticed it at all, but the› first two words of it were weathered and the third stood out glaringly in fresh white paint. Inquisitiveness made him ask: "You have changed her name?"

"Yes. I named her ›*La Belle Diane*‹. A little compliment, you understand. But Monsieur Webster said no, I must change it. For mademoiselle would think she looked the fool if ever she perceived it. Not that mademoiselle perceives very much these days," and his little black eyes glittered between half-closed lids. "However, I changed it."

Mr. Ricardo turned away. He walked back along the broad avenue and saw beyond the border of trees, on the far side from the house, a little chalet of two storeys, which stood by itself in an open space, and was approached by a small white gate and a garden bright with flowers. It was now, however, seven o'clock, and without exploring it Mr. Ricardo returned to the drawing-room. There was still no sign of the house-party. He rang for Jules Amadee, and was conducted by him to his bedroom at the very end of the eastern wing. It was a fine big room with two windows, one in the front which commanded the sloping vineyard, the pasture land and the wooded hill opposite, the other at the side, looking upon the avenue and affording a glimpse of the little chalet beyond. Mr. Ricardo dressed with the scrupulous attention to his toilet which not for the kingdom of Tartary would he have modified; and he was still giving the final caress to the butterfly bow of his cravat when, over the top of the looking-glass, he saw a youngish man in a dinner-jacket cross the avenue towards the château. The reason for the chalet was now clear to Mr. Ricardo.

"A guest-house for the younger bachelors," said he. "Thomson, my pumps and the shoehorn, if you please."

He walked down the long corridor—he was astonished to notice what a large tract of ground the house covered, and how many empty rooms stood with their doors open—turned to the left at the end of it, and came to the drawing-room, which was in the very centre of the main building. As he stood at the door, the hall and the front door was just behind him. He stood there for a few mo-

ments, listening to a chatter of voices and invaded by an odd excitement. Was he to solve by one flash of insight the mystery of Joyce Whipple's letters? Was he to look round the room and identify by an inspiration the sinister figure of the person who had detained Diana Tasborough in the seclusion of Biarritz throughout the summer?

"Now," he said to himself firmly. "Now," and with a gesture of melodrama he flung open the door and stepped swiftly within. He was a little disappointed. Certainly there was a moment of silence, but the abruptness of his entrance accounted for that. No one flinched, and the interrupted conversations broke out again.

Diana Tasborough, looking as pretty as ever in a pale green frock, hurried to him.

"I am so glad that you could come, Mr. Ricardo," she said pleasantly. "You know my aunt, don't you, very well?"

Mr. Ricardo shook hands with Mrs. Tasborough.

"But—I am not sure—I think Mrs. Devenish is a stranger to you."

Mrs. Devenish was a young woman of about twenty-five years, tall, dark of hair, with a bright complexion, and black liquid eyes. She was brilliant rather than beautiful, big, and she suggested to Mr. Ricardo storms and wild passions. It passed through his mind that if he ever had to take a meal with her alone, it should be tea and not supper. She gave him her right hand negligently, and by chance Mr. Ricardo's gaze fell upon the other. Mrs. Devenish wore no wedding-ring, no jewels indeed of any description.

"No, I don't think we have ever met," she said with a smile, and suddenly—it was certainly not due to her voice, for he had never heard her utter a word before, it may have been due to some gesture of her hand, or to some movement of her body as she turned to resume her conversation, it was probably due to the slowness of Mr. Ricardo's perceptions—anyway, suddenly he was conscious of a thrill of triumph. So quickly had he solved Joyce Whipple's problem. Mrs. Devenish was the dominating force which menaced Diana Tasborough. She was the malignant one. It was true that he had not met her before, but he had seen her, and in just those morbid circumstances which settled the question finally.

"Yet, I saw you, I think, exactly nine days ago in Bordeaux," he said, and he could have sworn that terror, sheer, stark naked terror, stared at him out of the depths of her eyes. But it was there only

for a moment. She looked Mr. Ricardo over from his pumps to his neat grey hair and laughed.

"Where?" she asked; and Mr. Ricardo was silent. It was an awkward, bold question. He was more than a little shy of answering it. For he would be accusing himself of a taste for morbidities if he did. He might look a little puerile, too.

"Perhaps I was wrong," he said, and Mrs. Devenish laughed again and not too pleasantly.

Mr. Ricardo was rescued from his uncomfortable position by his young hostess, who laid her hand upon his arm.

"You must now make the acquaintance of your host that was to have been," she said. "Monsieur Le Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol."

Mr. Ricardo had been startled by the previous introduction. He was shocked by this one. No doubt, he reflected, there were all sorts of crusaders, but he could not imagine this one storming the walls of Acre. He was a tall, heavy, gross man with a rubicund childish face, round and dimpled; he had a mouth much too small for him and fat red lips, and he was quite bald.

"I shall look upon your visit to me as merely postponed, Mr. Ricardo," he said in a thin, piping voice, and he gave Mr. Ricardo a hand which was boneless and wet. Mr. Ricardo made up his mind upon the instant that he would rather abandon altogether his annual pilgrimage than be the guest of this link with the Crusaders. He had never in his life come across so displeasing a personage. He should have been ridiculous, but he was not. He made Mr. Ricardo uncomfortable, and the feel of his wet boneless hand lingered with the visitor as something disgusting. He could hardly conceal his relief when Diana Tasborough turned him towards the man whom he had seen crossing from the chalet.

"This is Mr. Robin Webster, my manager, and my creditor," said Diana with a charming smile. "For I owe to him the prosperity of the vineyard."

Mr. Webster disclaimed the praise of his mistress very pleasantly. "I neither made the soil nor planted the vines, nor work any miracles at all, Mr. Ricardo. Mine is a simple humble office which Miss Tasborough's kindness makes a pleasure rather than a toil."

The disclaimer might have sounded just a trifle too humble but for the attractive frankness of his manner. He was of the average height with quite white hair, and a pair of bright blue eyes.

But the white hair was in him no sign of age. Mr. Ricardo put him down at somewhere between thirty-five and forty years of age, and could not remember to have seen a man of a more handsome appearance. He was clean-shaven, fastidious in his dress, with some touch of the exquisite. He spoke with a certain precision in his articulation which for some unaccountable reason was familiar to Mr. Ricardo; and altogether Mr. Ricardo was charmed to find anyone so companionable and friendly.

"I shall look forward to seeing something of the vintage under your guidance tomorrow, Mr. Webster," he said; and a voice hailed him from the long window which stood open to the terrace.

"And not one word of greeting for me, Mr. Ricardo?"

Joyce Whipple was standing in the window relieved against the evening light. Of the anxiety which had clouded her face the last time he had seen her, there was not a trace. She was dressed in a shimmering frock of silver lace, there was a tinge of colour in her face, and she smiled at him joyously.

"So, after all, you put off your return to America," he said, advancing eagerly towards her.

"For a month, which is almost ended," she replied. "I am leaving here tomorrow for Cherbourg."

"If we let you go," said de Mirandol gallantly; a phrase which Mr. Ricardo was to remember.

Mr. Ricardo was introduced to two young ladies from the neighbourhood and two young men from Bordeaux, none of whose names were sufficiently pronounced for him to distinguish them. But they were merely guests of the evening, and Mr. Ricardo was not concerned with them.

"For whom do we wait now, Diana?" Mrs. Tasborough's voice broke in rather pettishly.

"Monsieur l'Abbé, aunt," Diana answered.

"You should persuade your friends to be punctual," said the aunt, and there was no gentleness in that rebuke. Mr. Ricardo had been startled and shocked. Here was a third riddle to surprise him. He remembered Mrs. Tasborough as the most submissive of pensioned relations, a chaperon who knew that her duties did not include interference, a silent symbol of respectability. Yet here she was interfering and talking with all the authority in the world. No less surprising was Diana's meekness in reply.

"I am very sorry, aunt. The Abbé is so seldom late for his dinner that I am afraid that he has met with an accident. I certainly sent the car for him in good time."

Mrs. Tasborough shrugged her shoulders, and was not appeased. Mr. Ricardo looked from one to the other. The old lady in her dowdy, old-fashioned dress sitting throned in a great chair, the pretty niece in her modern fineries humble as a village maid. There was a reversal of positions here which thoroughly intrigued Mr. Ricardo. He glanced towards Joyce Whipple, but the door was opening, and Jules Amadee announced: "Monsieur l'Abbé Fauriel."

A little round man in a cassock, with a ruddy face, thick features and a small pair of shrewd twinkling grey eyes, bustled into the room in a condition of heat and perturbation. "I am late, madame. I express my apologies upon my knees," he protested, raising Mrs. Tasborough's hand to his lips. It was noticeable perhaps that he looked to her as his hostess. "But when you hear of my calamity you will forgive me. My church has been robbed."

"Robbed!" Joyce Whipple cried in a most curious voice. There was dismay in it, but not surprise. The robbery was unexpected, and yet, now that it had happened, not unlikely.

"Yes, mademoiselle. A sacrilege!" and the little man threw up his hands.

"You shall tell us about it at the dinner-table," said Mrs. Tasborough, cutting him short. Mrs. Tasborough was a Protestant. At home she sat under a man who preached in a Geneva gown. The robbery of a Roman Catholic church was to her a very minor offence, and dinner should not be delayed by it.

"It is true, madame; I forget my manners," said the Abbé Fauriel, and, indeed, he had barely time to greet the rest of the party before dinner was announced.

The rest of that evening passed apparently as uneventfully as most evenings pass in country houses. But Mr. Ricardo, whose faculty of observation was keyed up to a sharper pitch than usual, did notice during the course of it some things which were odd. The Abbé Fauriel's complaint, for instance. No money had been stolen, nor any sacred vessel from his church, but a vestment of fine linen, the alb, which he wore when he celebrated Mass, and a little scarlet cassock and white surplice used by the young acolyte who swung the censer.

"It is unbelievable!" the old man cried. "They were of value, to be sure. My dear Madame de Fontanges, now dead, presented them to the church. But they must be cut up at once and then their value is gone. Who would commit a sacrilege for so small a gain?"

"You have, of course, informed the police," said the Vicomte de Mirandol.

"But understand, Monsieur Le Vicomte, that it is only within the hour that I discovered my loss. You would all realize"—and a twinkle of humour lit up his face—"if you were not all heathens, as you are, that tomorrow is the feast of Saint Matthew, a most sacred day in the Calendar of the Church. I went to the sacristy to assure myself that those garments of high respect were in order, and they are gone. However, Madame Tasborough, I must not spoil your evening with too much of my misfortune," and he swerved off into an amusing dissection of the foibles of his parishioners.

A small interruption brought him in a moment or two to so abrupt a stop that all eyes were turned on the interrupters. Mrs. Devenish was the cause of the interruption. She had been taking no part in any of the conversation, beyond answering at random when she was addressed, and sat occupied by some secret thought of her own. But once she shivered, and so violently that the little bubbling cry which people will utter involuntarily when they are freezing, broke from her lips. The sound recalled her to her environment, and she glanced guiltily across the table. Her eyes encountered Joyce Whipple's, and Joyce suddenly exclaimed in a queer, sharp, high-pitched voice:

"It's no use blaming me, Evelyn. It's not I who dispense the cold," and then she caught herself up too late, her face flushed scarlet, and in her turn she looked quickly from neighbour to neighbour. This was the first sign which Mr. Ricardo got, that under the smooth flow of talk nerves were strained to the loss of self-control by secret preoccupations. The Abbé Fauriel was even quicker than Mr. Ricardo to notice it. His eyes darted swiftly to Evelyn Devenish, and from her to Joyce Whipple. His face, in spite of the long, drooping nose and the thick jaw, became alert and birdlike.

"So, mademoiselle," he said slowly to Joyce, "it is not you who dispense the cold. Who, then?"

He did not insist upon an answer, but a moment or two later, when, as if to cover Joyce Whipple's confusion, the chatter in her neighbourhood broke out afresh, Mr. Ricardo noticed that almost imperceptibly he made the sign of the Cross upon his breast.

So far Mr. Ricardo was little more than curious and excited. But a quarter of an hour afterwards he caught a momentary glimpse of passion which shook him from its sheer ferocity. The men had retired from the dinner-table with the ladies, in the French fashion, and had split up into little groups. Joyce Whipple was sitting in a low chair at the side of the hearth, her knees crossed and one slender foot in its silver slipper swinging restlessly, whilst on a couch at her elbow Robin Webster was talking to her in a low voice and with an attention so complete as to make it clear that there was no one else in the room for him at that moment. The Vicomte de Mirandol was chatting with Mrs. Tasborough and the Abbé. Evelyn Devenish stood near the window in a group with Diana and the two young Frenchmen. Suddenly from that group sprang a phrase which was heard all over the room.

"The 'Cave of the Mummies'."

It was one of the Frenchmen who uttered it, but Evelyn Devenish took it up. The "Cave of the Mummies" is a famous show-place of Bordeaux. Under the soaring tower of St. Michel in the open square in front of the church there is an underground cavern where bodies, mummified by some rare quality of the earth in which they were originally buried, stand mounted in a row upon iron rests for all the world to see at a price of a few pence.

"It is a scandal," cried the Abbé. "Those poor people should be put decently away. It is a nightmare, that cavern, with that old woman showing off the points of her exhibits by the light of a candle!" He shrugged his shoulders with disgust and looked at Joyce Whipple. "Now I, too, mademoiselle—yes, now I, too, feel the cold."

Evelyn Devenish laughed. "Yet we all go to that spectacle, Monsieur l'Abbé. I plead guilty. I was there eight or nine days ago. It was there, too, I think, that Mr. Ricardo saw me."

She challenged that unhappy gentleman, with a smile of amusement, to deny the charge. But, alas, he could not. A taste for the bizarre was always at odds with his respectability.

"It is true," he said lamely, shifting his weight from one foot on to the other. "I had heard so much of it—I had so often passed through Bordeaux without seeing it. But now that I have seen it, I take my stand with Monsieur l'Abbé." He recovered his assurance and felt as virtuous as he now looked. "Yes, a dreadful exhibition; it should be closed."

Evelyn Devenish laughed again, quizzing him. "A most unpleasant young woman," said Mr. Ricardo to himself, "bold and without re-

spect." He was relieved when she averted her eyes from him. But he observed that they travelled slowly round until they reached Joyce Whipple, and there for a moment they stayed, half hidden by the eyelids; but not hidden enough to conceal the hatred which grew slowly from a spark in the depths to a blaze of devouring fire. Mr. Ricardo had never seen in his life the evidence of a passion so raw. It was covetous to punish and hurt. The dark eyes could not leave, it seemed, the girl radiant in her silvery frock. They rested with a dreadful smile upon the foot swinging in its gleaming slipper and ran up the slim leg in its silken sheath to the bent knee. Mr. Ricardo understood by a flash of insight the cruel thought behind the eyes and the smile. "Oh, certainly, it would have to be to tea and not to supper," he said to himself, almost in an agony as he thought of that imaginary meal alone with Evelyn Devenish which his fears had conjured up.

Diana Tasborough crossed the room to him. "You will play whist, with my aunt and the Abbé and de Mirandol, won't you?" she pleaded. "It must be whist, for the Abbé has never played bridge"; and plaguing his brains to recollect how the game of whist was played, he was led to the card-table.

So far, then, Mr. Ricardo had undoubtedly earned some good marks, not so much for putting two and two together as for discerning that there might be two and two which would possibly want putting together afterwards. But at this hour, half-past nine by the clock, he ceased to be meritorious, and the most important circumstance of the whole evening completely escaped his observation. He was really too much occupied in the effort to revive his recollections of whist; which was made even more difficult by the action of the younger members of the party.

The dining-room, drawing-room and library of the Château Suvlac were arranged in a suite, the drawing-room being in the middle; and all of these rooms had windows to the ground opening upon the broad terrace. Diana, as soon as the elders were seated at the card—table, went into the library and set a gramophone playing. Within the minute all the young people were dancing upon the terrace. The connecting door between the salon and the library was shut, it is true, but the night was warm and all the windows stood open. So the music with its pleasant lilt floated in to the card players, and joined with the rhythmical scuffle of the dancing shoes upon the flags to distract Mr. Ricardo from his game. It was the time of moonlight, but the moon was obscured by a thin fleece of white clouds so that a pale silvery and rather unearthly light made

the garden and the wide river beyond a fairyland of magic. On the far shore a light twinkled here and there through a mist, and close at hand, the long avenue of trees, now black as yews and motionless as metal, protected the terrace as though it was some secret and ancient place of sacrifice. But instead of sacrifices, Mr. Ricardo saw the flash of white shoulders, the sparkling embroideries upon the light frocks of the girls, the dancers appearing, disappearing, gliding, revolving, and altogether he made so many mistakes that his fellow players were delighted when the rubber came to an end. Robin Webster came in from the terrace. "You will excuse me, Mrs. Tasborough. The morning begins for me at daybreak, and I have still a few preparations to make before I can go to bed."

"I too," said the Vicomte de Mirandol, rising from his chair, a trifle abruptly perhaps. "The Mirandol wine will not compare with the Château Suvlac, alas! Yet I must take just as much care of it." He looked out of the window rather anxiously. "A good shower or two, not too violent, just for a couple of hours during the night—that would help us, Monsieur Webster. Yes, two hours of gentle rain—I beg you to pray for them, Monsieur l'Abbé."

Mr. Robin Webster shook hands with Mr. Ricardo. "You said that you would like to come round with me tomorrow," he said. "I live in the chalet beyond the avenue. It is my office too. You will find me there or about the *chais*."

He went out through the window, Monsieur de Mirandol through the door to the front of the house, where his car waited for him. Jules Amadee brought in a tray of refreshments, and Mrs. Tasborough lifted her voice petulantly.

"Diana! Diana!" she cried. "Will you please come in at once and prepare his nightcap for Monsieur l'Abbé!"

The Abbé, however, would by no means break in upon the girl's enjoyments. "I can mix my grog very well for myself, madame. Let mademoiselle dance, and so I can put a little more of your excellent whisky into my glass than it would be seemly for me to allow mademoiselle to do."

As he moved towards the table Joyce Whipple stood in his way. "And I," she said, laughing, "since I know nothing of the proper proportions, will in my ignorance put more whisky into your glass than you would."

Joyce Whipple, in a word, took possession of the buffet. It was in a corner of the room and she stood with her back to the company.

A lemonade for Mrs. Tasborough, a whisky and soda for Mr. Ricardo, a hot grog for Monsieur l'Abbé. The young people drifted back into the room. Joyce Whipple served them all in their turn with beer and sirops and spirits, laughing gaily all the while, and proclaiming that she had a future as a barmaid. Diana came from the library and was the last to join the group.

"I shall have a brandy-and-soda with a lot of ice," she said, and again Mr. Ricardo was conscious of an unsteady note in her voice, and a laugh which threatened to rise out of gaiety into hysteria.

Joyce threw a quick glance backwards over her shoulder.

"So, after all, I do dispense the cold," she cried, and in her case, too, the words and the laughter on which they were launched were edged with excitement, and undoubtedly the glass which she held clattered against the siphon when she filled it, as though her hands trembled.

The party, however, was already breaking up and within a very few minutes the Château Suvlac was silent and Mr. Ricardo back in his own room. He opened both of the windows. When engaged upon the side-window, he saw that a light was still burning in a room upon the ground floor of the chalet. Mr. Robin Webster was still then at work in his office. Looking out from the front window his gaze wandered over the peaceful stretch of empty country. The white house upon the hill might have been black for all that he could make of it. Not a window glimmered anywhere. Mr. Ricardo wound up his watch and went to bed. It was then ten minutes to eleven.

Chapter 5

Hanaud Reappears

Mr. Ricardo was not the man to sleep comfortably in a strange bed, and though he did fall asleep quickly, he awaked whilst it was still dark; and with a vague uneasiness. He reached up for the light-switch, which in his house in Grosvenor Square was set into the wall above his head, and was disconcerted not to find it there. Gradually, however, he remembered. He was not at home. He was at the Château Suvlac, and discovering the cause of his uneasiness in the unfamiliar environment, his uneasiness itself departed. But he was now thoroughly awake.

He had his own remedies for this mischance. Sheep were of no use to him. He had counted most of the sheep upon the South Downs upon an unhappy night, but having missed one he had been forced to go back and count them all over again; and his annoyance at his carelessness had kept him awake till morning. His better plan was to throw open his curtains and raise his blinds, and the inrush of fresh air through the open windows as a rule quickly sent him off. He tried this cure now.

First of all he turned on his bedside lamp and looked at his watch. It was a few minutes before two o'clock in the morning. Then he rose from his bed and freed the side-window from all its coverings. He noticed that a light was still burning even at that late hour in the chalet beyond the avenue, but it was now upon the first floor and not in the office.

"Mr. Webster has finished his work and is now going to bed," he reflected with a warm approval of the young man's industry.

The next moment assured him that his judgment was correct. For whilst he looked, the light flickered and went out. Mr. Ricardo

wished the manager a deeper repose than he was enjoying himself, and passed on to his front window.

He threw the curtains wide open with a rattle of rings, and wound the blind up with its roller. The country was spread wide in front of him upon this side, and the air fresher. The moon had set, leaving the night dark and clear and the sky gemmed with stars. But it was not the coolness of the air nor the blaze above his head which kept Mr. Ricardo standing in so fixed an attitude. When he had taken his last look from this window before getting into bed more than three hours ago, not one light had been burning in the white house upon the hill. Now the long range of windows was ablaze from end to end, shining clear in little oblongs of light where the front of the house was in full view, and throwing the trees into relief at the two ends. The building was illuminated like a palace.

"Now, what is the meaning of that?" Mr. Ricardo was asking himself. "Who in a country district would start the evening at so late an hour? It is very, very odd."

No answer being forthcoming, and his feet growing cold upon the polished boards of the floor, he retired to his bed and turned out his lamp. But his curiosity was thoroughly roused. From his position upon his pillows, he could see that golden blur upon the darkness. He could not but see it, he could not but think of it.

"This will never do," he said to himself. "I must try recipe number two."

Recipe number two was a book. But it must be read for itself, not as the gateway of dreams. If you put the thought of sleep altogether out of your mind and settled down to your volume, presto! the trick was done. You are aware suddenly of broad daylight, a cup of tea by your bedside and a lamp extravagantly burning. Mr. Ricardo's trouble was that he hadn't a book in his room. Very well then, he must go to the library and take one. So on went his light again. He got out of bed and into his pumps, draped his form in a Japanese dressing-gown of flowered silk, and with a box of matches in his hand stole oft along the corridors. He knew their geography by now, and one match took him to the dining-room door. The French windows of the three rooms *en suite* were undraped. He passed therefore through that room and the salon and into the library without having to strike a second match. He remembered that there was a light-switch in the library, close to the long window and just within the door. He was feeling for it when something dark on the terrace outside flicked past the panes and

vanished. Mr. Ricardo was so startled that he dropped his box of matches on the floor. He stood in the dark, with his heart pounding noisily in his breast, not daring to move. And in the silence, even above the clamour of his heart, he heard a key grate in the lock.

The truth must be told. Mr. Ricardo's immediate impulse was precipitately to retire. But with an effort he rejected it as unworthy. The thought of the long corridor, too, through which he must return, daunted him. He stood his ground, and in a little while the fluttering of panic subsided. He was his own man again; and being so he could not leave things as they were, select a book and go quietly back to his bed. For the prospect of an adventure never failed to thrill him.

He opened the long window very cautiously and stepped out on to the pavement of the terrace. Far away a star beam trembled on the water of Gironde. Close to him upon his left the projecting round of the turret loomed largely, and from the front of it some rays of light streamed out. Mr. Ricardo moved cautiously forward from the angle made by the turret and the house wall; the light slipped out at the edges of a curtain drawn across a long window in the front of the turret. Someone was awake in the room behind the window. Someone had slid with the swiftness of a snake into that room and turned a key. Mr. Ricardo was in doubt what to do. He had heard of strange doings in country houses, even in England. How much more must he expect them in the gay atmosphere of France!

"I certainly don't want to butt into the middle of some highly illicit affair," he argued. "On the other hand, who knows what trouble may be occurring behind that curtained door? A sudden illness perhaps! Perhaps a crime! At the worst I can be sent about my business. At the best I may be of help."

Thus he stood and disputed. But his romantic disposition got the upper hand. He advanced and rapped gently upon the framework of the glass door; and at once the light went out. But with a speed so instantaneous that the knock upon the door and the extinction of the light seemed to be not so much two consecutive movements as two facets of the same one.

Mr. Ricardo had the most uncomfortable sensations. Someone in that room had heard the sound of his pumps upon the stone slabs of the terrace. That someone had been ever since half expecting and wholly dreading that he would knock upon the window, had

been ready then with ears alert and fingers actually on the switch. But who? Mr. Ricardo's eyes could not pierce those curtains; nor had he the least excuse to renew his signal. He retired discreetly to his room without troubling to select a book from the library at all. There he watched one by one the windows on the hill recede into the night. But whether the emotions through which he had passed were the cause, or the mere movement and fresh air, he fell at once into a heavy sleep, and never stirred until the morning.

Indeed, although he dressed with the utmost expedition that he was capable of, it was after ten o'clock before he was equipped to leave his room. The vineyards were alive with the stooping figures of peasants stripping the plants, the house itself as empty as on his arrival yesterday. Mr. Ricardo walked to the chalet. The office opened directly on to the little flower garden, but that was empty too. He crossed some rough grass to the line of chais. The grapes were being brought to the door in little hand-carts, and thence carried to the wine-presses above the vats. Robin Webster was standing in the great room on the first floor, watching the press move backwards and forwards on its rollers. He looked up at Mr. Ricardo with a smile and extended his left hand, which Mr. Ricardo took, or rather touched, a trifle haughtily. For he was punctilious in such matters. He might be nobody of importance, but youngish managers of vineyards must not behave to him as if they were dukes and he a hireling.

"You must excuse my left hand," said Robin Webster the next moment. "You see?"

His right hand was inside his double-breasted jacket, the wrist resting upon one of the buttons. He drew the hand out and showed that it was bandaged.

"I did you an injustice," said Mr. Ricardo.

"So I saw," Robin Webster replied with a smile.

"You are badly hurt?"

"A trifle. I came here early this morning, before anyone was about, to make sure that everything was ready, and as I tried the press I caught my hand in it. But it is not a wound which needs a doctor."

Once more the curiously precise articulation of the young man struck Mr. Ricardo as familiar, and yet he could not define it.

"You were up before everyone, then. You had little sleep last night," he said.

Robin Webster watched the great slab of iron move backwards and forwards on its rollers, crushing the grapes beneath it. "Do you know we are the only vineyard which uses machine-driven presses?" he said. "Yes, I was late last night. No doubt you saw the light in my office when you went to bed."

"And hours afterwards I saw the light in your bedroom," said Mr. Ricardo.

Once more the press rumbled backwards and forwards. "It must have been nearly two o'clock in the morning when I put it out," Robin Webster remarked.

"It was two o'clock to the minute," said Mr. Ricardo.

He strolled away and spent a pleasant morning wandering about the three hundred and fifty acres of the estate. It was a day of bright sunshine, with strips of white cloud streaming out here and there in the blue of the sky. The broad water of the Gironde was dotted with sailing ships at anchor waiting the turn of the tide to carry them to the river's mouth, and every now and then a steamer with a fantail of tumbled foam and a distant throb of engines rushed past towards the port of Bordeaux. Mr. Ricardo wandered down to the little harbour. It was empty and that was quite as it should be. The ›*Belle Simone*‹ had sailed with the inward tide at six in the morning. No doubt she was now nearing Bordeaux. But as he turned away he had a flash of a suspicion that she was doing nothing of the kind. For sailing merrily upwards from the lower reaches of the river a *gabare* was at that moment passing the garden with the sunlight upon her bows; and she was near enough to the bank for him to see that one word of her name stood out in a brilliant relief upon the grimed timber. He was puzzled. Of course, he argued, the ›*Belle Simone*‹ might not be the only boat upon the river which followed the practice of her sex and changed her name. And yet—! Nothing was too trivial for Mr. Ricardo's speculations. In a twinkling he scuttled back to the house; in another he was back again with his expensive field-glasses lifted to his eyes. The *gabare* was just opposite to him now. He could read the glistening name Simone, and there were other words in front of it too discoloured for him to make out. Undoubtedly this was ›*La Belle Simone*,‹ whose captain had been in such a pother yesterday because he could not start for Bordeaux until six in the morning. Yet he had put out before the turn of the tide and gone down with the ebb. What unexpected commission had taken him out in the dead of night?

"It is all very odd," Mr. Ricardo reflected for the twentieth time since he had arrived at the Château Suvlac. But the oddest thing of all was to happen to him now.

He went to his room, washed, and brushed his hair. Luncheon was fixed for half-past twelve. There were still twelve minutes. He walked down the avenue, and as he returned he heard a motor-car approaching the front of the house. He mounted on to the terrace and was joined there by Robin Webster. Both men, thereupon, entered the drawing-room by the window. Mrs. Tasborough, seated on her throne, was glancing through the newspaper from Bordeaux which had just arrived. Diana at the centre table, with a tray of glasses in front of her, was vigorously shaking cocktails. At that moment the door opening on to the hall was flung open, and Jules Amadee, with his eyes starting out of his head, broke into the room.

"Madame!" he cried, and again "Madame!" and then a quiet hand pushed him aside.

A small, square man dressed in a morning coat, with a tricolour sash about his waist and a bowler hat in his hand, stepped forward and bowed.

"Messieurs, Mesdames, I am Herbesthal, the Commissaire of Police. I beg of you as yet not to distress yourselves."

Spoken in the grave, cool voice of the Commissaire, no beginning could have been more ominous. Yet it was not that which made Mr. Ricardo utter a little shrill cry. To his stupefaction, through the doorway he saw standing in the hall the burly figure of Hanaud. Only a few days ago he had left the inspector sunning himself at Aix and practising his deplorable humour upon his friends. Now he was here at the Château Suvlac—on business. His smoothed-out expressionless face was sufficient evidence of that. Hanaud could see Mr. Ricardo quite clearly, and yet gave him no sign of recognition. It was all very well for the Commissary Herbesthal to beg his audience not to distress itself. Mr. Ricardo knew better. Since Hanaud was here on business, someone was certainly going to distress himself very much. The Commissaire Herbesthal looked round the room. He was obviously relieved. He turned towards the door and Hanaud, in reply, stepped with his noiseless feet into the room. He, too, bowed, but there was no relief visible upon his face.

"You see," said Herbesthal. "It is all a mistake. Nothing could be more calm. It's not here that we must look!"

"Pardon me," Hanaud objected. He advanced and bowed again, rather ridiculously, Mr. Ricardo thought, to Mrs. Tasborough. "Madame, I think, does not drink the cocktails. She belongs to a more orderly world."

The old lady might have taken the words as a compliment, or as an unnecessary reflection on her age. She chose the latter interpretation. For she looked stonily at Hanaud and then turned to the Commissaire; "And, pray, who is this gentleman?"

Herbesthal was a little shocked. "Madame," he protested, "this gentleman is the famous Monsieur Hanaud of the Sûreté Generale of Paris."

The name meant nothing whatever to Mrs. Tasborough. It was known, however, to Robin Webster. Mr. Ricardo heard him draw in his breath sharply and ask in a wondering voice: "What in the world does he want here?" and as Mr. Ricardo looked at him, he added with a laugh, "Whenever I find myself in the presence of the police, I begin to ask myself whether after all I have not committed some crime."

Hanaud meanwhile had not taken his eyes from Mrs. Tasborough's face.

"I ask if madame drinks the cocktails for a reason," he said suavely. "There are five glasses upon the tray, and if madame avoids the cocktail, then two of her party are not yet here."

Mr. Ricardo just lifted his shoulders. This was his dear friend at his worst. He must show off. Everyone must applaud the acuteness of his observation. A simple question—"Is the whole party present?"—no, that would not do at all. Mr. Ricardo coined a phrase and stored it for future use. Hanaud must be on the spot. Diana was no more impressed than Mr. Ricardo. She gave her cocktail mixer such a shaking that the ice rattled within it like a handful of pebbles.

"That is so," she answered. "Two of the house-party are absent, but it is not yet a crime to be late for luncheon. No doubt in time we shall have inspectors to look after these things."

"Mademoiselle," the Commissaire interrupted quietly. "This is not the moment for amusement. I beg you to remember that there are two parties to a crime. The criminal and the victim."

Up to this moment, the two women had been disposed merely to resent the visit of the police as an intrusion upon their privacy. But

the Commissaire's words were too disquieting to be taken lightly. Mrs. Tasborough uttered a little cry of fear and sank back in her chair, her tiny sceptre of authority struck out of her grasp in a second. Diana was paralysed. She stood with the cocktail mixer still uplifted in her hand, her eyes fixed in horror upon Hanaud, and the blood receded slowly from her face until her very lips were white.

"A victim?" she repeated in a shaking voice.

"Let us not be too quick to assume that trouble has visited this house," said Hanaud compassionately. "There are two absentees—"

"Evelyn Devenish—" Diana began.

"A lady?" asked Hanaud.

"Yes."

"And the other?"

"Joyce Whipple."

Hanaud started ever so slightly. His eyes did not seek Ricardo's, but he remained silent for a time. And his silence was more noticeable than his movement had been.

"You know that young lady?" Robin Webster asked quickly, and Hanaud looked at him curiously, as though he wondered why the question was put.

"No, monsieur. I have not that good fortune," he replied. "This gentleman is—?"

"Mr. Robin Webster, my manager," Diana explained.

Hanaud nodded his head and bowed with a smile to Robin Webster.

"Now! Has anyone in this room seen either of these two ladies this morning?"

At once Webster, Mr. Ricardo, Diana, even Mrs. Tasborough, began to look quickly and anxiously at each other.

"Have you?"

"No!"

"And you?"

"No!"

No one had seen either of them; and on every face anxiety suddenly deepened into alarm.

"Of course we have been all very busy this morning," said Diana hurriedly. She had the air of one trying to convince herself that there were no real grounds for apprehension. "This is the first day of our vintage, and there has been, in consequence, an unusual bustle. The house is awake early, the service disarranged."

"I understand that very well," said Hanaud. "It may well be that your two friends are still amongst your vines. It is known that young ladies will pursue a new pastime with an enthusiasm which scorns the hours of meals. But they will hardly have left the house, bent upon so arduous a morning, without taking first their little breakfast."

Diana Tasborough crossed the room at once and rang the bell. Jules Amadee answered it with a suspicious celerity.

"Will you send Marianne to me?" Diana commanded; and Jules Amadee disappeared.

"Aha! He listens at the door, that one," said Hanaud with a grin. "Yet so do we all—each in our different way. We strain our ears for the little private conversation a few feet away. I, Hanaud, if I see an open letter on a table, I must read it, if I can manoeuvre myself near enough. No, let us not blame Jules Amadee!"

He spoke lightly, and because of his very lightness Mr. Ricardo's heart lost a beat. Both Hanaud and the Commissaire were too eager in their encouragements, too delicate in their approach, to leave him in any doubt that they were concealing to the very last possible moment some unutterable horror.

"Marianne is your housemaid, I suppose," said Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo reflected how curious it was that in a crisis the truth of things should proclaim itself so naturally that not a soul was surprised by the most sudden of changes. Hanaud addressed himself now altogether to Diana. Mrs. Tasborough with her little reprimands and complaints was no longer of any account whatsoever. She did not even resent her dethronement. Diana, yesterday the dutiful ward, was now the unquestioned mistress and chatelaine.

"Marianne is everything, Monsieur Hanaud," Diana answered with the glimmer of a smile, "as only a Frenchwoman can be. She is the wife of Jules Amadee, and since for the great part of the year the château is empty, they are the only permanent servants we have.

During this month or two she gets some assistance from the village, but very reluctantly, and hates everybody she engages and would never let any one of them approach her patrons or any of their guests."

Hanaud bowed and smiled in the friendliest way. "Ah, mademoiselle, if everyone whom I ask to help me could sketch for me a character with such clear lines, I could have six months' holiday a year and yet do all the work it takes me twelve months to do."

Compliments and compliments! When would these petty trappings be torn aside and the shattering facts be disclosed? A sound of heavy shoes clattering along the polished corridor was heard and Marianne marched into the room, defiance in every stubborn line of her. She was a woman of middle age with a full, freshly coloured face. She turned her back upon Hanaud and the Commissaire Herbesthal. No one could doubt that Jules Amadee had primed her with all he had learnt by his eavesdropping.

"Mademoiselle wants me?" she asked.

"Yes, Marianne. At what time this morning did you take their coffee to Mrs. Devenish and Miss Whipple?" Diana asked.

"At seven o'clock," Marianne answered.

"They were both in their rooms?"

"See, mademoiselle! This is a special day, isn't it? People are up and about early. Madame Devenish was already out of doors."

"And Miss Whipple?"

"That was a different thing. There was a notice pinned on that young lady's door that she had not slept well and did not wish to be disturbed. So I carried her coffee away, meaning to make some hot and fresh for her when she rang for it."

"And has she rung?"

The question was asked gently enough, but Marianne was deaf to it. She neither turned nor looked in Hanaud's direction. He repeated it patiently; and suddenly Marianne's face grew crimson, and crossing her arms upon her breast, she cried out in a sort of angry screech:

"Look, mademoiselle! I don't know what the police are doing in this house. What affair is it of theirs, if one young lady gets up earlier than usual and another has a migraine? Let them go away

and find the poor cure's stolen vestments! Aha! They will be at last of a utility."

"I ask you if Miss Whipple has yet rung her bell?" Hanaud repeated.

"And I, by my silences, have replied that I do not answer monsieur's questions," said Marianne.

"That won't do, Marianne," Diana rebuked her gently. "You must answer monsieur."

Marianne turned sullenly towards Hanaud.

"Well then, she has not rung," and Marianne broke out again in exasperation: "But—*Saperlipopette*—what questions to be asking when mademoiselle's luncheon is all frizzling away to cinders—"

"And I ask you another question," Hanaud interrupted with authority now rather than patience ringing in his voice. "Had the bed of Madame Devenish been slept in?"

The question took all who were in the room aback, and no one more so than Marianne. She looked at Hanaud with a little respect. She replied in a humbler voice.

"See, monsieur! As I have told you already, this is a busy day for everyone. It is very likely that Madame Devenish thought of it, knowing what idle good-for-nothings all the young girls are today. She may well have said: 'Ah, that poor Marianne, today I must help her.'"

"Which means that the bed had not been slept in," Hanaud insisted.

"No, monsieur, it does not," cried Marianne, beginning to get red again. "It means that when I went into her room this morning the bed was made."

Hanaud accepted the correction meekly, but to Mr. Ricardo's thinking no one who was at all acquainted with Evelyn Devenish could agree with Marianne's explanation for a moment. Evelyn Devenish was not the kind of person to give a thought as to whether Marianne's fingers were worked to the bone or not. Nor could he imagine her springing out of her bed in the early morning to help the peasants to strip the grapes. The story was altogether too thin.

"It is enough, I think, that the bed was made," said Hanaud. He was very grave, very reluctant to speak more openly. He looked at Herbesthal, and Herbesthal, with an inclination of the head, returned the look.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. The fine feelings—we cannot all the time consider them. I give you the word, Monsieur Hanaud!"

The Commissaire, magistrate though he was, was happy to pay deference to the great man from Paris.

Diana made a restless movement. She was not only distressed; she was puzzled too.

"I beg you not to keep us in suspense," she cried nervously. "Suspense is worse than the worst of news."

Even then for a moment Hanaud hesitated. He was uneasy. It seemed that he had a premonition that he was now being definitely committed to an inquiry which would open up a pit of monstrous iniquity from which even he shrank back.

"Very well," he said at length. "At seven o'clock this morning a large dress-basket was seen floating up the Gironde on the flow of the tide by two boys belonging to the village of St. Yzans-d'Houlette, Albert Cordeau, aged fourteen, and Charles Martin, aged thirteen and five months. The village of St. Yzans-d'Houlette lies on the same bank as the Château Suvlac, but six miles nearer to the mouth of the river. These details are important. The dress-basket was carried by a current nearer and nearer to the shore, and the tide running then very slowly, the two boys were easily able to keep up with it. It grounded gently in a tiny bay in a lonely reach half a mile from the village. There were the low slope of grass bank, a strip of meadow, a hedge of brambles behind the meadow, and the village a hundred yards behind that. The two boys dragged the basket out of the water with difficulty. For it was almost too heavy for their strength. They found that it was fastened securely with a thick rope, and that attached to the rope at the bottom of the basket was a fragment of a small-meshed net—a sinister little circumstance, For it looked as if a weight intended to sink the basket had proved too heavy for the net and had torn itself free. The boys, excited at this discovery, sawed through the rope with a pocket-knife and, raising the lid, were horrified to see a body wrapped in a piece of fine linen. They lifted the edge of the linen, and found a girl stark naked, with the knees drawn up towards her chin. They were too frightened to make any closer examination. They replaced the linen, and whilst one, Charles Martin, ran to St. Yzans-d'Houlette with the news, Albert Cordeau closed the basket and remained on guard beside it. The body still huddled inside the basket was then taken to the mortuary at Villeblanche." He mentioned the little town which was the seat of the local administration. "It happens,"

he resumed, "that I was at Bordeaux engaged upon some troublesome business, of which this affair of the basket may, or may not, be a development." Hanaud at this point received such a glare of reproach from Mr. Ricardo that he was at pains to soften down his neglect of his friend's neighbourhood.

"Business, I should add, which forbids me seeking advice, however valuable." And he had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Ricardo's self-esteem restored. "Monsieur Herbesthal did me the honour over the telephone to inform me of this discovery and to invite my help. The medical officer, the Doctor Brune, made his examination in our presence. The body is that of a young lady, careful, even fastidiously careful, of her beauty and appearance. There is no mistaking the evidence of a hand in a matter of this kind. But everything—the delicate whiteness of her skin, the gloss of her hair—indicated that she was one who had the time and the inclination to give to herself the most meticulous attention."

"She was dead?" Diana interrupted in a low voice.

"According to the Doctor Brune, she had been dead for some six hours."

"Drowned? In that basket? Horrible!" said Diana, and with a shudder she suddenly pressed her hands over her face.

"No, mademoiselle, not drowned," Hanaud answered. "She had been stabbed through the heart. There was no mark of pain upon her face, nor any contortion of fear. She cannot have known what was happening, so completely was she at peace;" and having thrown all the emphasis of which he was master into those consoling words, he went on slowly: "But there is one perplexing and dreadful detail in this crime. For crime, of course, it is. After she was dead, her right hand had been hacked off at the wrist."

A wave of horror swept over everyone in that room. For what purpose could mutilation have been added to murder? It spoke of a hatred at once implacable and monstrous, a vengeance which sought to glut itself even beyond the grave. A cry broke from the trembling lips of Diana. Mrs. Tasborough was crying and moaning. Robin Webster, his face troubled and disordered, exclaimed; "Why? In God's name, why?" Mr. Ricardo alone was silent, with a horrid fear growing in his mind. He sank down into a chair and sat and stared at the floor.

Meanwhile Hanaud went on. "There was no mark whatever by which this young victim could be identified—not a bracelet on the

wrist, not a chain about the neck—nothing. But Monsieur Herbesthal and the Doctor Brune thought it most likely that we should learn more at the Château Suvlac, since it was the rule of mademoiselle to entertain a house-party for the vintage. So we came here at once, and here we find that a guest is missing. I shall beg Mr. Ricardo, whom I know, to drive back with me to Villeblanche, and I shall hope, but without much confidence, that he will not recognize her. Until he returns I must ask that none of you leaves the house."

Mr. Ricardo, however, did not reply. He sat still and stared at the floor, as though he had not heard.

"You will come?" Hanaud insisted. "It is a thankless office, I know very well."

Still Ricardo never spoke, never changed his attitude. Robin Webster's shoulders worked uncomfortably. Then he said reluctantly: "Of course, it is my duty more than anyone's."

Before he could say more, Hanaud interrupted. "No! I thank you, but it is Mr. Ricardo whom I want."

Then at last Mr. Ricardo found a voice to speak with, though it was a dull one and toneless, and quite unrecognizable as his own.

"Before I go," he said, still staring at the floor, "I think that someone should hammer at Miss Whipple's door and make very sure that she answers."

At once Mr. Ricardo became the cynosure of all that sad company; and for once he took no joy in his unusual position. But then the glances directed at him were without any friendliness. No one had given a thought to Joyce Whipple during the last tense minutes. Hanaud's story linked itself so closely with Evelyn Devenish's disappearance that the proposed journey to identify the body became the mere fulfilment of a formality. Yet now suddenly here was a new suggestion, as vague as it was alarming.

"No—no!" Diana cried sharply. She was not so much opposing Mr. Ricardo's demand, as refusing to allow that yet another mystery should add to the torture of her nerves.

"I think so," said Mr. Ricardo, never lifting his eyes from the floor, and his odd attitude somehow convinced everyone that he was right. Hanaud turned towards Marianne, who all this while had been standing apart, and nodded his head. Immediately she went out of the room, leaving the door open, and no more words were

spoken. Her shoes were heard ringing on a flight of stone steps a short distance away, and then a loud rapping on a door. In a dreadful suspense the assemblage in the drawing-room listened for the opening of the door, for the welcome sound of Joyce Whipple's clear voice. They heard only the rapping repeated, more insistently; and again there was no answer.

Mr. Ricardo lifted his head now in a sort of listless bewilderment, and broke the silence.

"Miss Whipple sleeps upstairs?"

"Yes," answered Diana.

In one of the two turret-rooms, then!

"And Mrs. Devenish?" he asked.

"In the wing opposite to yours."

"I see."

What window was it, then, which he had knocked upon at two o'clock that morning, behind which he had seen the light so furtively extinguished? He was very soon to know. Marianne was heard to knock again, to cry out Joyce Whipple's name; and then she came clattering back to the room, her bosom heaving, her face distorted with fear.

"Mademoiselle's door is locked, and there is no key in the lock," she stammered.

Hanaud put a question to Diana: "Have you another key to that door?"

"Any key will open it. All the locks are upon one pattern."

"All of you, then, will stay here."

Hanaud whipped out of the room. They never heard his step upon the stone stairs, but they did distinctly hear the grinding of a key as it shot back a bolt; and again there was silence. But for once silence became intolerable.

"Joyce! Joyce! Oh!"

The name broke from Robin Webster's lips in a long-drawn little cry of utter misery. It was an appeal to her to answer, to appear in all her radiant youth in the midst of them, and an expression of a belief that she never would. Mr. Ricardo saw Diana slowly lift her eyes to Robin Webster and let them dwell upon his twitching

troubled face with a curiously intent look; and in a moment Hanaud was back again in the salon.

"Her room is empty," he said gravely. "Her bedclothes were tumbled and dragging on the floor. But that had been done deliberately. Madame Devenish, Mademoiselle Whipple—neither of them slept in her bed at the Château Suvlac last night."

Suddenly his face changed. "Wait! Wait!" he cried, and sprang forward. He had seen Diana Tasborough sway like a sapling in a wind. Her face took on a sickly pallor. "It's horrible! Horrible!" she whispered. Hanaud was only in time to break her fall. For she slipped through his arms and lay quite still upon the floor.

Chapter 6

The Picture on the Wall

Hanaud stooped, raised her shoulders, and finally stood erect, holding her in his arms very tenderly, as though she were nothing more than a big baby.

"I was rough—yes, you shall reproach me," he said remorsefully. "In my profession, alas! one grows hard. One sees so much of the brute in man. However, I make what amends I can for my clumsiness. I carry this young lady to her room."

Mr. Ricardo was not moved by this remorse. He was never so suspicious of that inspector of the Sûreté, as when he displayed his tenderer moods. He slipped them on like a pair of gloves. He was so kind and so human and so gentle up to the last grim moment when he towered, the avenger of broken laws. Mr. Ricardo, accordingly, felt the prickliest sensations running up and down his spine when he saw his large friend holding the dainty slip of a girl within the prison of his strong arms. Was he a Samaritan or an animal of prey? A friend or a jailer?

Marianne, however, cherished obviously none of Mr. Ricardo's doubts. She crossed at once to the windows and opened them wide.

"This, monsieur, is the nearest way, if you will be so amiable. The poor lamb! She has had enough for one day."

She stepped out on to the terrace with Hanaud upon her heels, and turned to the left past the windows of the library. It was Diana's room, then, which bowed out upon the terrace in the lower story of the turret. It was upon her window that Mr. Ricardo had knocked. Mr. Ricardo hurried out after Hanaud in a condition of extreme bewilderment. So many questions rapped upon his brain for an

answer, even as Marianne had rapped upon Joyce Whipple's door. Joyce Whipple had occupied the room above Diana's, and some time during the night Joyce Whipple had gone from her room and vanished. It was in her room, then, if in any room, that a light might be expected to burn at so unlikely an hour. And, after all, why had Diana made not the least smallest inquiry as to who it was that had come beating upon her window in the dark of the morning? Had she, too, been away from the house last night?

Mr. Ricardo saw the tail of Hanaud's coat as he disappeared with his burden between the glass doors of the turret-room. Mr. Ricardo was not very sure that he would be civilly treated if he followed. But he simply had to follow. He crept into the room timidly, just as Hanaud was gently lowering Diana upon her bed at the back of the room; and he stood aside out of the light at once, making himself very small.

"A glass of water, Marianne," said Hanaud, straightening his shoulders. "There is no great harm done to mademoiselle, I think. Look, even now her eyelids are fluttering."

Marianne hurried to the washstand and poured out a glass of water, whilst Hanaud stood by the bedside, his eyes now looking down upon Diana Tasborough, now sweeping the room with a careless glance which Mr. Ricardo had long since learnt not to belittle. He gazed at the door of a wardrobe, at a mirror, at Mr. Ricardo, at the carpet and the chairs. But where his eyes rested, there as a rule there was nothing to see. Suddenly he dropped upon his knee. Diana's lips were moving. But she only murmured: "I was a fool!—Nothing happened—nothing—or I should remember."

It seemed to Mr. Ricardo that Hanaud's head went forward, as though he were about to whisper some question in Diana's ear, in the hope that she would answer it, whilst still her mind was dim. But Marianne the next second was at his side, and in the most natural manner he took the glass from her and held it to Diana's lips.

"So—so—That is better," he said, rising to his feet. He came across to Mr. Ricardo. "You and I, my friend, we are not wanted here, whereas we are wanted at Villeblanche."

He took Ricardo by the arm and led him out again on to the terrace. But there was a change in him now. He was quietly alert, with a bright questioning glint in his eyes, and an odd little smile about his mouth.

"I tell you," he said in a low voice. "Very curious things have been

happening in this house. Miss Whipple and her letters. I am thankful that I did not make light of her fears."

Mr. Ricardo raised his forefinger and announced: "You saw something in that room."

"Yes. A bed, a young lady in a swoon, a servant, a glass of water."

"More than that."

Hanaud threw up his arms. "I was there but for a few seconds. During those seconds I was occupied."

Mr. Ricardo shook his head sternly. "That won't do for me, I'm afraid."

Hanaud gave in with a gesture of despair and a look of regretful admiration. "It is true. I, like this Miss Diana, confess that I was a fool. I should have known better. A secret! Ha, ha! Conceal it if you can! The cunning Mr. Ricardo is after it straight as the cock crows!"

Ricardo was in the habit of foolishly correcting his friend's admirable English idioms, but preening himself upon this admission of his perspicacity, he allowed the unfortunate form in which it was expressed to pass. Hanaud took him by the arm and led him out of everyone's hearing to the very edge of the terrace.

"Yes. I saw something in that room," he said in an important voice. "I shall tell you what it is. A little picture. It hangs upon the wall above the bed. I saw it as I laid that poor young lady down. You must look at it when you get the chance. You will see just what I saw. Meanwhile, however—" And he laid a finger meaningly upon his lips.

Mr. Ricardo was thrilled to his marrow at being made a participator in this mystery. "I shall not say a word about it," he said reassuringly, and Hanaud without a doubt was immensely relieved. He was turning away when now Mr. Ricardo caught him by the arm.—"Before you continue your work," he said with a new but tiny touch of patronage in his voice—he was always anxious to reward one of Hanaud's rare confidences—"I must warn you. You betray yourself, I think, a little more than you used to. So far it is not very serious. But the defect will grow unless it is very carefully watched."

Hanaud was aghast. "I betray myself!"

"Twice this morning."

"It is clear, then." The detective threw up his arms in despair. "Hanaud grows old. Twice! Twice in one morning you catch me bowing."

"Bending," said Mr. Ricardo. "But, at the best, it is a vulgar phrase."

"Twice!"

"Yes."

"Once when I see the little picture on the wall?"

"Yes."

"And the other time?"

"Earlier—in the drawing-room. Your regrets that you had so terrible a story to tell, your compassion—on the whole they were very well done."

"Thank you," said Hanaud meekly. "Praise from Sir Herbert!"

"Hubert," said Mr. Ricardo. "Yes, they were well done up to a point. The point when you used one brutal word, and used it brutally, to describe the severed hand."

All the mischief died out of Hanaud's eyes. He looked at Ricardo in the oddest way; like some fencer when a despised antagonist slips through beneath his guard.

"Go on!" he said, and Mr. Ricardo was only too pleased to go on. "The sympathy, the gentle remorse that your rough world of crime must break in upon the elegance of that drawing-room—and then suddenly the crude word spoken violently, like a blow—'hacked'. 'Hacked off at the wrist'. My friend, you looked for some reaction—yes—some definite reaction from someone in that room."

Hanaud did not admit the intention. On the other hand, he did not deny it. He remarked rather sulkily: "If I did, I didn't get it. Come! It is high time that we went off to Villeblanche and identified this poor Madame Devenish. You have your car, no doubt? Yes? Then you and I will go in it and we will leave the police car to Monsieur Herbesthal the Commissaire."

Yet once more during the passage of a morning, Mr. Ricardo was really to astonish the detective. "We will use my car by all means," he said slowly. "But I do not think that we shall identify Evelyn Devenish."

Hanaud's big frame stiffened—"Oho!" he murmured. "So that was it! Yes! It was you who insisted that Miss Joyce Whipple should

be roused from her long sleep. Yes. From the moment when I finished my story, you were troubled by a great fear. Even I, Hanaud, who grow old, could appreciate that. For that reason I wished to drive alone with you to Villeblanche. Yes! It is your little friend, the American, you expect to find in that cold mortuary," and he shook his shoulders, as though the chill of that place reached out and caught him here on the sunlit terrace. "Let us go! You shall tell me why you fear this, as we go."

Chapter 7

The Caves of the Mummies

The two men walked from that house of calamity down the hill to the farm buildings and the garage; Hanaud lost in his own thoughts and Mr. Ricardo a little surprised to see the peasants going about their daily labour, and the world astir. "It seems somehow against nature," he said, and Hanaud woke from his reflections to reply: "After all, we may both of us be wrong. There are many houses along the Gironde." But it was clear that he put no atom of faith into his words, and as soon as the great car was running smoothly on the white road between the vineyards, he turned briskly to his companion.

Mr. Ricardo began with some excuses. For he had at the back of his mind a suspicion that his taste for what was odd and bizarre was not altogether seemly in a man of his ripe years and honourable condition. But he had to come to the Cave of the Mummies in the end.

"I had always meant to see it," he cried in an honest burst, "and ten days ago I did."

He described how he walked to the high tower of St. Michel opposite to the doors of the church in a great square. At the foot of the tower he found a pay-box, which was closed, and by the side of it a winding staircase descending into darkness. He peered down the staircase and from the darkness, but surprisingly near to him, a woman's high voice cried out: "Descend then, monsieur! You shall pay me afterwards. I am about to begin."

He obeyed, feeling for the steps with his feet and for the side walls with his hand. There were only a few treads to that old brick stair-

way, but it twisted, and with his back to the daylight he could see nothing at all.

"One more step, monsieur. So!"

He was taken by the elbow and guided for a few steps to his left. The woman, with the thrift of her kind, did not light her tallow dip to illumine her gruesome exhibition until she had gathered her little flock of sightseers at the point of departure. Mr. Ricardo was vaguely aware that he stood on the edge of a group. He had a sensation, too, of immense space. But when the match was struck, and the red, smoky flame of the cheap candle held aloft, he saw that the cabin was a tiny rough excavation. It was too dark still for him to distinguish anything of the rest of the party, except that they were of both the sexes. But the light shone upon the face of the guide, and he was as disappointed by her appearance as he had been by the cavern's tininess. He had expected an old, witch-like crone. He beheld a practical, apple-faced, middle-aged woman of the most respectable mien with a black shawl about her shoulders.

She passed within an iron rail which guarded the line of her grim exhibits, and delivered her preliminary lecture. There were mummies, of course, in Egypt, but none of them, from Tutankhamen downwards, were a patch upon hers. Egypt's mummies were the work of men, stuffed and cured like animals for the table. Hers were the only real natural mummies in the world, and a glory to the great city of Bordeaux.

"Gentlemen, ladies, they were found, just as you will see them, in an ancient graveyard of the city close to this spot. A chemical ingredient of the soil, which is nowhere else known to exist, has preserved them. Attention, gentlemen! Ladies!"

Mr. Ricardo's eyes were popping out of his head in his effort to see over the shoulders of the happy people who had got the front places. The curator of this queer museum passed slowly along the line of the dead people propped up on an eternal parade. They stood with loincloths about their waists, their skin greenish in colour and of the texture of parchment. The blackened tatters of their grave-clothes still hung to them; wisps of matted hair dangled from their skulls, and here and there a huge glaucous eye still stared at them from its socket. The guide raised and lowered her candle, pointing out this or that noticeable detail; and the red light, wavering unsteadily over the dead figures, gave to them an eerie semblance of life and movement.

"Here is a woman with a child at her shoulder," said the guide in her shrill, matter-of-fact voice. "They were buried together at the time of epidemic! Here is a man who was killed by a sword-thrust"—the candlelight disclosed a great gaping wound in his chest. "The lungs are still there," she continued. "Listen!"

She thrust her hand through the wound and, under the tapping of her fingers, the lungs rattled and rustled like dead leaves. Mr. Ricardo shivered deliciously, he felt tremors up and down his spine and in the soles of his feet.

"What now?" he asked himself, wondering whether he could really endure more, when the guide stopped impressively beside the last figure in the row. She had, good showman that she was, kept her extra special supermummy for the last of the spectacle. And even before she had uttered one word of explanation a curious uneasiness and discomfort stirred amongst that little company; so vivid across all those centuries of interment remained this dreadful epitome of pain.

Mr. Ricardo saw the figure of a youth. His mouth was wide open as though he gasped for breath; his head was bent forward as though he sought by a thrust of his shoulders to rise; and one knee was drawn tensely up towards the chest as though it drove against a coffin-lid.

"The doctors are agreed," said the woman with a sort of pride. "It is supposed that the boy was a cataleptic or the victim of a ferocious cruelty. God be praised, we live in gentler days! He was buried alive, and waked. He screamed, you see, and gasped for air. The leg drawn up to lift all those feet of earth was so strained in agony that it could never be straightened again. It is fixed so. The poor one!"

She moralized for a moment or two upon the advantage of living in the gentler age of today, whilst up and down the red light of her candle flickered over that tormented figure; until a man's rough voice cried out sharply: "Enough, mother! That's enough!"

It was for some such tribute to the success of her show, it appeared, that the woman waited. She snuffed out the candle between her forefinger and her thumb, without a word, and for a little while, so still was everyone and so silent in the pitch black cavern, that a new visitor coming down those winding steps must have believed it empty. Then the silence was broken, very faintly, at Mr. Ricardo's elbow, by a sigh; and his blood turned cold as he heard it. There

was neither pity in it, nor horror, but a passionate longing that such a penalty could still be exacted.

"Oh! Oh!"

It was a low cry of desire, savage and primitive, the desire to hurt as no one had yet been hurt, to punish as no one had yet been punished, a whisper of regret that no such punishment was possible.

Mr. Ricardo tried to figure out in his mind who it was that stood beside him. He had an impression that it was a woman, but he could not be sure; and whilst he still speculated the guide's voice was raised again.

"Gentlemen, ladies, that is all. If you turn you will see a gleam of light from the steps. You, sir, who came last, the charge is fifty centimes. I will give you a ticket at the pay-box."

The group of people stumbled with relief up the steps. Mr. Ricardo was detained at the top of them whilst he paid his half-franc and received his ticket. But his eyes were on the little group of people as they dispersed, and amongst them he saw a girl separate herself from the others and walk away alone. She was dressed with a quiet distinction which surprised him in a visitor to this macabre exhibition. There was something incongruous—he wondered whether it could be she who had sighed. He would have very much liked to have cross-questioned her upon the subject. He was none the less, however, a trifle disconcerted when nine days later he was introduced to her in the drawing-room of the Château Suvlac.

Evelyn Devenish? The contrast between that murky cavern with its grim associations and this bright room overlooking the Gironde no doubt affected Mr. Ricardo's judgment. That the woman who sighed in the cavern could be this smartly-robed girl who made so pretty a picture in the drawing-room was out of the question. He dismissed his suspicion from his mind until a particular moment came immediately after dinner, when she challenged him to deny that they had stood in the same group, in the Cave of the Mummies. Her eyes had been withdrawn from him at once. Their glance had wandered to where Joyce Whipple lay back in her low chair. They had flashed with an implacable fury then, and they had moved up from the slim foot in its slipper of silver brocade to the knee, with a veritable hunger of hate. Oh, without a doubt Evelyn Devenish had been thinking at that moment of the distorted figure of that youth in the Cave of the Mummies! She had been putting Joyce Whipple in his place, had been watching her knee pressed in a despairing agony against the coffin-lid. Yes, it was Evelyn Devenish who had

sighed. Therefore, since both the girls had disappeared from the Château Suvlac, and one had been murdered that one assuredly was Joyce Whipple.

This was the story which Mr. Ricardo told as he drove through the sunlit country to Villeblanche. Hanaud gave to it all his attention, but at the end he shook his head.

"No woman, my friend, hacked off that right hand, though all the hatred in the world consumed her."

"But no doubt she had accomplices to help her," Mr. Ricardo answered with a patient and condescending kindness. "You had not thought of that!"

Hanaud smote his forehead with a slight exaggeration of despair.

"It is terribly true!" he cried. "Hanaud is growing old. How ever should I solve this mystery alone! Fortunately you are here, the Chief of the Staff who tells the General what to do; the power behind the sofa. I lean on you. So tell me this. You have just the time!"

The car was approaching the long street of Villeblanche, bordered by small white and dusty houses.

"When Madame Devenish turned this ugly look upon the delicate Joyce Whipple, who was beside Joyce Whipple? To whom was she talking?"

Mr. Ricardo rebuilt in his mind the drawing-room, its furniture and its occupants. He set them all in their places, and exclaimed: "I know. He was at the side of Joyce Whipple, a little behind her perhaps. Yes, certainly a little behind her. For he was leaning forward over the back of her chair—Robin Webster."

"Aha!" said Hanaud. "The good-looking young man with the white hair and the little shade of pedantry in his speech. The Apollo and the school-marm all in one, eh? So it was he. The same man who cried out suddenly 'Joyce! Joyce!' when it was discovered that she had disappeared. That is curious—yes! Well, we shall know in a minute whether you are right."

For the car had stopped at the mortuary. And in a minute Mr. Ricardo knew that he was entirely wrong. For stretched out upon the mortuary slab, wrapped decently about in a clean linen sheet, her eyes closed, a look of peace upon her face, lay Evelyn Devenish.

Mr. Ricardo's surprise was intense, but his relief even greater. Joyce Whipple had wound herself about his heart a little more

closely than he had known. He put aside from him, for the moment at all events, all that was enigmatic about her, and the possibility suggested by Hanaud at Aix that she might have invented her queer story about Diana Tasborough's letters for some unknown purpose of her own. He was content that she was not lying there on the stone slab.

"It is Madame Devenish, then?" said Hanaud, reading his friend's face.

"Yes." Hanaud turned to the Commissaire Herbesthal, who had joined them, "It is as you thought. Let us see what we have to see. For we keep Mr. Ricardo from his luncheon."

Led by the attendant of the mortuary, they passed by a bare, white-washed passage to a room at the back. The room was filled with cupboards, and the basket, still wet from the river, stood upon the floor.

"I want to see the piece of linen in which this poor woman was wrapped," said Hanaud.

The attendant unlocked one of his cupboards, and took it out and handed it to Hanaud. Mr. Ricardo could see that one of its edges was torn from top to bottom, and that it was stained with blood. Hanaud carried it towards the window and turned it over and shook it out and gathered it together again in a bundle. When he turned back to the room again his face was quite changed. It was grave and discontented. Clearly he had no liking for the task to which he was now committed.

"This, I think, will prove to be very important," he said, as he laid it carefully down upon a chair.

He went over to the basket and opened it. Mr. Ricardo, from the place where he stood, could not see the inside of it. He stole over on the tips of his toes to Hanaud's side. It was lined with some sort of strong white canvas, which was here and there smeared with blood. Hanaud bent down into it swiftly, feeling the soaked lining at the corners.

"It has been torn here," he said, thrusting his fingers into the rent, and then his face sharpened. He stood up, and turning the basket upon its side bent over the wicker-work at one corner and close to the bottom.

"See!" he said to Herbesthal. He pointed to a tiny wedge of yellow metal which projected between the withies of the wicker. He set

the basket once more upon its bottom, and plunging in his hands worked for a moment or two with considerable exertion. When he stood up again he held in his hand a narrow gold bracelet. It was open. A tiny wedge was made to slide into a hollow, where a spring caught and fastened it, and at the catch there was a large fire opal. Mr. Ricardo gasped incredulously as he looked at it.

"May I see it?" he asked, and Hanaud, holding—the two ends very gingerly in the tips of his fingers, stretched it out to him.

"You know it?" he asked.

"I have seen it before," Mr. Ricardo replied, his face puckered in bewilderment.

"Where?"

"In London."

Some part of Mr. Ricardo's perplexity now showed in Hanaud's face.

"But I understood you had never seen Evelyn Devenish before yesterday."

"Nor had I," said Mr. Ricardo. "When I saw that bracelet, it was upon Joyce Whipple's wrist. It is hers."

"Hers!"

Hanaud stared at Ricardo and from Ricardo to the bracelet.

"That is extraordinary," he said slowly. He turned the golden circlet over and looked at the inside of it. But there was no inscription there at all. Then he asked for a sheet of paper, and wrapped the bracelet in it carefully and laid it on the folded linen.

"There may be some finger-marks upon it which may help us," he said, and he stood back and stared at it again, as though, even hidden in its paper wrapper, it could be forced to explain its presence in the basket. He flung himself again upon the basket, dived into it, and searched its every crevice. But it held no other secrets. Hanaud stood erect again.

"You, monsieur le commissaire, will be good enough to take charge of the linen and the bracelet and have them properly examined. Meanwhile you and I"—he turned towards Ricardo—"will return to the Château Suvlac. I shall ask you to stop at the office of Monsieur Tidon, the examining magistrate, but it will be only for a few

minutes. For I have nothing to say to him except that we are at the beginning of a very dark and terrible affair."

He walked out of the mortuary with a slow step from which all the lightness had gone. For the third time Mr. Ricardo was aware of a shrinking, a reluctance in his companion.

"It is true," said Hanaud as they climbed into the car. He was answering Mr. Ricardo's unuttered question. "I have a glimpse of things I do not like to see. And I shall have to look them full in the face before I reach the end. I should say to Monsieur Tidon if I could: 'Sir, this is not my affair.' But it is my affair. I came to Bordeaux about some disappearances—on the face of it, a sordid, vulgar, uninteresting business, which a little attention would solve. But your Miss Whipple disappears too. Does that disappearance stand by itself? Or does it lift the others to the level of a great and infamous conspiracy? I don't know!" He brought his clenched fist down upon the cushions at his side.

"But I must know. It is my business," he cried vigorously; and from that moment to the end of the long and difficult inquiry, Mr. Ricardo saw no more of any hesitation upon Hanaud's part.

"There is one question I would like to ask," he said timidly.

"Ask it, my friend, for I have many to ask you," Hanaud replied.

"Was the severed hand discovered in the basket?"

Hanaud shook his head. "No! It is a pity. Yes—a great pity. For in that case we might have discovered why it was cut off, and I think that of all the questions we have to answer, there is not one which is more important than that."

The car stopped at the Prefecture.

Chapter 8

The Magistrate in Charge

Destiny, careless as ever of the creature comforts, had written down that Mr. Ricardo, who was rather particular about them, should have no luncheon worth talking about at all on that unusual day. As Hanaud entered the vestibule of the Prefecture, he was passed by a man who suddenly stopped and turned about. "Is it Monsieur Hanaud?" he asked.

"Yes," Hanaud replied, turning about too.

"What a stroke of luck! I am Arthur Tidon, the examining magistrate, and I was off this moment to the Château Suvlac in search of you."

For a few minutes the two men talked earnestly in the shadow of the archway, whilst Mr. Ricardo sat in the car and imagined that he was beginning to feel very faint for lack of food. Then they came out into the sunlight and approached him.

"My friend, Mr. Ricardo—Monsieur Tidon, the Judge of Instruction," said Hanaud, and he stood aside.

Arthur Tidon was a tall, slim man of thirty-five years or thereabouts, with a thin, pointed, smiling face. He was clean-shaven except for a short strip of whisker upon each cheek, and his clothes were of an urban elegance.

"The name of Mr. Ricardo is of course known to me in connection with the famous Hanaud and an affair at Aix a few years ago," Tidon began affably. "I count myself happy that Providence has brought you together again at a moment so impressive. I invite you to give me at once a little of your attention in my office."

Mr. Ricardo was torn between his importance and the pangs of hunger. On the one hand he had an intriguing story to relate which justice, the enigma of Joyce Whipple, the distress of Diana Tasborough, all demanded should be related at once. On the other, would it not be more brilliantly told after a good luncheon, with a big, long, fat cigar to underline its drama—a minute's silence now whilst the lips expelled a neat ring of smoke and the eyes thoughtfully watched it mount and dissipate, a vigorous quick puff afterwards to illustrate the pounding of his heart, an inch of white ash flicked off by his little finger to close a sentence? It was hard to abandon these accessions of good story-telling, harder than to forget his stomach's emptiness, but the magistrate had opened the door of the limousine; and Mr. Ricardo had committed his foot to the step.

Tidon led the way into a large, oblong, comfortably furnished room at the side of the front door. Two tall windows looked on to the street; a knee-hole table stood between them; against the wall was a smaller table where the magistrate's clerk sat writing.

"I shall ring for you, Saussac, when I have finished with these gentlemen," said Tidon pleasantly, and the clerk rose at once with a little grimace of disappointment. He left the room with his eyes so intent upon Hanaud that he knocked his nose against the panels of the door.

"My poor Saussac," cried Monsieur Tidon, laughing. "He is heartbroken. So little happens here—the theft of a cure's vestments at the most. Then comes this startling case. Bouchette, from the window, sees the great Monsieur Hanaud and his famous friend Mr. Ricardo drive up to the door, and he is sent out of the room. Yes, poor fellow."

He laid his hat and his malacca cane upon a side-table, and placed a chair in front of his table for Ricardo and another for Hanaud, and then stood behind it facing them.

"You see?" he rattled on, laughing once more, but this time with apology in his voice. "We have here all the discredited methods—the light behind me and shining upon your faces. Everyone who is examined recognizes the old trick at once and composes his expressions to defeat it. But I keep to the arrangement because it gives me the light over my left shoulder, and there is no shadow upon the paper when I write."

Mr. Ricardo wondered whether the examining magistrate rattled on in this superfluous way to put them at their ease, or in sheer

nervousness because he had to cope with a problem of such unwonted gravity. He sat down immediately afterwards in the armchair behind the table, looked from one to the other of his guests and then leaned briskly forward, his hands, in bright yellow gloves of chamois leather, clasped lightly in front of him.

"I disarm myself," he said with a smile, "by a confession. I am of Paris, you understand, where I have important friends, and in time, no doubt, I shall be able to help those who now help me"—this with a frank glance towards Hanaud. "I want that time to come soon. In adopting the profession of a judge, I knew of course very well that I must pass my probation in the provinces. But this little dusty corner is not my world at all, and here is my chance to escape from it—with your help. This affair will ring through France—the fame of the Château Suvlac wine, the social position of the victim, the mysterious and sinister nature of the crime—all make that certain as daylight. Well then! I must have a criminal, and such evidence that conviction is certain." He pressed his hands tightly together, and then with a quick, short gasp of breath hurried on: "Yes, a good conviction! Help me to that, and I pass on to Bordeaux, which is after all a city where one eats well. And from Bordeaux to Paris—a mere step! I see myself there already," he added gaily, laughing himself at the intensity of his desire. "For Paris is"—and he turned searchingly for a phrase towards Mr. Ricardo—"you have an idiom in your language—"

"Certainly he has," cried Hanaud, leaping into the conversation long before Mr. Ricardo was ready to supply the phrase. Idioms indeed! Who but Hanaud should supply them?

"Paris!" he exclaimed with a courteous wave of his hand. "It is your spirituous home."

"Exactly," replied the magistrate, and the two men bowed at one another with great satisfaction. "Assuredly the English have phrases," said Monsieur Tidon, and he bowed again politely to Mr. Ricardo.

"So the ground is clear. We work, the three of us, for a good conviction at the Assizes. That is well! Now you, Mr. Ricardo, have seen the body of our young victim?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you identify it?"

"Yes. It is that of a Mrs. Evelyn Devenish, a visitor at the Château Suvlac."

"Good! That is something. Now, what do you know of her?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Ricardo. "I met her for the first time last night. I never heard her name before. I remarked, however, that though she was introduced to me as 'Mrs.,' she wore no wedding-ring."

Tidon the magistrate looked at his witness cunningly. "Our first little trace of a clue. So—you assume that this Evelyn Devenish was a woman of an irregular life."

Mr. Ricardo started back in horror. And then reflection came. After all, could he honestly say that he had not been assuming that? He was a little troubled when he realized what irresponsible conjectures he was being invited to attest. "I have not the slightest authority to assume anything of the kind," he replied cautiously. "A woman may leave a ring upon a wash-stand."

"A wedding-ring?"

"She may have discarded it long ago and divorced her husband."

"And yet kept his name?"

"Devenish may be her maiden name. I don't know. But no doubt Miss Tasborough does."

Mr. Ricardo was growing restive under these questions, and the shortness of his speech showed it.

"I had a wish to spare that young lady as much annoyance as I could," the magistrate observed, and Mr. Ricardo coloured at the rebuke. "You are a friend of hers, of course. You shall tell me everything."

Mr. Ricardo walked warily in his answer to this demand. "Everything" meant a number of little details which were, to use his favourite word, odd. The anxieties, for instance, which Diana's letters had awakened in Joyce Whipple. An unconscious telepathy there might no doubt have been between the mind of the writer and the reader, the words of the letters acting as a sort of telegraph line. But it would not be fair to presume on such elusive grounds that Diana when she wrote was disturbed by some pressing menace of which she was careful not to let one hint escape. No; he would omit the letters altogether from his reply. Next, Diana had certainly spent the summer at Biarritz instead of in London. Well, that was not worth mentioning. Thirdly, she had sent her lover to the rightabout. But any girl may do that. The hero of a week ago is the crashing bore of today. It can't be helped. It may be

gossip for a newspaper but no evidence of crime. Fourthly, Diana had a picture on the wall above her bed which Mr. Ricardo was most anxious to see. But he hadn't seen it; and in any case it was Hanaud's business, not his. Fifthly and above all, he, Mr. Ricardo, was Diana's guest, and not ten thousand Arthur Tidons in a hurry to get to Paris should lure him to disparage her. He spoke accordingly in warm terms of her social position, of her many friends, of her love of sport.

"And last night you noticed no change in this young lady?" the magistrate asked quickly.

Mr. Ricardo was a trifle confused. "Last night?" he repeated slowly, and he shook his head and plunged into a description of her growing horror and amazement this morning as the disappearance of her friends was revealed. "It struck her down in the end. Monsieur Hanaud had to carry her to her room."

"Yes, sir," Hanaud said at once in corroboration. "No one could have been more shocked. I broke the bad news too abruptly. Mademoiselle Diana fainted."

Monsieur Tidon had been making a note now and again whilst Mr. Ricardo was speaking. Now he tapped the butt of his pencil upon the table with a dissatisfied air. He was assuredly a long way off this good conviction which was to make his fortune.

"And this other young lady, Miss Whipple"—he pronounced it *Vipple*—"did you know her, too, before yesterday?"

"Yes."

Mr. Ricardo felt at a greater ease. There was after all nothing more important than that the mystery of her disappearance should be cleared up at once. Whatever account he could give of her was at the magistrate's disposal. He gave her history so far as he knew it, and added: "But I did not expect to see her at the Château Suvlac. No! Two months ago in London she told me that it was unlikely she could come, that she must return to America, and she used a strange phrase. 'Cinderellas must be off the premises before midnight.' That is a curious remark for a young lady with a pipe-well in California. I didn't understand it."

"Nor do I," said Tidon. "She has relations?"

"A sister who is married."

"In America?"

"Yes."

"A fiancé, too, perhaps?"

"I think not."

The magistrate was growing more and more discouraged. "We shall make our inquiries of course in England," he said gloomily, "but they pass through many channels. It will take time before we get our answers, and when we do"—he stood up, flinging out his gloved hands—"shall we be better off? Was there ever, Monsieur Hanaud, a case more difficult?"

Hanaud did not reassure him. Indeed, he added yet another to the complexities of the affair. "It is made more difficult still by the matter of the bracelet."

"Bracelet?" cried the magistrate sharply. "What bracelet?"

"The bracelet of Joyce Whipple which I found in the basket, half an hour ago." Hanaud related how he had discovered it, and how Mr. Ricardo had identified it, and ended with a couple of questions which no one in the room could answer.

"Did it slip from that severed wrist unnoticed? Was it put deliberately into the basket so that it might be found after a search, and suspicion directed upon Joyce Whipple? Who shall say?"

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders despondently. "Now—no one." He looked towards Hanaud, however, and his face cleared and a hopeful smile made it pleasant. "But let us not forget that we have Monsieur Hanaud with us. In a few days he shall say."

Once more the two men set to work bowing at each other with ceremonious affabilities, which at a moment when all was bewilderment and muddle, Mr. Ricardo thought supremely ridiculous. When the performance was at an end the magistrate began to move away round the end of the table.

"Since for the moment, then, this is all you have to tell me—" He started thus to dismiss his guests, when Mr. Ricardo caught him up.

"But, sir, this is not all," he cried timidly, clinging to his chair although both Hanaud and Tidon were on their feet.

At once the magistrate stopped. "This is not all?"

"No. I have not told you that I woke up at two o'clock this morning."

Immediately so sharp a change occurred in that room that its very atmosphere was different, its occupants men of another stamp. A

second ago baffled and despondent, they were now watchful and alert. The air was electrical. They were held stone-quiet by suspense, Mr. Ricardo no less than his companions, for the magic of the storyteller was upon him and to these fine trained minds his narrative might be the wanted Open Sesame. He used none but simple words and spoke them in an even, sober voice; and inspired by the breathless attention of his audience, he enjoyed for one brief memorable space the artist's sense of triumph. He told them of his sleeplessness, his glance at his watch, the raising of his blinds. They saw with him Robin Webster's first-floor light flicker and go out, and the windows ablaze in the white house upon the hill. They went out with him on to the dark terrace and rapped upon the glass door of the turret-room. They saw the light behind the curtains there vanish in a trice; and, returning to his bedroom with him, watched one by one the windows on the hill recede into the night. Even after he had finished, Mr. Ricardo's two auditors stood for a while, neither moving nor speaking, like men dumbfounded.

It was Hanaud who broke the silence. "And that turret-room you speak of—Oh, I understand very well your delicacy, but, alas! there is no room for delicacy or reticence—it is the room into which I carried Miss Diana Tasborough this morning."

Mr. Ricardo could not but admit it. "Yes. It is her room," he said, and the magistrate, as though exasperated by the difficulty of his problem, struck the palm of his right hand down upon the table and turned abruptly away to the window at his back. He stood there facing the street. He lifted up his hand to the bolt and played with it, swaying his body backwards and forwards, a man at the end of his wits.

"I can tell you one thing, Monsieur Hanaud, which may help you," he said in a faint, low voice. "The house upon the hill is the house of Monsieur de Mirandol, whom you, Mr. Ricardo, met last night. He is a great student, a member of many learned societies, and it is no rare thing for his windows to burn until the dawn. Meanwhile," and he swung round again to face the room, "our first duty is clear, isn't it? It is to find this girl Joyce Whipple—if we can. I entrust that task to you, Monsieur Hanaud, with every confidence. Find her for me, whether she be alive or dead."

"Alive!"

The word broke from Hanaud in a bellow loud and violent, so that the room rang with it. He stood erect, his eyes blazing, his big body from head to foot one challenge, one denial. Even Mr. Ricardo, who

had seen him in so many moods, was startled by his passion. His cry was a flame. He would not have it that Joyce Whipple was dead. He was ready, like Herakles in the play, to wrestle with Death for her himself. Even Tidon was moved by the aspect of him.

"Good," he cried with a smile. "That is the spirit we want. Alive, then! I count on you. Yes, indeed, alive. For, after all, what do we know. Justice may have need of this young lady." A note of steel had crept into Tidon's voice.

He stood up as erect as Hanaud and quietly confronting him. Were the two men ranged in opposite camps, Ricardo wondered. Certainly there was a suggestion of menace in the magistrate's attitude, a suggestion of championship in the detective. The magistrate wanted his "good conviction"—that was not to be forgotten. On the other hand, Hanaud's outburst might have been no more than the expression of his passion for a complete trim rounded finish to a case, with every malefactor held to atonement. He bent his head now in an unquestioning deference.

"I shall do my best."

Tidon rang the bell and a gendarme conducted his visitors to the door of the Prefecture. Hanaud glanced up to the windows of the magistrate's office, which were just above his head.

"That is a very clever man," he said, with a respect which quite surprised his friend. "Yes, mark me well! A very clever man! Remember that I have said it."

Again, was it deference, or was it opposition which dictated those words? Mr. Ricardo could not decide, was not in truth given the time to decide. For Hanaud proceeded to commit one of those offences about which the particular finical gentleman was most touchy. He gave an order to Mr. Ricardo's chauffeur, without the merest by-your-leave.

"To the Château Suvlac," he cried as he stepped into the car.

"It is, after all, my Rolls-Royce," Mr. Ricardo protested indignantly.

"It might be a Ford," Hanaud answered graciously. "You should still carry me back to the Château Suvlac."

Mr. Ricardo jumped upon his seat. "You don't follow me, I am afraid," he said coldly.

"Ah, but I do!" Hanaud chuckled. He pushed a big fat finger into Ricardo's ribs. "Yes, yes, I follow you. It is that excellent judge who

does not. Ah! Ah! Ah!" and he shook his finger now at Ricardo, as though he playfully rebuked a naughty child. "We keep our little secrets—yes, yes. We pick and choose what we tell—yes, yes. But I, Hanaud, I say, No, no! We were asked a question and at once we are the startled chamois on the hill."

"Nonsense," Mr. Ricardo interrupted rather guiltily. "I present no resemblance to a chamois. I never did."

"The question was," Hanaud continued, "'Did you notice last night any change in the charming Miss Tasborough?'—and you would not answer it. Therefore you did notice a change, my friend—and you shall tell that inquisitive old elephant of a Hanaud what that change was."

"I have no objection to telling you," said Mr. Ricardo, "though the change I noticed has nothing whatever to do with the case."

"Let me be the judge. One never knows."

"Very well, then. In London, Diana Tasborough was the mistress always. Mrs. Tasborough the shadow, the chaperon without authority. At Suvlac the positions were reversed. Mrs. Tasborough was the chatelaine, more than a little petulant, more than a little exacting; Diana the submissive, docile ward. I was astonished."

"Oho!"

Hanaud sat up in the car.

"But that is a big change, my friend, a very big change. Let us understand it. Something has given the older woman the mastery over her niece. She had learnt something which gave her the control, eh? Some nice quiet piece of family blackmail, eh?"

"No," Mr. Ricardo replied. He was quite sure that that explanation wouldn't do. He took a moment or two to put into clear words the impression which he had. "I think that Diana was occupied by some overmastering idea. You, see, there never was any rivalry between Diana and Mrs. Tasborough—never any struggle for control. Diana exercised it without question, and without question, too, Mrs. Tasborough acquiesced. It seemed to me that Diana had dropped that control as not worth bothering about, as too troublesome, as somehow interfering with whatever preoccupation possesses her. And that Mrs. Tasborough picked that control up and is making the most of it. Diana was always a little aloof; and last night it didn't seem to me that she even noticed that she was no longer the queen, but the lady-in-waiting."

"Ah!"

Hanaud's exclamation was one of comprehension rather than of surprise. "To me that is very interesting," he added softly, and leaning back again in the car he sat mum until they drew up at the pink archway of the Château Suvlac. Then he woke to life again. As he sprang out he said:

"I shall be grateful if you will go into the house before me and say that we have returned. It may be that Miss Tasborough will be the first person you will meet. Already I have caused that young lady great distress. It might be a shock to her if when she does not expect it I come face to face with her again."

There were moments when Hanaud displayed a quite surprising delicacy. "After all, he has not known me for nothing all these years," Mr. Ricardo said to himself with pride. He consented to Hanaud's plan with alacrity, and went forward alone towards the door. But half-way up the drive, he turned about and noticed that Hanaud was engaged in an earnest conversation with his chauffeur. His thoughts took on a different and censorious complexion.

"My car and my chauffeur!" he reflected now. "He behaves as if he owned them! I trust that I am not feudal, but even the liberties of a city have their bounds."

He was a little consoled by his quip, but at the front door he turned again. The conversation at the archway was still proceeding. It dawned upon Mr. Ricardo that he had been sent forward by Hanaud not from any delicacy of sentiment, but to make an opportunity for a quite private conversation with his chauffeur. He waited in the porch accordingly until Hanaud joined him, hauteur and indignation in every line of his face. But Hanaud waved his hand airily.

"I know, I know, my friend. It was a subterfuge. Yes, my manners are all that is deplorable. But you must take me as I am. As you say very well in your idioms, you cannot make a silk purse out of a Bath chap."

Chapter 9

Tells of Evelyn Devenish

For half an hour Hanaud was busy with the Commissary Herbesthal and his own assistant Moreau, in a room which had been put aside for them. Mr. Ricardo, left to his own devices and being in a maze of doubts, speculations, prejudices and ignorance, snatched some luncheon and set himself down in the library in front of the window. Half-way between the terrace and the hedge at the bottom of the garden a gendarme stood sentinel at the edge of a round flower-bed. There were three little brown mounds on the surface of the bed, as though a mole had been at work; and the thought of that industrious animal became to Julius Ricardo a reproach and an inspiration. He took a sheet of paper from the stand to make a table for his own guidance. He drew a dividing line down the middle of the sheet, set the facts, so far as he knew them, upon the left-hand side, and his questions and suspicions upon the right. After half an hour of laborious breathing and deep cogitation, he had produced the following compendium; upon the top of which he wrote the rather pretentious legend: "The Affair at the Château Suvlac"—so:

THE AFFAIR AT THE CHATEAU SUVLAC

i A crime has been committed. For young ladies do not stab themselves to the heart, cut off their hands, put themselves into baskets, and throw basket, themselves and all into a river unaided. This is true.

1 The victim is a young woman, Evelyn Devenish, who is or has been married, but wears no wedding-ring.

Important to discover at the earliest moment Evelyn D.'s antecedents.

1 So far, no motive for the crime has been discovered or suggested.

1 So far, the severed hand has not been found.
Question (i): Why was the hand severed after death? Or at all?

1 Another guest at the Château Suvlac disappeared upon the same night, an American girl, Joyce Whipple, and a gold bracelet which she was wearing was found in E. D.'s basket.
A very unusual occurrence. Question (2): Was J. W. present when E. D. was basketed, and did the bracelet become unfastened and fall unnoticed in the horror of the moment?

1 My observation assured me that E. D. had a great ill-will towards J. W. and would gladly have seen her dead.
On the face of it, therefore, it would have been more probable that J. W. should be murdered by E. D., than E. D. by J. W.

1 When E. D. betrayed by a glance of hatred her feelings towards J. W., Robin Webster was seated close to J. W. in a rather caressing attitude.

1 When the fact of J. W.'s disappearance became known, Robin Webster uttered a cry of grief and dismay.
(7) and (8) might have provided a motive for the murder of J. W. by E. D., if the two girls were rivals for the young man. But no motive for the murder of E. D. by J. W., since J. W. was the successful rival.

1 Since E. D.'s bed was undisturbed and there was no noise in the house, it looks as if she had left the house and was murdered outside.
But when? The lights which I saw in the white house on the hill at two o'clock in the morning have been explained by the Juge d'Instruction.

1 It appears that Joyce Whipple did not sleep in her room either, and it becomes necessary to consider her position in this case.

1 Her first statement to me in London about the letters which she had received from Diana; which, according to Hanaud, may be explained either:

a She wished to prepare me for what was to happen at the Château Suvlac, for some purpose of her own;
a She was a hysterical person;
a She was just speaking the truth.
With regard to (a) Tidon, the Juge d'Instruction, would probably accept it. But he wants a good conviction.
With regard to (b) no; she was not hysterical.
With regard to (c) you cannot any longer scoff at telepathy. It is a fact.

1 Joyce Whipple is generally held to be a rich American girl. Yet she spoke of herself as Cinderella.
1 She might have been kidnapped.
Why?
1 She might have run away.
Why?
1 There remains Diana Tasborough for consideration. She was both astounded and horrified at the murder of E. D. and the disappearance of J. W.
Women criminals are admirable actresses. All police authorities agree.
1 Her docility to her aunt showed that she had some great obsession.
Quite.
1 She has a picture over her bed which gave Hanaud an idea.
Mem. I must see that picture as soon as I can.
1 A light was burning in her room at half-past two in the morning. When I knocked upon the glass door it went out extraordinarily quickly.
Very suspicious.
(19) In view of the surprising difficulties of the case, judgment must be suspended, But some questions must be borne in mind.
Yes, e.g.: Why was Evelyn Devenish's hand chopped off?

As Mr. Ricardo wrote those last ineffectual words Hanaud's voice spoke above his shoulders.

"So there we are! We suspend the judgment! To be sure. What else can we do when we have no judgment even to suspend? And some questions must be borne in the mind. How very, very true that is."

Mr. Ricardo flushed and looked up haughtily. “I made these notes solely for my own guidance.”

“They are there, just as valuable as if they had been made to guide me.”

“And, quite uninvited, you read them across my shoulder.”

“Not as well as I could wish,” Hanaud answered imperturbably, as he reached forward and gathered the sheets in his hand. “You permit? But, of course! What a question!”

Indeed it had been Mr. Ricardo’s intention to present this little summary of his inconclusions to Hanaud at some dramatic moment. For he realized that the inspector of the Sûreté would need all the help he could get from his friends before he cut to the core of his difficult problem. And he was pleased with his notes. The form of them with the dividing line had a literary flavour. There were some pages of Robinson Crusoe, casting up the “fors” and “againsts” in the same judicial spirit. Nevertheless he was a little nervous as he watched Hanaud reading them. He had been jeered at and trampled upon before very unceremoniously. He was delighted, therefore, to see that his friend read them slowly and with a serious face.

When he had done, Hanaud folded the sheets and handed them back with a little smile of appreciation.

“You shall put them in your pocket, and keep them safe, so that no one sees them but you and I. For I tell you, Mr. Ricardo, you almost write down there one most important question.”

Mr. Ricardo, on the other hand, was conscious that he had written down not one but many important questions, and there was no “almost,” either, about his way of putting them. They were direct, short and pithy—models of questions. But, of course, Hanaud would never admit any really high merit in another. That was very, very far from the habit of his mind. Ricardo was accustomed to make an allowance for this defect in his friend the inspector, and he smiled indulgently.

“You refer, of course, to the question why Evelyn Devenish’s hand was brutally hacked off after her death.”

To his surprise, Hanaud shook his head vigorously. “No. That is a question—yes, but it leaps to the eyes that is a question.”

Mr. Ricardo pulled his notes out of his pocket and studied them thoughtfully.

"It is, then, the question of Evelyn Devenish's antecedents," he remarked, and was wrong again.

"No. The question you approached was much more subtle than that. As for Madame Devenish's antecedents—they come under the heading of routine. I think, indeed, we shall learn something definite about them at once—for Mademoiselle Tasborough has recovered from the shock of the bad news which I brought to her, and is good enough to receive us."

He unlatched the door between the library and the drawing-room and passed in with Ricardo at his heels. The room, however, was empty, and Hanaud stopped abruptly. The long windows stood open upon the terrace, and Hanaud with his noiseless step approached them and peered cautiously out. He returned to Mr. Ricardo with an odd smile upon his lips.

"It was just as well that I did not read your notes out aloud, my friend," he said in a low voice. "We spoke of what? The hand cut off—yes—and Evelyn Devenish's antecedents—that was all."

He was clearly relieved, and now raised his voice a trifle above his usual compass.

"We shall no doubt find that young lady upon the terrace," and he stepped out at the window.

Mr. Ricardo understood Hanaud's anxiety when he followed him. For Diana was sitting upon a garden seat close by the open window of the library, and not a word which they had spoken, but she must have overheard it. She raised her head, however, without the slightest embarrassment. Though her face was still pale, her manner was collected, and she could even summon up the ghost of a smile. Only her eyes had the unmistakable look which comes with grave illness or immeasurable trouble.

"I am sorry that I made such an idiot of myself this morning, Monsieur Hanaud," she said,

"Oh, mademoiselle, the regrets must come from me. To discover with so harsh a precipitancy that of two great friends one is lying mutilated and dead in a common mortuary, and the other has vanished, would tax anyone of sensibility."

Hanaud was speaking with the formality which became his position, but to Mr. Ricardo's thinking he was repeating the fault for which he apologized. Diana replied with a slight hesitation: "You speak of two great friends, Monsieur Hanaud. But in an affair so

serious it is best to be exact. I'll admit to you that when your assistant told me that the girl who was dead was Evelyn Devenish, I did feel, heartless though it may sound, a considerable relief. For Joyce is one of my very dearest friends."

"Who shall blame you, mademoiselle?" Hanaud answered gently. "Let us after all admit that we are human."

"Your assistant, monsieur—"

"Moreau," Hanaud interposed as she paused.

"Yes. Monsieur Moreau told me at the same time that you wanted to see me. Won't you sit down? And you too, of course, Mr. Ricardo." She turned to him for the first time during this interview, but though her lips counterfeited a faint smile, her eyes as they met his were hard as iron.

"If I am not in the way," said Ricardo in some confusion. There was no doubting her hostility. She was putting him down as a busybody who was clinging to the skirts of his beloved detective and poking his nose into matters much too momentous for so inconsiderable a person.

"It is for Monsieur Hanaud to say who is in the way, and who not," she answered coldly; and Hanaud came to the unfortunate man's rescue.

"Mr. Ricardo has already been of service this morning, in more ways than one," he said with a gentle remonstrance to which Diana Tasborough made no response whatever.

The two men drew up a couple of iron garden chairs to Diana's bench and sat themselves down.

"Now, mademoiselle," Hanaud began briskly. "This young Madame Devenish was not, I gather, a great friend of yours, but she was your guest here, and no doubt you will know something of her history."

"Of course," she returned. But she was silent for at least a minute, looking at Hanaud with speculation and at Mr. Ricardo as though he did not exist, and so back again to Hanaud.

"I want you to spare her memory as much as you can," Diana resumed in a sudden outburst. "She had of late years a most unhappy life. That indeed is why I asked her to stay with me this year at Suvlac. She was the daughter of Dennis Blackett, a financier of extremely wide interests and enormous wealth, a very good friend, I believe, and like so many men who are very good friends,

a remorse-less enemy. I don't think Evelyn had much chance from the beginning."

"He hated her?" Hanaud asked.

"On the contrary, he doted on her. Her mother died when she was six or seven; she was an only child, and she grew up amongst governesses and servants who had to obey every whim of hers or lose their jobs. Dennis Blackett made an idol of her. He named his yacht after her, and his crack filly and his prize Jersey cow, and an orchid of his own creation, and whilst she was still a child, she presided at his table. He flattered her beauty to her face. Nothing that she did was anything but uncommon; nothing that she said was anything but witty. And that wasn't the end of his adoration. There was something fantastic in it—oh, even that doesn't express what I mean! There was something abnormal in it. Yes, Dennis Blackett, with his hard city head, was silly in contact with Evelyn. I'll give you an instance. I saw it happen myself, for I once stayed in his house—" Diana broke off suddenly. "But you want, of course, to hear about the marriage, not about these trifles."

"The marriage afterwards—yes," Hanaud pleaded earnestly. "But these details first, if you please. You call them trifles, mademoiselle. I don't. For just such trifles build character. And how shall we reach the truth in a case so obscure, unless we understand something of the people concerned in it, of the what—they—have—been which has made them what—they—are."

Ricardo had seldom seen Hanaud so eager, so insinuatingly insistent as he was at this moment. He sat leaning with his elbows upon his knees, his strong face and alert posture both claiming Diana's narrative. "The instance, if you please." Diana nodded her consent and resumed. "Well, then, here it is. Dennis Blackett had a great house in Morven on the Sound of Mull. The house had a high staircase with broad shallow treads all in dark gleaming oak. It was a fancy of his—no, fancy's altogether too light a word—it was a passion of his to see Evelyn, dressed in her prettiest clothes, step daintily down this staircase. He would stand at the bottom of the stairs in the hall, and correct her just like a dancing-master if she stepped awkwardly or made an uneasy gesture, and send her back to the landing to begin all over again. Of course she made a very pretty picture, slim and fresh and young, glistening in her lovely clothes against the dark background, but the whole scene made me—what shall I say?—uncomfortable. It struck me as all wrong. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Hanaud replied.

"And you understand too, then, that Evelyn must have been an angel with silver wings if she hadn't grown up vain, utterly self-willed and ready to repay his folly in the way such follies are repaid. Evelyn's twenty-first birthday fell in the month of August. Dennis Blackett brought a great party of his friends up to Morven to celebrate it. For a week before her birthday the house was packed. They shot grouse by day, danced at night and kept high festival. I was there, and I could hardly imagine a man so absurdly happy and so absurdly proud as Dennis Blackett. Until the morning of Evelyn's birthday. A message was brought to each one of his guests at breakfast-time; no one saw him; and by the afternoon the house was empty but for him. Late on the night before Evelyn and Julian Devenish, a young man who owed everything to Blackett, had slipped down to the small harbour of the Sound, sailed across in a little sloop to Oban and taken the first train to London, where they were married."

"And this Monsieur Blackett never forgave that treachery," Hanaud interposed.

"Never. I told you he was a relentless enemy. He swept Evelyn out of his life altogether. He remained alone in his great house in Morven until the late autumn. Then he came down to London, and methodically set to work to ruin Devenish. Oh, it wasn't much and it didn't take long. If you dealt with Devenish, you see, you didn't deal with Dennis Blackett. If you were interested in any of Devenish's concerns, you were liable to find your shares knocked about from day to day until they went to nothing. The little swansdown pill-box of a house in Mayfair went piecemeal. One of a row of red cottages at Surbiton took its place. Then that went in its turn and three rooms at Sydenham had to make a home for the girl of the shimmering frocks and the oak staircase at Morven. There were quarrels without end, of course, each one blaming the other. Within a year Devenish was stripped bare and blew his brains out."

"And even that wasn't enough," Hanaud added. There was a note of reluctant admiration in his voice. He lived in a contact so close with the shifty volatile mind of the criminal, that he could not but respect thoroughness, even if it were a thoroughness in cruelty.

"No, that wasn't enough," Diana agreed. "Evelyn wrote to her father. She was absolutely destitute. She was answered by a clerk and a typewritten letter. Every quarter, if she applied for it, she

would receive one hundred and twenty-five pounds for the rest of her life. That was three years ago. Evelyn could live cheaper on the Continent than in England. She went abroad and I met her, for the first time since her birthday party in Scotland, this summer at Biarritz."

"She was—you will forgive the question—alone?"

"Terribly alone."

"And you came upon her in the Casino, I suppose?"

Diana seemed to be upon the point of saying "Yes"; but she reflected for a moment and then answered: "No. Let me seel It certainly wasn't in the Casino. I think that it was upon the golf-links. She had some lodging in the cheaper part of the town, and I asked her to stay with me and then brought her on here."

"Mademoiselle, that was generous," Hanaud observed with a little bow. "Now you shall tell me about your real friend, the American, Joyce Whipple."

Diana Tasborough threw up her hands in a gesture of despondency. "It is curious, Monsieur Hanaud, but I know much less about my real friend than I do about my acquaintance. That she and her sister are alone in the world, that they came over from America two years ago, that they have an oil-well on their land in California, that the sister married recently and returned to America—the whole world knows as much as I do. Joyce was always very reticent about herself—even to me. She was full of enthusiasm for the things she was doing and seeing over here, and the people whom she met. But about herself and her home, you couldn't get her to talk of them."

"Yes, that is curious," Hanaud agreed, but he did not press Diana with any more questions. He rose from his chair and spoke gratefully. "I must thank you, mademoiselle. What you have told me will be of the greatest help. I make a little recommendation to you in return. Telegrams must be sent both to America and to this inexorable Monsieur Blackett—" He broke off from his recommendation to interject—"Do you know, I have a great sympathy with that stern man? All that devotion, foolish no doubt but frank, and for reward first the treachery, then this miserable end. It will be right that he should hear the bad news from you, before the newspapers tell it to him. It is the only bright spot, eh? that at Suvlac we are far from the newspapers. I recommend, therefore, that mademoiselle put herself into her car and drive to Pauillac or whatever telegraph

office is nearest, and send off the messages herself. It will give mademoiselle something to do."

Diana looked at him with unbelieving eyes. Then a light shone in her eyes and the blood rushed in a torrent into her face. "Ah, you are happy that I ask you to go upon this errand," Hanaud observed with a smile.

"Happy—no. Glad—yes—immensely glad," she answered in a sort of eager confusion. "To sit here useless on this terrace watching the Gironde, and that sentinel by the flower-bed, with one's hands idle and one's thoughts going round and round in a circle! Oh, terrible! Thank you! I'll get my hat"; and she sprang up, restored to life and animation, and ran off through the open window into the drawing-room.

Mr. Ricardo had strolled away to the edge of the terrace occupied with a little struggle of his own. He was quite aware of Diana's dislike for and disdain of him, and was inclined to think the worse of her in consequence. On the other hand he was a susceptible person and her immense relief at being given something to do moved him. He was thus in two minds whether to warn Hanaud with some such subtle question as, "Are you wise to let her go off without a gendarme in the car to take care of her?" or to congratulate him upon his delicate consideration. Mr. Ricardo's higher nature, however, got the upper hand of him; and as Hanaud joined him, he said encouragingly: "That was very thoughtful of you, my friend."

"Yes, yes," Hanaud answered. "It was very thoughtful of me."

"The drive in the fresh air will do her a world of good."

"Yes, yes, and we shall have the house to ourselves, and that will do us a world of good too," said Hanaud with a grin.

Mr. Ricardo turned round with a start. So that was the aim which had prompted all this show of delicate feeling! But he said nothing in criticism of this duplicity. He stood on the contrary with his mouth open. For he was looking now into the drawing-room and he saw a man there talking to Diana. The man stood with his back to the long window and well within the shadow of the room, so that it was easy to mistake him. Mr. Ricardo, however, had not a shred of doubt.

"So, after all, he is here," he cried in a low voice.

"Who?" Hanaud asked, swinging round towards the window.

"Why, look! The examining judge, Monsieur Tidon."

"Oh!" said Hanaud slowly in a dry voice. "So that is Monsieur Tidon, is it?" and at that moment the man turned round.

It was not the examining judge at all, but merely Mr. Robin Webster, the manager of the vineyard. He came to the window.

"Monsieur Hanaud, if you don't want me I'll drive with Miss Tasborough into Pauillac. The work at the vats can go on without me. There are overseers of experience. It is true that with my hand crippled like this," and he glanced down at his arm supported in a sling, "I shall not be of much use for driving. But after the shock which Miss Tasborough had this morning, I'm not very easy about her driving herself alone. I want no more tragedies in the Château Suvlac."

"I understand that very well, Monsieur Webster," Hanaud replied. Nothing could have been more cordial and kindly than his manner. "By all means drive that young lady into Pauillac and help her with her telegrams. And for yourself. You will not think me guilty of an impertinence. No. But I heard your little cry of distress this morning. You shall not lose heart, hein? We shall try to find for you your little friend with the charming name," and he clapped Robin Webster on the shoulder heartily.

"I shall not lose heart," Webster asserted. But his face was convulsed with a spasm of pain and grief. "But, oh, be quick! Be quick!" he cried in a low voice. "We are all near to breaking-point in this house." He recovered himself in a moment, and coloured as a man will when he is caught in a display of emotion.

"I am afraid, too, that your wounded hand is giving you a great deal of pain," said Hanaud gravely.

"It throbs, of course, as such wounds will. But it is only for a day or two. If that were the sum of our troubles here, we should not think much of them," Robin Webster replied with a shrug of the shoulders, and turned to another topic. "You will perhaps speak to Monsieur Le Commissaire Herbesthal, so that we may take out the car from the garage."

Hanaud stepped back in astonishment. "But certainly I will, although there is no need. Monsieur Herbesthal will not interfere with you. You go of course where you will, and Mademoiselle Tasborough too."

He hurried into the house and to the room in the wing where the Commissaire sat making his report. He was back again upon the

terrace with an agility which quite belied his lamentations over his age, and found Mr. Ricardo deep in thought.

"I have been reflecting," he said. "I am obviously unwelcome to Miss Tasborough. It is right that I have my bags packed and return to Bordeaux."

But Hanaud would not hear a word of any such conduct. "Listen! This is not a moment for the dignities! No—I detain you, I, Hanaud. I will make myself clear upon that point to Mademoiselle Tasborough. Let the inestimable Thomson put one of your paper collars in your bag, and I arrest you very severely. You shall pack your sensibilities into the bag, but nothing more. That is understood. One paper collar—one arrest. For you are of use to me—do you appreciate that?" He used a tone of wonder which was quite natural and sincere. Yes, he was astonished that Mr. Ricardo could help him. But there it was. He looked his companion over and saw nothing which could explain the remarkable fact.

"Yes," he repeated, "Hanaud is actually helped by this Mr. Ricardo."

Mr. Ricardo smiled modestly. He was immensely relieved that he was not to be allowed to retire from this tragic embroglio where every hour brought its new thrill, its new mystification. "Once more," he said to himself with a lifting heart, "I chase criminals to their doom. They are cubbing in the Midlands. Let them cub!"

"Help you is a big word," he said with a totally false diffidence. "I have had the good fortune to reveal a few strange facts to you—"

"More than that," said Hanaud, and he himself fell into a troubled muse.

Mr. Ricardo was buoyant.

"More than that?" he exclaimed. "For instance?"

"For instance—yes," and Hanaud came out of his muse. He slipped his arm through Ricardo's and bent his eyes closely upon him. "For instance, what made you mistake just now the unhappy Robin Webster for the Juge d'Instruction? They are both more or less of the same build to be sure. The hair of one is growing a little grey; the hair of the other is white, though, again, it would not look so very white in the shadow of the room. Yes, yes. But you sprang at your conjecture very confidently. You clung to it. You would have it so. There in that room was Monsieur Tidon. Now, why were you so sure? Can you tell me? Think well!" and he shook Ricardo's arm that he might think the better.

Mr. Ricardo went over in his mind this and that detail. Yes, undoubtedly he had been very sure. Clothes? No. Monsieur Tidon had worn a black coat, and Robin Webster a—a—a—brown one. Certainly not a black one. Why then had he been so sure?

"No," he said at last. "I cannot tell you why."

"Yet nothing more illuminating to me has happened since this morning than that cry of yours," Hanaud continued. "For without that cry I should not have seen—"

"What?"

Hanaud wrinkled up his nose in a grimace. "What I did see. I tell you, my friend. In this case you are the germ-carrier. I get the disease and you give it to me without knowing what you are doing."

Mr. Ricardo drew his arm sharply away. "That is a most unseemly metaphor," he said, and stopped. For Hanaud was not listening to him. His hand was raised, his head inclined towards the house. The silence was broken by the throb and whine of a motor-car.

"They have gone," cried Hanaud. "Let us be quick."

Chapter 10

Three Rooms

Hanaud swept through the drawing-room into the hall, where Moreau his assistant was sitting. He spoke an order over his shoulder without pausing in his walk.

"Bring the keys, Moreau," and with Moreau and Ricardo following behind him, he turned to the left and at the end of the passage again to the right, into the wing where Mr. Ricardo slept. It was in the middle of this wing that the Commissaire Herbesthal had installed himself. Hanaud opened the door.

"Monsieur Le Commissaire, I propose now to visit the bedrooms of these two young ladies."

Monsieur Le Commissaire rose at once. "I am at your disposal."

Evelyn Devenish had occupied a room in the same wing but nearer to the back of the house. Moreau led the way to it and taking a key from his pocket unlocked the door. Hanaud stood in the doorway blocking the entrance.

"There is little, it seems, to help us here," he said.

Behind him Mr. Ricardo dodged about, seeking in vain for a clear view. But he got the impression of a room tidy and neat as though the housemaid had just left it. The window was closed and looked upon the avenue of dark trees. The coverlet of grey silk was spread over the bed. Every chair was in its place. Hanaud crossed the room to the window. It was a window on the English pattern and the sashes were not bolted. He lifted the lower one and looked out. The terrace was prolonged round the side of the house for a full quarter of the length of the wing, and the flags stretched beneath

the window to the edge of the avenue of dark trees. Upon their dry surface there was not a mark. Hanaud closed the window again and turned back into the room. There was a wardrobe in which some dresses were hung, and a chest of drawers filled with the more intimate details of the toilet. Hanaud turned towards Ricardo.

"You remember perhaps the colour of the dress Madame Devenish wore last night?"

"It was green."

"Do you see it here?" Hanaud asked, standing by the open wardrobe.

"No."

"We shall ring for Marianne."

Hanaud rang the bell, and whilst he waited examined a little writing-table near the window, on which stood a blotting-pad, an inkstand with a tray of pens and a small despatch-case. The blotting-pad was as clean as the flags outside the window. The pens had the rusty look of pens which had not been used for many a long day. Hanaud opened the despatch-case. It held a few small receipted bills from shops in Biarritz, and a cheque-book on a London bank. Hanaud looked at the counterfoils. A few cheques had been drawn to "self" for small amounts. Hanaud replaced everything in its old position and smiled ruefully at Mr. Ricardo.

"Not a letter from a friend! It is true! That young lady was lonely and poor. She paid for that flight across the water on the eve of her birthday."

A dressing-table stood beneath a pendant of electric light, and this was the only piece of furniture in the room which showed the least disarrangement. The lid of the big glass powder-bowl was off, the hair brushes, backed with tortoiseshell and set with Evelyn's maiden initials E.B., in gold, were one here one there. A hare's foot lay dropped at random; a tiny pot of dry rouge was uncovered; a pencil of lip-stick had not been sheathed. Hanaud nodded his head and pursed his lips as he took note of this disarray. Then he turned towards the door almost before Marianne had opened it.

"Marianne," he asked, "can you tell me what clothes are missing from this poor woman's wardrobe?"

Marianne shrugged her shoulders. "That should not be difficult. She had not so many, the poor lamb!"; and of all the inappropriate

expressions which Mr. Ricardo had ever heard, that word "lamb" as applied to a creature of passions and strong hate like Evelyn Devenish, seemed to him the worst. It was magnificent in its absurdity.

"There is missing, monsieur, the dress which madame wore last evening," said Marianne, as she felt along the hanging row of clothes, "and a cloak."

"Ah!" Hanaud exclaimed. "A cloak!"

"Yes, monsieur, a cloak of brown satin, warmly lined with white ermine and with a big collar and cuffs and border of white ermine too. It was a cloak of madame's other days. For very sure, she could not have afforded so beautiful a wrap today."

"Thank you," said Hanaud. He cast one final look about the room and added: "We will now visit the room of mademoiselle the American. For very likely, Marianne, you can help us there too."

Marianne threw up her hands. "For Mademoiselle Whipple, my good gentleman! That is a very different thing! She goes from here to America, so she has everything here. If you are fond of fine clothes, you shall see them, I promise you. And boxes besides which have never been unlocked. Oh, la, la! And shoes and stockings! And scarves and cloaks! Oh, you like wonderful clothes, my gentleman. For me, I tell you frankly, I have no very high idea of men who run here and there to see ladies' clothes."

If ever there was a lamb, Mr. Ricardo reflected, that lamb was Hanaud of the Surety Generale of Paris. Marianne stood with her arms akimbo, wilfully misunderstanding the help she was asked to give. She resented in every fibre this invasion of the Château Suvlac by the police. She had seen her beloved young mistress struck down, as if by a merciless fist. Mr. Ricardo wondered whether behind all this violence there was not a fear of whither this inquiry would lead. She affected to frown upon the burly Hanaud as though he were some hopeless decadent. Hanaud, however, was meekness itself, so that the Commissaire, who was red in the face with outraged dignity, could not believe his eyes or ears.

"It is because I wish to see mademoiselle wearing once more her pretty frocks that I ask you to show me them, Marianne," he said; but it seemed that Marianne knew better, for she turned to the door with a disdainful toss of her head and strode back along the corridor past the front door again and turned down the passage towards the turret.

A door faced her, and in the corner at the angle was a second door a good deal narrower, with panels of ground glass in the upper part of it. This door Marianne unlatched and drew open. A narrow spiral stone staircase constructed in the thickness of the wall wound upwards. Marianne ascended it to a small landing and halted in front of another door. On this a sheet of note-paper was fixed with a pin. It read:

MARIANNE—Je vous prie de ne pas me reveiller le matin.[1]

Hanaud asked of Marianne, "Is that mademoiselle's handwriting?"

"Yes, monsieur. I give the letters to the postman. That is the writing of mademoiselle."

"No doubt," Hanaud agreed.

Moreau produced another key and unlocked the door, and the whole party followed Hanaud into a large room with one wide window which overlooked the garden and the broad water of the Gironde. The window stood open and Hanaud paused at it. The tide had turned again and was running seawards, so that the breast of the river was sprinkled with little ships at anchor, their sails all furled and their sterns towards distant Bordeaux. The gold of a September afternoon painted the lovely country. In the furrows between the vines the peasants stooped and straightened their backs and stooped again; and for a moment or two the contrast between the peace outside and the mystery which haunted this room held everyone in a spell.

Hanaud was the first to break it. "Ahaha! There are other points of difference in this room, Marianne, besides the clothes," he cried, looking about him; and indeed where all had been tidiness in Evelyn Devenish's room, here all was disorder. The silver dress which Joyce Whipple had worn was flung carelessly across a chair; her silver slippers lay one kicked into one corner, another in the middle of the room; her stockings had been tossed in a bundle on to a second chair. It was clear that upon coming up from the drawing-room Joyce had changed her dress even to her shoes and stockings in a great haste.

Hanaud opened a wardrobe which stood against the right-hand wall of the room. It was full of dresses and tailored suits all hanging orderly.

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[1] Marianne, please don't wake me up in the morning.

"There are others in the lowest drawer," said Marianne, pointing to a tall chest of drawers against the back wall by the side of the door. Hanaud stooped and drew it open. Certainly some other skirts and coats lay there, but they were all neatly folded. Hanaud turned to Marianne and spoke abruptly and with authority.

"You have been very amusing, Marianne, no doubt. But we are not here to amuse ourselves. You will now tell me plainly, whether to your knowledge any dress is missing from the wardrobe or the drawer."

"I do not know," Marianne replied without budging an inch.

"Or any cloak."

"I do not know. Mademoiselle has been at the Château Suvlac for a fortnight, and once or twice she has put on a wrap in the evening when she has been out of doors on the terrace." She went to the wardrobe and examined the clothes hung up there. "Yes, it has always been this one," and she touched a glittering cloak of gold lame.

"Thank you," said Hanaud. "I need not keep you any longer from your service."

Marianne closed the door of the wardrobe and went out of the room. Hanaud walked over to the bed which stood against the wall opposite to the wardrobe with the foot of it stretching out into the room. The bed-clothes were tumbled, the pyjamas crumpled up, the pillow flung aside. Hanaud threw the bed-clothes back. The lower sheet was flat and tightly stretched over the mattress without a wrinkle on its surface.

"Yes, it is clear," said the Commissaire. "Nobody has lain in that bed since it was made."

Hanaud called Mr. Ricardo to his side.

"Let us now put quite clearly, my friend, the question you approached. Madame Devenish retires to her room. She stops for a moment at her dressing-table to touch her hair, powder her face, and repair the little disorders of the evening. She puts on her cloak of brown satin, opens her window and slips out. Whither she is bound we do not know. But she does not tumble her bed. No! Why should she? If she does not mean to come back, there is no reason why she should pretend to have slept in it. If she does, there is still less reason, for she means to sleep in it on her return. That is clear, eh?"

"Yes," Mr. Ricardo agreed.

"But now consider the case of Joyce Whipple! She, too, retires to her room. She changes her clothes in a great haste, and then—" he flung his arms out wide—"she, too, is gone. But her bed is tumbled. If she meant to come back and sleep in it, again I ask you, why should she tumble it? If she did not mean to come back, what is the use of pretending that she has slept in it? There is a notice on the door—'Do not wake me, Marianne!' If she does not mean to come back, she has taken her precautions. She will not be missed until the hour of luncheon. Why should she tumble her bed any more than the unhappy Madame Devenish? So you see your question, plain and clear now."

Mr. Ricardo had not one idea of the nature of the famous question which he was supposed to have put, but he nodded his head vigorously and sagely.

"Of course," he said.

"Did Mademoiselle Whipple go out of this room of her own accord?" Hanaud went on, to Ricardo's amazement. "Yes, that is the question."

"But there was no noise," Ricardo objected.

"No, there was no noise that anyone could hear, and yet I ask myself that question. She meant to go somewhere—that is clear from the fact that she changed her clothes in so much haste. Oh, there are a hundred questions. Did she mean to go with the woman Devenish? Did she mean to follow her? Was it by an accident that she meant to go where she meant to go on the same night that Evelyn Devenish went? But more important than all these questions is this one. Did she actually in the end go of her own accord? Suppose that she was taken away—"

"By force?" interrupted Mr. Ricardo.

"And by some persons who had not noticed that writing on the door, because they are in the dark and in a hurry. If they tumble the bed they may win some hours before it is discovered that the young lady has disappeared. Marianne finds the bed in disorder. Very well. Then mademoiselle has risen early. She may be amongst the vines." He suddenly turned to his companions and cried:

"Let someone explain that tumbled bed to me in some other way. I shall be very glad."

There was a note of anxiety, of deep feeling in Hanaud's voice which troubled everyone in that room. He was setting no trap now to parade his cleverness. He looked from face to face, eager for a convincing interpretation other than the only one he discovered for himself.

"Can you, Monsieur Le Commissaire?"

"No."

"Come, Moreau! You!"

"No, Monsieur Hanaud."

"And you, Mr. Ricardo, I hardly ask, since it was you who first of all of us detected the significance of this manufactured disorder."

He turned sombrely away from the bed and then swooped upon a writing-table which stood in front of the window, but a little way back from it. A leather blotting-book lay closed upon it. Hanaud opened it and at once half a sheet of the blotting-paper fluttered down to the floor. He picked it up. Its inner edge was jagged. Hanaud compared it with the other sheets.

"Half of this has been torn away," he said, "but we shall not find it."

There was a waste-paper basket beside the table, but it was empty. There was a drawer in the table. It held no torn sheet of blotting-paper, but on the other hand it did hold a jumble of letters opened and pushed back into their envelopes. Hanaud sat down in the chair in front of the table and with his face to the window and his back to the room set himself quickly to read them.

"Aha! She has friends, this young lady," he said more to himself than to any of those behind him. And after another moment or two, "Who is a certain Bryce Carter?"

Mr. Ricardo started as he heard the name, and without so much as turning his head Hanaud exclaimed:

"So you know him, my friend."

"No. I know a little of him," Mr. Ricardo returned. "He was at one time engaged to Diana Tasborough," and Hanaud swung round in his chair.

"What is this you tell me?" he said slowly, with a letter open in his hand. Mr. Ricardo remembered very clearly the information which Joyce Whipple had given to him about this young man, in

London, but he remembered still more clearly the confusion with which she had given it.

“Bryce Carter is a young man who was in the Foreign Office, but he left it to go to the City and make money, since he did not wish to be the poor husband of a rich wife. But a few months ago he crashed.”

Ricardo remembered the graphic word and reproduced it.

“Crashed? “Hanaud repeated. “Crashed? That is an idiom,” and he was utterly surprised that here was an idiom with which he was unacquainted.

“I mean that Diana Tasborough broke off her engagement.”

“Oh!”

Hanaud turned back to the drawer. He searched amongst the litter of envelopes and found another of the same handwriting and then another; and he read them all through. He looked over his shoulder at Ricardo with a grin.

“I make you a prophecy. That young man will make money in the City. He wastes no time, the scamp,” and with a little mimicry of burnt fingers he dropped the letter he was holding and took it up again gingerly. “They are live coals, these letters of Bryce Carter. Oh, oh, they boil”—he put his fingers ridiculously into his mouth and blew upon them—and suddenly all his play-acting ceased. Some quite new thought had smitten him, and he sat, his body arrested, a man changed into stone.

“Yes,” he said at last. “Yes,” and now very soberly he continued his examination of the drawer. For a little while he found nothing to interest him, and then he leaned back in his chair staring at a sheet of paper.

“It is not easy to read, this signature. Do you know a name Brever?”

Ricardo shook his head.

“There is a name Brewer.”

“Yes? Then that is it. Brever. Henry Brever, and he has a pharmacological laboratory at Leeds.”

“Oh!”

Mr. Ricardo jumped.

“You know him?” asked Hanaud.

"Again, I know of him. Sir Henry Brewer. He is a renowned physician devoted to research."

"A curious friend for a young lady of fashion," said Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo as a citizen of the world was in a position to put his friend right in matters of the social order.

"We don't live in our categories and departments as much as you do in France," Ricardo explained with a trifle of condescension. "No, we have the habit of a wider life. Our actresses dine in high company and eminent physicians run around with the girls."

Hanaud bowed his head meekly. "It must be very pleasant for the eminent physicians," he said. Mr. Ricardo, curious as to the character of the letter, drew nearer to the table. But before he could get so much as a glimpse of it, Hanaud folded it, replaced it in its envelope, ;and put the envelope in his pocket. It was to the credit of science that he didn't have to blow upon his fingers to cool them, afterwards. He rose up from the table and as he closed the drawer he said: "I keep this one letter, and I beg of you that no one shall mention it. We forget the name of Brever! So!" He closed his eyes for a moment and opened them again. "It is done. And there—is no Leeds. So!" He repeated his performance with his eyelids and to Mr. Ricardo who was staring at him with a certain disfavour. "Ah! I am a comical, eh? Yes, but I do not always live in my category and department, either. In that I am like—the one I have forgotten. Let us go!"

He took a final glance about the room. The dressing-table stood against the same wall as the wardrobe opposite to the bed. The window and the writing-table were between. A cluster of light globes was fixed in the centre of the ceiling. There was a standard lamp by the bed, two upon the dressing-table and in the back wall two sconces were set, fitted with electric bulbs. Hanaud took all these details in and led the way down the stone staircase into the angle of the corridor.

"And this," he said, seizing the handle of the door close by, "this is the room of Mademoiselle Tasbruff."

"Tasborough," Ricardo corrected him.

"That is what I say, 'Tasbruff.'"

He remained with his hand upon the knob, measuring with his eyes the distance between the two doors.

"This something," he asked of Ricardo, "which flicked past you last night outside upon the terrace—it was a person? It could not have been a bat or an owl?"

"Oh, no. It was a person. I am sure."

"But you had no suspicion who it was?"

"None."

"And it vanished through the window of this room, at the door of which I am standing?"

"Yes."

"At half-past two in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Good! We have that clear," and Hanaud turned the handle and for a second time entered Diana Tasborough's bedroom.

Mr. Ricardo had been awaiting this moment in a fever. He almost pushed Hanaud out of the way in his anxiety to get to that picture on the wall above the bed and pluck its secret from it. He suffered one of the great disappointments of his life. For he found himself staring at one of a myriad copies of Tintoretto's picture of the Grand Canal of Venice. The gondolas, the pale mass of the Doge's Palace, the dome of Santa Maria del Salute—Mr. Ricardo had seen them a hundred times on the walls of a hundred bedrooms, had slept under them, he too. There was no secret to be plucked out of that picture, no mystery by its mute agency to be laid bare. Mr. Ricardo gazed reproachfully at the detective who hurried to his side.

"You see nothing there?" Hanaud asked.

"Nothing."

"It must be, then, that there is nothing to see."

Nothing there—no! But there was that curious brightness in Hanaud's eyes, that curious alertness in his manner, which Ricardo had noticed before in this very spot. Even his voice was vibrant with excitement. Once more this room had had some vital information to give to him. The picture—a joke and not in the best taste. But jokes in bad taste played upon you delightedly were part of the price which you had to pay for the thrills which his friendship was apt to provide. Mr. Ricardo swallowed his grievance and gazed with a frowning brow about the room for just that changed

thing which had so encouraged Hanaud. Alas! He could not find it. There was the mirror, the writing-table with the crucifix, the same bottles of perfume on the dressing-table—no, Mr. Ricardo was at a loss. He detected Hanaud watching him with the shadow of a grin upon his face.

"It is peculiar, isn't it?" said Hanaud quickly.

"Very. Very peculiar," replied Mr. Ricardo, who was not going to be made a mockery and derision if he could help it.

"If you are satisfied, there is one more room which we should visit before our hostess and her manager return. It is not pleasant to find the police poking their noses into little intimate secrets which have nothing to do with them. Yet that, alas, in their wide search the police must do. So let us cause as little annoyance as we can. Moreau, you will ask Monsieur Le Commissaire to post someone to watch the road and give us warning of the car's return."

Monsieur Le Commissaire, however, was disinclined to withdraw the dignity of his tricoloured sash from Hanaud's investigation. He nodded to Moreau.

"You will find Andrieu Biche in the room we are using. You shall post him at the spot which is most convenient."

Moreau went reluctantly upon his errand.

"Andrieu Biche has his wits about him," said the Commissaire to Hanaud. "We are safe from interruption."

Mr. Ricardo knew Hanaud well enough to realize that he was now in a great hurry. He led the way on to the terrace by the long window in the bow of the turret, passed swiftly along the face of the house, crossed the avenue of trees and came out into the open space of grass upon which the chalet was built. On the edge of this space he halted just for a second. But there was not any movement visible within the chalet, and a screen of trees sheltered the onlookers from the observation of the labourers about the chais and the vats. Nevertheless Hanaud crossed the plot of grass at a run, flung open the white gate and was at the door of the chalet with a speed which his bulk altogether belied. The door was latched but unlocked. It gave upon a narrow passage with a door on either side, a staircase beyond, and beyond the staircase, through an open doorway, the party caught a glimpse of a kitchen. Hanaud stopped in the passage again for a second with his finger to his lips. But not a sound could be heard.

“The service of the chalet is done from the château,” Hanaud said with a note of relief. “It is empty.”

A hurried step sounded on the gravel behind him. He turned round. The new-comer was Moreau back from his errand to the Commissaire. “A man is posted on the road,” he said.

“Good!” Hanaud replied. He paid not the slightest attention to the rooms on the ground floor, but sprang quickly up the stairs. A bathroom and a dressing-room stood upon one side, a long bedroom upon the other with a window at either end. Hanaud went at once to the window, which looked out across the grass on the avenue of trees.

“It was here that you saw the light burning?” he asked of Mr. Ricardo.

“Yes.”

The room was lit at night by electricity. A standard lamp stood upon a table by the bed and a couple of brackets were fixed in each of the walls.

“Yes,” Hanaud repeated. But he was not satisfied. A table stood in the centre of the room but in a line with the window. He ran his eyes over the articles upon it—a book, a fountain-pen, a case for note-paper and envelopes, a blotter, a bottle of ink, a pencil—but he was looking for something, and the thing he looked for was not there. Some cupboards were let into a wall side by side. Hanaud opened them in their order. In one, clothes dangled upon hangers; in the second, Robin Webster’s linen was arranged upon shelves. In the third, which was fitted with shelves too, his ties and collars and socks and handkerchiefs were grouped. But they only took up two shelves and there were three. The third was given over to odds and ends—a leather collar-box, a few bottles, a Thermos flask, and a saucer. Hanaud closed the door and swung round, he clapped his hands and rubbed the palms together while a smile slowly overspread his face. Oh, he had found what he was looking for—not a doubt of it. But Mr. Ricardo was not paying any great attention to him. He had found something too. Yes, he had—an idea.

“Hanaud, I have an idea,” he cried as he stood by the window. In a moment Hanaud was shaking him by the elbow with every sign of admiration and excitement.

“An idea! Actually! That thing so rare! Speak it! Don’t keep me on the tent-hook! Put the idea so priceless into priceless words!”

"You will not laugh at me?"

"My friend!" The two words breathed a whole world of reproach.

"Very well, then. I measure the length of the wing of the château with my eyes."

"I had not thought of it! Now I do," said Hanaud.

"On the left at the end of the wing, obliquely from us, is my window."

Hanaud curled his hands into a mimicry of opera-glasses and held them to his eyes.

"I do see that," he said earnestly. "It is very extraordinary."

"There, just opposite to us, is the window of Evelyn Devenish."

Hanaud collapsed into a chair. "Oh!" he cried. "To be sure it is! Well, then! Oh, speak!"

"Well, then! I told you of the murderous look which Evelyn Devenish shot at Joyce Whipple when Robin Webster was leaning over her chair."

"You did! You did!"

"Don't you see, then? It was to this chalet that Evelyn Devenish fled of her own accord when she left her room last night. It was to her lover Robin Webster."

All the enthusiasm faded out of Hanaud's big face. Discouragement became visible in the limpness of his attitude. He shook his head at Mr. Ricardo with the tenderest of reproach, and pressed a large hand upon his bosom to still the disappointment at his heart.

"My friend," he said in a voice of pathos, "you work me up to a pitch of excitement most dangerous to the aged, and then you fling me down with the thud of Lucifer falling from the skies! How could you! How could you!"

Even the Commissaire Herbesthal, who could make neither head nor tail of Hanaud's varied moods, glared at Mr. Ricardo indignantly. Mr. Ricardo, however, stood his ground.

"Evelyn Devenish fled to this chalet and to Robin Webster," said he hotly.

"But Robin Webster wasn't here," said Hanaud.

"Not here!"

Mr. Ricardo stared sympathetically at the inspector of the Sûreté. Yes, the great detective's day was done. This case with its subtleties and confusions had been too much for his once great bright mind. Mr. Ricardo could not, however, have him put to shame before his colleague. He must let him down easily and smoothly.

"You forget, Monsieur Hanaud. I saw Webster's light in this window. I saw him turn it out."

And at once Hanaud leaped to his feet.

"No, no, no! I recall your words. You saw the light flicker and go out. Yes, at the time when you used them, I thought the words were strange. Let us see now. If I turn out an electric light, it is out and at once I am in the dark. If a wire fuses, it is the same. But when an electric lamp nickers and goes out, it is because the bulb is exhausted. Let us see now!"

He switched on all the lights of the room one after another, and all of them burned brightly. He switched them off again, and in each case the light disappeared cleanly and sharply and instantaneously.

"You see!" he said.

He went back to the third cupboard and from the third shelf he took the saucer and brought it back to the table.

"This is what you saw flicker and go out."

Herbesthal and Mr. Ricardo jostled each other in their haste to examine the saucer. At the bottom of it they saw a fragment of black wick and a little patch of wax which had melted and congealed again.

"I don't understand," Mr. Ricardo stammered.

"Yet it is clear. My young friend Webster lights this candle and leaves it burning in the room, so that Mr. Ricardo, or anyone who looks this way, may say to himself: 'Oh, that industrious young man! What a treasure!' But the candle is of a certain length, so that at a moment which experience has fixed, it will go out, and Mr. Ricardo, if he is still awake, will say: 'It is high time he went to sleep. Treasures must not ruin their health. We do not pick them up in every hedge.'"

Now Mr. Ricardo had, indeed, argued in just that way, and he grew very red as he listened to this exposition.

"But, meanwhile, he is away. Yes, all very fine, but he forgets the nicker when the flame fades and leaps up, and so goes out. Aha! This Monsieur Webster is an interesting person. Where does he go when he leaves the candle burning? What does he do?"

Hanaud carefully replaced the saucer in its old position upon the shelf of the cupboard and closed the door. In a small recess in the wall at the head of the bed some books were standing. Hanaud walked across to them and read the titles aloud. It was the queerest collection of books for a man to keep at his bedside, and in Mr. Ricardo's opinion some of them were not at all likely to foster those nice thoughts which should attend upon falling asleep.

"'The Diary of Casanova,'" Hanaud read out. "'The Ornaments of Ruysbroek, the Mystic,' '*Mademoiselle de Maupin*,' 'The Imitatio Christi,' 'Urn Burial' and '*La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*.' A very interesting person, this Monsieur Webster! What a collection!"

He took the copy of "*Mademoiselle de Maupin*" into his hands and opened it at the fly-leaf.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "'Robin Webster.'"

He replaced the book and took at random one of the volumes of Casanova. That, too, bore the name of Robin Webster upon the fly-leaf. The binding of the third book which he removed from its shelf was more used than the other bindings; at which Mr. Ricardo was surprised. For it was "The Ornaments of Ruysbroek, the Mystic," and it seemed an unlikely book to find in frequent use in the bedroom of the manager of a vineyard. Hanaud opened it. The sewing of the leaves even was loose, and the fly-leaf had disappeared altogether.

But Mr. Ricardo was now at Hanaud's side, not looking over his shoulder—for that his stature prevented him from doing—but peeping round his elbow; and as Hanaud was closing the book he exclaimed in remonstrance at the detective's carelessness: "But, my friend, you don't notice things any more! How is this?"

"Tell me! Tell me quick!" cried Hanaud in a voice of anguish at all the mistakes which he was committing.

"The fly-leaf of that book was not lost because it was loose. Not at all. It was folded back and creased and then neatly and deliberately cut out."

Hanaud's voice grew strong again.

"I did notice that. Yes, yes. Some remnants of Hanaud's once terrific acumen are still alive. The fly-leaf has been cut out."

"But why?" Mr. Ricardo cried triumphantly. "It is obvious. Robin Webster has changed his name."

"I wonder," Hanaud replied. He took down the "Imitatio Christi." From that book, too, the fly-leaf had been neatly removed. He stood and stared at it for an appreciable time. Then he slowly replaced it and as slowly observed: "There is another explanation. I like it the better of the two. For it explains to me something about Robin Webster which has been puzzling me all this day."

He resumed his searching, running through the drawers with the light touch of a woman and a swiftness which was all his own. An old chest remained, on the closed lid of which lay heaped a pipe or two, a tennis racket, a telephone book, a map, an American magazine, the miscellanies which a man collects. Hanaud swept them aside and burrowed in the chest. A travelling-rug and a heavy overcoat were tossed upon the floor and then Hanaud stood up, holding in his hands a little cheap oblong box inlaid with mother-of-pearl. He shook the box and something within it rattled faintly. He tried the lid but it was locked down, and he seated himself at the table. The lock was as cheap as the box. Hanaud took from his pocket a bunch of tiny steel implements on a ring. He selected a forceps and in a trice the box was open.

"Oho!" he said, and he shook out on to the table some eight or ten letters—if letters they could be called. For even to the eyes of Mr. Ricardo, on the other side of the table, they had the appearance of notes, most of them in pencil and all scribbled off in a hurry. Hanaud read them quickly, and his face changed.

"Aha!" he said slowly, and looking up he nodded at Mr. Ricardo in confirmation of some suggestion which he had made.

"Yes, yes!" said Hanaud, which was pleasant for Mr. Ricardo as far as it went. But since Mr. Ricardo was not allowed to see even the signature to the letters, it did not go very far. Hanaud replaced the letters in the box and turned to Moreau.

"These must be photographed—now. It will be a matter of a few minutes for you."

"I'll fetch my camera and the little board to keep them flat," said Moreau, making for the door.

But he was recalled. "No. Our friend the—" and Hanaud pulled himself up short. "Our friend, Mr. Robin, might hop in and make

us leave the work unfinished. Better take them to our room, photograph them as quickly as you can and bring them back, if you're in time. If you're not, so much the worse for you. We keep the box and hope that its disappearance will not be discovered too soon."

He spoke confidently enough, but he was certainly on the "tenthook" during Moreau's absence. He walked backwards and forwards between the table and the window, peering up the avenue, searching again some corner which he had already searched and betraying every sign of impatience. Finally he sat down again at the table and folded his hands.

"Why does a man keep letters from a woman in a locked box?" he asked suddenly. "Can you tell me that?"

Julius Ricardo smiled. The answer was obvious. "Because he is in love," he replied. "You will remember that I saw him leaning forward over the back of a chair. And my observation was confirmed by his outburst this morning when we discovered that Joyce Whipple had vanished."

Hanaud looked curiously at Mr. Ricardo.

"Then those letters, notes, fragments of writing—call them what you will—were from Joyce Whipple?" he asked.

"I did not need to see the signatures you so carefully concealed to be aware of that, my friend," said Mr. Ricardo in gentle reproach.

Hanaud turned abruptly to Herbesthal.

"And you, Monsieur Le Commissaire? Why does a man keep letters from a lady in a locked box? Do you say the same? Is it because he is in love?"

"Probably," replied the Commissaire with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, it may be," said Hanaud doubtfully. "But again I say there is another explanation, and I like it the better of the two."

Moreau returned to the room as he spoke with the inlaid box in his hands. "It is done," he said.

Hanaud sprang up, relocked the box with his forceps, and stowed it away in its hiding-place. "Good!" he said, his face beaming with relief. "Let us go now! For the motor-car—I give it the permission to return!"

And the three men departed from the chalet and returned to the terrace.

Chapter 11

Footsteps

Hanaud was quite genuinely relieved to find himself once more upon the open terrace of the Château Suvlac. He laughed in a low, quiet rumble of a voice which to Mr. Ricardo sounded peculiarly alarming. He nodded at Ricardo with a gleaming eye.

"You have a poem. I know him. He is a very fine poem. Life is real, life is earnest, and the grave is certainly somebody's goal. Yes, I am of a pleasant humour. For we are nearer to the truth. Now we will see what it is that our excellent gendarme there is guarding for our inspection."

He descended the steps and crossed the lawn to the circular flower-bed. Mr. Ricardo could now see that the objects which had puzzled him were three dishes of brown earthenware, capsized one upon the grass rim of the circle and the other two upon the mould of the bed itself. The gendarme standing near to the dishes saluted.

"It was you who discovered these marks?" Hanaud asked genially.

"Yes, monsieur. Monsieur Le Commissaire ordered me to look round the garden. When I discovered the marks I ran at once to the kitchen for the dishes to cover them."

"Yes, that was a good idea," said Hanaud with a smile of approval.

"But I had some difficulty in collecting them, monsieur."

Hanaud nodded sympathetically. "Marianne," he said, and warmed by his approval the gendarme lost something of his rigidity. He puffed out his cheeks.

"She is a prodigious woman, monsieur, if she is a woman at all. She boxed my ears, monsieur. I had the dishes in my hands. She

dared me to drop them, and boxed my ears again. You understand, monsieur, that I was helpless. She said—but, pardon me, it would be an impertinence to repeat what she said."

"You shall certainly repeat what she said," Hanaud insisted. "There are no ladies present." The gendarme blushed under his kepi.

"Oh, it wasn't an impertinence of that kind. No, it was worse."

"Nevertheless, repeat it."

"She said: 'And if you don't like my boxes on the ear, you rascal, you can pass them on to your precious Monsieur Hanaud, of whom I think nothing at all.'"

The Commissaire Herbesthal was shocked, but Hanaud's face expanded in a grin.

"I have an inclination towards Marianne," said he. "Well, you got the dish-covers and set them here. Yes?"

"Then I found Monsieur Le Commissaire and he ordered me to keep watch so that nothing should be disturbed."

"Good! Has anyone come about this flowerbed as if he wanted to disturb it?"

"No, monsieur."

"That's not so good," said Hanaud. "Now you shall tell me your name, so that I may have it to bear in mind. Then you shall uncover one by one those marks on the ground."

For a second time the gendarme coloured with pleasure.

"For my name, monsieur, it is Corbie—Victor Corbie, at monsieur's service. For the marks, look!"

He knelt down and removed the dish from the rim of the grass about the flower-bed. Where it had lain the turf was broken, and just by the side of it in the mould but at the very edge was the imprint of a small foot, wearing a pointed shoe with a high heel.

"Yes," said Mr. Ricardo, agreeing with himself. "At that point a woman's foot has slipped."

Victor Corbie, kneeling upon the ground, was able to reach to the second dish on the slope of the flower-bed. He lifted it and disclosed yet another footprint. Mr. Ricardo examined it from the place where he stood.

"That imprint was made by the same woman," he declared.

"You will notice, however, that it was made by the left foot, whereas this one on the edge of the bed was made by the right foot," said Hanaud.

"I quite agree, my dear Hanaud," said Mr. Ricardo. "Yes, I agree."

The Commissaire Herbesthal, who from time to time during the last hour had been staring at Mr. Ricardo, and from Mr. Ricardo to Hanaud in a maze of wonder, was now completely at a loss as to which category or department of men he belonged to. Hanaud, on the other hand, was a picture of delight.

"I am so glad that you agree," he said.

He nodded to Victor Corbie, who hurried round the circle of the flower-bed and removed the third dish. This was nearer to the house, and, since the imprints pointed towards the river and away from the house, it was behind the other two. The mark which it disclosed was the imprint of a foot, too but of a man's foot shod in a big nailed boot. Yet the imprint was shallower. Mr. Ricardo, however, was not deterred by observations of any subtlety. He declared boldly:

"It is obvious that a woman fled and that a man pursued her."

Hanaud, however, was not at that moment paying the homage to Mr. Ricardo's statements which he so often paid. He did not, indeed, seem to hear this one at all. He said:

"I think the first thing to do is to discover which one of the young ladies at the Château Suvlac ran across the flower-bed last night, if it was last night and not the night before that she ran across the flower-bed. Victor Corbie, you shall help me."

He hurried back to the house, disappeared into the turret bedroom of Diana Tasborough, and less than a couple of minutes afterwards reappeared at the window of the drawing-room. Victor Corbie followed him. He ran back to the flower-bed, and Corbie dropped on the grass beside him three pairs of the gay kind of evening slippers which ladies use. There was a pair of brocaded satin shoes belonging to Evelyn Devenish which were a shade too large, another pair belonging to Diana Tasborough which were a shade too broad and short, and a pair of silver ones belonging to Joyce Whipple which fitted exactly.

"It is clear then," said Hanaud, rising from his knees. "Someone wearing the slippers of Joyce Whipple ran across this lawn, slipped in the dark on the edge of the flower-bed, planted her left foot full

in the mould and sprang across to the grass upon the other side. Yes—but"—and he turned the shoes over in his hand—"it was not in these delicate trifles that she ran. They have walked upon carpets, perhaps upon the terrace, but they did not plunge across the flower-bed last night."

There was not, as they could all see, a trace of discolouration upon the fine kid or the heels. Not a shred of the mould clung to them. The arches of the insteps were as they came new from the shoemaker, the flat of the soles hardly tinged.

"These are the shoes which were left kicked here and there by Joyce Whipple in her haste last night, when she flung them off and changed her clothes."

Hanaud turned to Corbie as he spoke and handed him back the three pairs of shoes.

"Run, my friend, and replace these quickly in the cupboard of Mademoiselle Diana from which we took them. Then do the same with the shoes of that unhappy Madame Devenish. Those of Joyce Whipple we will take along with us."

Hanaud watched Corbie run off upon his errand with more anxiety than his consideration for the feelings of the young chatelaine of Suvlac would seem to justify. Mr. Ricardo began to tremble for her, for he had seen Hanaud at work before, and remembered that he was never so delicate and kind as just before he pounced. Corbie, indeed, had not traversed more than half of the space between the flower-bed and the house, when at last the whirr of a motor-car grew loud and stopped. Hanaud grumbled out an oath under his breath.

"I didn't want that," he muttered, and then, raising his voice: "Run, Corbie, run!"

He waited thus in suspense until Corbie vanished into the turret-room. Nor did he take his eyes from the terrace until he saw the gendarme again running towards them from the direction of the avenue.

"Well?" he asked quickly as Corbie reached his side. "Those two have returned, then?"

"No," Corbie returned "It is that the news of this disaster has spread. It was the car of some neighbours who have come to leave their cards and condolences."

Hanaud's attitude relaxed. A great relief lightened his face.

“Good! Moreau, my friend, you shall get your plaster and make some casts of these pretty little footsteps at once. As for that big fellow, we shall see! Corbie, will you continue to run, but this time to the chais and find for me the gardener. If he is not there he will be working amongst the vines.”

Actually, the gardener, a hulking, big, clumsy fellow with a good-humoured face as red as a ripe apple, was superintending the removal of the grapes from the little carts on to the tray of the press. He came back with Corbie, and Hanaud, who was again upon his knees at the border of the flower-bed, without looking up at the gardener said the most unexpected thing.

“So after all it did rain.”

“Yes, monsieur,” the man answered. “Just what we wanted, a soft gentle fall which lasted steadily for two hours. The year will after all be a good year.”

“That’s admirable,” Hanaud commented in an absent voice. “And at what hour did the rain begin?”

“At midnight, monsieur, or a few minutes afterwards.”

Hanaud looked up alertly. “You are quite sure? It’s of an importance.”

The gardener laughed. “Oh, monsieur. I should not be likely to make a mistake. Consider! We each of us have our ; ; little patch of vines. Two hours of rain last night would make all the difference in our grapes. Instead of being shrivelled, they would be full. There was not a labourer in this district who slept well last night, I’ll warrant. From midnight until two in the morning. Yes, monsieur, a fine small-rain—God’s holy water for the vines.”

The fervent gratitude of the man and the common sense of his argument were convincing. “Very well, then! It rained from twelve to two. That is clear,” said Hanaud.

“Clear as the night was afterwards, monsieur, clear and dark,” the gardener went on, all in one voice. “And as for the mark of my great boot on the flower-bed which monsieur examines with so much care, it does not bring me within the penal code.”

Hanaud made a grimace at Mr. Ricardo of a very undignified kind. “So it is your footstep?”

“Yes, monsieur, very sure.”

"Show me!" The gardener planted his foot in the shallow imprint. It fitted exactly.

"You made it—when?" Hanaud asked.

"Yesterday, monsieur. I should have scraped it over this morning, but for these two or three days the garden must look after itself."

"Thank you! That's all."

"I may go back to the chais, monsieur?"

"I even invite you to," said Hanaud, and the gardener went with a clumsy sort of amble. Meanwhile Hanaud grinned maliciously at his friend Ricardo. "Ahahahaha! What of this fine story of a flight and a pursuit?"

Mr. Ricardo blushed. He was aware that the Commissaire was watching him with an embarrassing inquisitiveness. He lost his head altogether and launched a devastating accusation.

"It was the gardener, then, who pursued Joyce Whipple," he declared.

"Ah!" cried Hanaud with an exuberant delight as he rose from his knees. "Now we have it then. We gum ourselves to our cannons. Our mysteries are solved. Homage to Mr. Ricardo, the mastermind!" He swept off his broad-brimmed soft felt hat and bowed to the ground. "Yes, it was the gardener. Miss Whipple—she runs away after the rain has fallen—for see the deep marks which she makes with her little shoes!—the gardener—he starts after her the day before she runs away—for see the shallower marks his heavy iron-nailed boots make in the dry soil. You see? He must catch her up. He does not run so fast as she—the clumsy fellow, but if he starts to pursue her a day before she flies—even he in the end must come up with her. Quick! The thumb-screws for the gardener, and in a moment we know all."

Nothing could be in more deplorable taste than this exhibition of ribaldry. It was Hanaud at his worst. It was Hanaud pouncing upon the body of his friend, like a gleeful buffalo. It left Mr. Ricardo tongue-tied and spluttering. "I shall make no rejoinder," he gasped at length.

"It is better so," the Commissaire Herbesthal agreed.

Happily Hanaud's mood changed very quickly. He came round to the side of the bed where the other four men were standing. He

looked at the little footsteps and from the footsteps back to the glass door of the turret-room.

“Consider how I am puzzled,” he said. “At some time after two o’clock in the morning, Joyce Whipple runs in great haste across the lawn, blunders into the flower-bed and goes on. I fix the time, because the footprints are so exact and clear. It was certainly after the rain had been falling for some time and had made the mould soft and—is there a word?—cohesive. It was almost certainly after the rain had ceased, otherwise those clear imprints would be spotted and blurred. Well, then! At half-past two someone flicks past 1.05the library window, vanishes into Mademoiselle Tasborough’s room, locks the door, and waits in a panic with fingers ready upon the electric-light switch. I ask myself, was Joyce Whipple indeed pursued—and caught by someone”—and he dropped the next words slowly one by one—“who had the right of entry into Miss Tasborough’s room?”

There could be no doubt as to whom Hanaud was suggesting. But Mr. Ricardo could not reconcile the suggestion with the little clamour of grief which broke from Robin Webster when Joyce Whipple’s disappearance was discovered. But for the moment he had had enough of advancing theories and making explanations. Moreover, he saw Hanaud looking at him with a very troubled air.

“After all, were you right, my friend? Did something terrible happen in this garden just before you stole to the library for a book?”

“No cry was heard,” said the Commissaire.

“That is true,” Hanaud agreed, “and on a still night a cry would have been heard a long way off. Yes!” He stood with a look of discomfort upon his face for a few moments and then shrugged his big shoulders. “Let us follow the line of these footsteps. They cannot lead us into a worse tangle than we’re in already.”

He left Moreau to pour a liquid plaster into the imprints, and, with Corbie carrying Joyce Whipple’s shoes, went on. Mr. Ricardo noticed that the line he took began at the turret door and led diagonally across the garden to the flower-bed. Beyond the flower-bed it ran towards the river, passing just under the branches of the last trees of the avenue. Hanaud walked along slowly with his eyes upon the ground and his tongue grumbling.

“Women used to be helpful when I was a young man. They wore pins—pins in their hair and pins in their clothes—and they dropped them everywhere the moment they began to run about.

Ah!" and he stopped to point to the little hole made by a high heel, and went on again: "They wore skirts too, which caught in things and left a bit behind. Now they've got their clothes made like gloves and—oh!"—he had discovered another stab in the grass from a narrow heel. "We're on the right line, anyway"; and under the boughs of the trees at the end of the avenue he came to a definite halt.

His companions stopped beside him, and without a word he pointed to the ground. Underneath the boughs, the turf was softer than in the open. The sun could not bake it, and the trees dripped upon it long after the rain had ceased. And in this stretch of damp and yielding grass the two small footprints were completely visible again, but side by side and close together, as if something just at this point had brought the fugitive to a stop and held her there stunned.

"Yes, she was startled here and stopped dead, suddenly," said Hanaud. "Corbie, young man, make it sure for us."

Corbie knelt down and stood up the glittering slippers in the tracks, and again they fitted exactly; and not one of those who watched but had a clear swift vision which appalled them. The vision of a girl fleeing in terror and arrested in full flight and standing in the dark under the boughs, her feet pressed together, her body tense with fear, her heart fluttering and fainting in her breast and a cry just checked upon her lips.

Hanaud took his stand just behind the footprints and looked forward. He was looking straight towards the little dock which had been constructed at the river-side. Mr. Ricardo uttered a cry. "Of course! Of course! The *gabare*!"

Hanaud turned upon him in a flash.

"The *gabare* which serves the château from Bordeaux, ›*La Belle Simone*.‹ It was here in its harbour yesterday with stores. It was to start on its return voyage with the change of the tide in the early morning at six. Yes, I talked with the captain yesterday afternoon—at six. Joyce Whipple was running for sanctuary to the *gabare*."

"Then why did she stop here beneath the trees, at half-past two?" Hanaud asked of him, but now eagerly, without a trace of irony or ridicule in his voice.

Mr. Ricardo was not at a loss for an explanation. "She saw the pole of the mast against the sky, perhaps a lantern too, swinging in the

rigging. From here to the harbour a few strides. She knew that she was safe."

Mr. Ricardo's voice revealed the immensity of his relief. He had a very strong wish that no harm should come to the warm-hearted and extremely decorative young lady who had poured out to him her apprehensions for her friend on a summer night in London. She was safe—that was the conviction which cheered him—safe on the *gabare*, and by this time very near to its mooring against the quay at Bordeaux. But Hanaud did not share his convictions. He stood in a moody silence with his lips pursed and his forehead all wrinkled in a frown.

"That man won't believe anything unless he has discovered it himself," Mr. Ricardo reflected, irritated, and at the same time disappointed. For if Hanaud disbelieved, he might have a reason for disbelief.

"Let us see!" said Hanaud. "I invite you all to stand exactly where you are."

He went on alone, more slowly than ever and searching the ground with even a greater deliberation. At every step he took Ricardo expected an invitation to go forward. None came. Hanaud continued his examination to the dockside, and there he stayed a long time, running backwards and forwards. Then throwing up his hands in a gesture of discouragement, he hurried back.

"She stopped here!" he said, pointing to the shoes, planted side by side. "Beyond not a mark. By the side of the harbour there is muddy gravel where at high tide the water has splashed over. There if anywhere there would be footprints to match those. But there's not a trace of them. Heavy shoes bound with iron—yes, but those slips of things—no! Mademoiselle Joyce Whipple went no nearer to the dock than this spot on which we stand. Wait."

He cast about first towards the marshy ground and the river, and then under the trees. A broad gravel path ran down the middle of the avenue and, narrowing to less than half its width at the end, curved off to the right towards the dock. Just where the turf met the gravel path he came across the footprints again. He summoned his companions to him with a gesture. The right foot was pointing towards the path and was on the edge of the turf. The left foot was drawn back behind it and pointed towards the tiny harbour, the two imprints making an obtuse angle.

"We can read the story a little more clearly now," he said. "That young girl—she runs from the house in a panic across the lawn.

Her frightened eyes are glancing back continually over her shoulder, and she blunders into the flower-bed, she crosses it, she continues to run until something startles her, paralyses her. She recovers and turns aside to the cover of the trees, running now, oh, so lightly—on the tips of her toes, her feet skimming the grass. Once under the shelter of the branches, she halts, for the moment secure, and stands firm, but looking back—yes—looking towards the dock." He put his hypothesis to the best proof he could think of. Taking care not to disturb the marks upon the grass, he acted the movements which he had been describing. And when he halted, his feet fell naturally into precisely the same angle as that made by the footprints of Joyce Whipple.

"Yes," he repeated with a greater assurance, "she looked again and for some time in the direction of the harbour—to make sure of—what?"

All sorts of grim pictures rose before Mr. Ricardo's eyes. Perhaps she had seen dimly the basket put aboard the *gabare*, and had somehow guessed the horror which it hid. Perhaps she had seen Evelyn Devenish murdered and her hand chopped off brutally with an axe. He had a vision of the patron and his two sons obeying the relentless commands of—But before Ricardo could fix upon the identity of the commander, a little cry of triumph broke from Hanaud's lips. He stood gazing out over the river, he, too, stunned, but by an inspiration not a panic.

"Very sure!" he exclaimed, his voice gusty with excitement, "very sure!" He ran back to the spot where the shoes gleamed side by side upon the grass, and stood behind them. "You shall tell me I grow old," he shouted to Ricardo. "Yes, yes! That poor Hanaud! His brains are all wool and cherry-jam! It must be so! Ohoho!"

It was almost as much to stop the indecency of Hanaud's ostentation as to gratify his curiosity that Mr. Ricardo felt it necessary to interrupt.

"Shall we take it for granted that all the bouquets are now thrown and get on with our business?" he suggested a trifle acidly, and Hanaud bowed to the ground.

"We shall do just what milor' wishes. We shall hope to satisfy milor. We are milor's servants. Milor', the carriage waits," and he scraped and grimaced like a boy in the gutter. Certainly, Mr. Ricardo reflected, Hanaud was insufferable in his moments of elation. Happily they did not on this occasion last long. He slipped out of his motley.

"It was not what Joyce Whipple saw that held her here and set the chains about her feet. No, my friend. It was what she didn't see. She runs straight as a stretched cord from the house to the *gabare*. Her chance of sanctuary—yes, no doubt. And suddenly here, at the end of the avenue, the dock's in view. There is no *gabare*. It has put out."

"Before its time?"

"Yes."

"And against the tide?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Can't we all make a guess?" Hanaud answered gravely, and had no need to be more explicit. The two boys playing by the river in the early morning, the basket with its tragic load gently rocking upon the ripples of the water and slowly washing nearer and nearer to the bank nine miles nearer to the sea—those particulars returned to the memory of Hanaud's audience and offered a reason for the precipitate departure of the *gabare* to which no one could be blind.

"Mr. Ricardo," Hanaud continued gravely, "it is said in all your treatises and books that there is one great difference between the police of England and the police of France. Where you cautiously proceed from fact to fact, we overleap the facts and trust to intuitions. Well, certainly I trust one now. Here she stood, that young lady, whilst her heart fluttered down in despair. Then she turns. She must seek some other refuge. She runs for the avenue where the trees will hide her; and as she reaches it, she stops and casts one look back towards the port. Perhaps, after all, her eyes misled her. Perhaps, after all, the pole of the mast is outlined against the sky. But, no! And she is off!"

He made a sweep with his arm towards the gravel path. Mr. Ricardo himself was carried away by the conviction and the fire of his friend. He did not doubt that his was the real true explanation. Joyce Whipple had flown in terror up that avenue. He began to piece together the facts which he knew with this conjecture of which he was confident; and suddenly such a load of remorse bowed him down that all his companions were concerned for him. He turned pale, he stood trembling, a man aghast.

"What is it?" asked Hanaud, running to his side and supporting him by the arm. "You are ill? No, no!"

"No, I am not ill. I am ashamed," Mr. Ricardo stammered. "You see, it might have been Joyce Whipple who whipped past me on the terrace—after she had fled from here up the avenue. Suppose that it was! Suppose that it was she who slipped into the turret-room! Suppose that for some reason we don't know the room was empty when she did! Suppose that it was Joyce who locked the door and waited in terror with her fingers on the switch! Suppose that after she had turned the light out, she crept upstairs to her room! You remember the tumbled bed and the question you asked: 'Was she taken away from that room against her will?' Well, then—I could have saved her. Yes, I could. I had but to come straight out of the library on to the terrace when she flashed past, and show her who I was."

"She would not have waited to see," argued Hanaud.

"I might have spoken through the glass door after the light went out. But I didn't! I let her think that I was one of the hunters.—I was nervous and—" He broke off suddenly and stood erect. "Nervous! No! I was afraid. I could have saved Joyce last night, but I was afraid."

Mr. Ricardo's outburst made everyone uncomfortable. Hanaud patted him gently on the shoulder.

"But Joyce—she is not lost yet," he said.

Mr. Ricardo would not be consoled. In a minute or two he would have made a luxury out of his cowardice, but happily Corbie, the gendarme, at this moment discovered yet another perplexity to add to this tangled affair.

"Monsieur Hanaud," he cried, his eyes starting out of his head and his voice one hoarse note of excitement. "Look! Look!"

He was standing in the open space at the end of the avenue, a few yards from the others of that party, and with an outstretched shaking arm, he pointed to the lower branches of a tree.

Chapter 12

The Mask

The cry had a sound so imperative that the the delicate question of Mr. Ricardo's conduct was clean forgotten. There was a rush to Victor Corbie, but not until they stood behind his shoulders could they see what he was seeing. The sight gave a queer little shock to everyone and begat an uneasiness as things which are odd and bizarre are apt to do. Perhaps, too, they were all now rather ready to be startled and to see miracles at each turn of their road. They were confounded to observe amongst the leaves of the branch at which Corbie pointed, bending down towards them as though it watched them, a face and head. By some chance a spray had blown across the eyes and hid them, but the rest of the face was revealed. It was quite livid in colour with full lips, not so much red in colour as a dark purple. The hair, on the other hand, was a bright red. The contour of the face was quite beautiful, but the whole effect was evil—abominably evil.

They were still contemplating this extraordinary spectacle when some breath of wind blew aside the spray which hid the eyes; and it was at once visible that though there were long black eyelashes, as silken as the lashes of a lovely girl, there were no eyes. The face was a mask, but of an artistry which was exquisite and astounding.

"We must have that down," said Hanaud.

It was not so high above their heads but that his crook-handled stick could fetch it down. It fell on to the grass and he picked it up. It was just a papier-maché mask—nothing more. But he handed it to Victor Corbie and said: "Put it on!"

Victor Corbie dropped his kepi on the ground, and with a grin of delight overspreading his bucolic face, slipped the mask over his face

and head; and at once from a good-humoured, grinning yokel, he became a thing of horror, a thing to fly from in a panic. Mr. Ricardo could not believe that so complete a transformation was possible. The mask, fixed though the features were, lived—yes, lived. The bright red hair gave to it a final touch of uncanny force. Whichever way Corbie turned, the mask never leered. On the contrary, it was beautiful and very sad—the long black fine lashes gave to even Corbie's staring eyes the sadness of all the ages. It would have been a fit mask for the Wandering Jew, but for one attribute it had. It was wicked—beautiful and sad and abominably wicked—a mask, in a word, for Satan. Such was its effect that, even when Corbie had removed it from his head, one at all events of the men watching him wondered for a time whether he was not some demon masquerading as a peasant who had vouchsafed him a glimpse of his real aspect.

"We shall take great care of this mask, Monsieur Le Commissaire," Hanaud said, wrapping it up in a great coloured handkerchief which he pulled from his pocket. "There are only two men in the world, I think, who can make such masks as this. One of them is in America. The other is to be found in a studio in the back of the Haymarket in London. We shall soon know which of them made this, and for whom. Meanwhile, I beg that no one will speak of it." He looked from face to face to impress his command upon them all, and continued with a quiet solemnity which Mr. Ricardo had only once or twice heard him use before: "For this crime of the Château Suvlac has, I think, a good deal in common with this mask. I mean, that when all at last is discovered, we shall find it to have been an inhuman and malignant business. It was pitiless, I believe. So we, in our turn, shall be pitiless too."

Mr. Ricardo shivered.

Chapter 13

Different Points of View

Hanaud gave an order to the gendarme. "You will take those shoes and wrap them up and hand them over to the secretary of Monsieur Le Commissaire. Then you will tell my assistant when he has finished with the flower-bed to take a cast of these footprints too and cover them up."

Corbie picked up the slippers and hurried off upon his duty up the avenue. The rest of the search-party followed at a slower pace.

They had come to within twenty yards of the house when a smallish, round man in a cassock with a purple sash about his waist stepped out from the window of the drawing-room and looked carefully about him. There was something curiously secret in his manner. Hanaud, though he seemed sunk fathoms deep in his own thoughts, saw him on the instant. He stopped, and with a gesture stopped the others.

"Who is that?" he asked in a low voice.

"The Abbé Fauriel," the Commissaire Herbesthal replied.

"Oh, yes!" said Hanaud.

But he did not resume his walk.

"Let no one move," he whispered; and, screened by the trees, they watched the Abbé's movements.

He walked on the tips of his toes to the edge of the terrace, and turning about scanned the upper windows of the two turrets. Assured that no one was watching him from those points of vantage, he moved along the stone flags in the direction of the avenue, but

slowly, with his eyes bent on the ground like a man pondering an abstraction. When, however, his pacing had brought him opposite to the glass door of the dining-room, he became all at once alert again. He peered into the room, raising himself up on the balls of his feet so that he might see the better, and then, crossing the terrace with a little noiseless, tripping run, he pressed his face against the glass.

"This is all very peculiar," Mr. Ricardo whispered with displeasure. Furtiveness in an Abbé was by no means an agreeable sight to him.

"Hush!" said Hanaud; and then to himself: "I wonder how long he has been waiting in the drawing-room to offer his condolences?"

The Commissaire answered him.

"Monsieur l'Abbé has not been waiting at all. No, indeed! He would have something to say, I think, if he was kept waiting. Oh! He is an authoritative one, the Abbé. He has already seen the ladies of Suvlac."

"Oho!" said Hanaud, his voice lifting a little on a note of interest. "Has he now? Let me hear of this, Monsieur Le Commissaire."

"He arrived before you and your friend returned from Villeblanche. He asked my permission very correctly to offer his ministrations to the ladies. It is true that the ladies are Protestants, but in such calamities, the creeds are one."

"You gave him the permission?" Hanaud observed softly.

"Without hesitation," replied Herbesthal very firmly.

Hanaud inclined his head. Even famous inspectors from the *Sûreté Generale* of Paris do not tread on the toes of Commissaires of police if they want their affairs to run smoothly.

"So all this while Monsieur l'Abbé has had us under his observation," he remarked, as though nothing could have been more fortunate.

"Far from it," Herbesthal replied. "The Abbé saw Mademoiselle Tasborough first of all, and was not very long with her. He went immediately afterwards to the room of Madame Tasborough, which is in the wing behind and does not look out in this direction at all."

There is a flaw here, Mr. Ricardo reflected. It was obviously important to know when the Abbé left the room in the wing and made his furtive way to the drawing-room. But he did not intervene. "It

is clear," he argued to himself, "that the Commissaire has a Fauriel complex." He left the matter to Hanaud, but Hanaud was once more watching the terrace with eyes for nothing else.

The Abbé, satisfied that there was no one in the drawing-room to overlook him, turned towards Diana Tasborough's room and resumed his meditative walk in that direction. Hanaud whistled under his breath.

"Did he see Diana Tasborough in her own room in the turret there?" he asked of the Commissaire, but without taking his eyes for one moment from the terrace.

"Certainly."

"And now he returns to it when it is empty. Yes, as my friend Mr. Ricardo says, it is all very peculiar."

Nearer and nearer the Abbé paced towards the turret, and suddenly he whipped through the doorway. It seemed that Hanaud had been expecting just that movement. He was away from his shelter in a flash. In spite of his bulk, he sprinted. He reached the terrace almost before his companions had started. He ran across it noiseless as a man in rubber shoes, keeping close to the windows of the house. In the angle made by the round projection of the turret, he stopped. He certainly had not been heard, and where he stood he could not be seen. On the other hand, he could not see anything that the Abbé was doing in Diana Tasborough's room. This, however, he did not appear to mind. He waited very patiently in his angle. His friends, indeed, were already within earshot before the Abbé reappeared, still with the absent air of a philosopher so lost in meditation that he did not know whither his feet had been guiding him. But he was to be startled out of it. Hanaud slipped up behind him and bending said in his ear: "Monsieur l'Abbé!"

The Abbé swung round quite disconcerted. Hanaud, holding the mask hidden in the handkerchief in his left hand, removed his hat with his right, and bowed respectfully.

"You noticed, no doubt, that the little rearrangement had already been made?"

The sentence, Greek to Mr. Ricardo and the Commissaire, had the clearest meaning for the Abbé Fauriel. Consternation shone in his eyes, the blood withdrew from his cheeks, leaving them mottled, and his nose and the skin beneath his eyes like tallow. His face in a second seemed to have sunk and grown thin. He was an old and shrivelled man. But he had the spirit of a young one. He raised

his head high, and now in place of the consternation there was the glint of battle in his eyes. He stood square; and then, turning slightly towards the Commissary Herbesthal, he said in a biting voice; "This, no doubt, is the illustrious Monsieur Hanaud, who very wisely speaks in riddles. For riddles are the short cut to prestige and reputation, and, besides, very intimidating to slow-witted provincials like ourselves."

It was a declaration of war—no less than that. Mr. Ricardo, observing the little priest and the big detective, thought, in his obvious way, of David and Goliath. Hanaud had undoubtedly staged a little trap, but the Abbé was indisposed to tumble into it. Now that he had recovered himself, and stood quivering a little from head to foot, not with terror but with a concentration of his faculties, he looked a little man to be wary of. Mr. Ricardo wondered whether he concealed a sling about his person, fitted with a nice, big, fat stone.

"If I wrapped up my meaning, Monsieur l'Abbé, so that you only should understand it, as you evidently did," said Hanaud, "you should be thankful for my consideration, rather than blame it. But since you won't have my riddles, I ask you now in the plainest terms why you went into mademoiselle's room just now with so many precautions against being seen?"

"I shall reply to you that I have my duties, as you have yours, Monsieur Hanaud. Mine, it is true, may be said to begin after yours have ended. But they are both sad and exacting and—secret. Should you, however, wish for a poor priest's blessing upon yours, whatever they may be," he added with a hint of humour, "I shall not be disposed to deny it you." He moved away with a little bow, but Hanaud pivoted upon his heels like a soldier, and fell in at his side with the neatness of a cog fitting into the ratchet of a wheel.

"No doubt," he said imperturbably. "I catch the criminal first, and you save his soul afterwards. It is a roughly correct division of our duties. But we each have the same third duty, Monsieur 1'Abbé."

"Thousands of duties, Monsieur Hanaud. I have preached for thirty years, but I have not got to the end of them yet."

"One, however, which is paramount."

The little priest saw the stroke coming.

"I am aware of it, Monsieur Hanaud."

"The duty of a good citizen."

"You have said it."

"And under the pressure of that third duty, one or two separate duties at times may overlap."

The two men were pacing side by side away from the Commissaire and Mr. Ricardo. They were still, to Mr. Ricardo's satisfaction, within earshot. But the Abbé, though he showed no sign of haste, was steadily edging in towards the door of the drawing-room.

"When and if that time comes, I trust that I shall not fail in mine," the priest replied.

"That time has come, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"I think not, Monsieur Hanaud, and I am the judge."

"I shall invite your closer consideration upon that point, Monsieur l'Abbé."

The dialogue was all very stiff and formal and polite, although now an angry quiver of the voice, now a bitter word caught quickly back, betrayed the fierce hostility between them. Now, however, disdain caused the Abbé Fauriel to trip.

"Any argument of yours, Monsieur Hanaud, must of course command every atom of consideration which I have to give," he said with a curling lip; and Hanaud was under his guard in a flash.

"My argument is an instance, monsieur. For example, there is the little matter of your vestments which were stolen last night."

The Abbé was shaken. He showed it only by stopping in his walk and by a second's silence. Then he resumed in an accent of self-reproach:

"Monsieur Hanaud, I spoke too lightly in this house last night. I am ashamed, and I have appointed to myself certain penances in consequence. My vestments were hanging in my sacristy this morning and were worn by me as early as six o'clock, when to a deplorable congregation of two old women, I sought the blessing of St. Matthew upon our vineyards."

Clearly Hanaud was astonished. "They were brought back by six o'clock this morning?" he cried.

The Abbé smiled.

"We who are not of your profession, Monsieur Hanaud, may be permitted to cultivate a spirit kind enough to believe that they had never been taken away."

"That won't do," said Hanaud bluntly. The two men were standing face to face, the priest sheltering what knowledge he had behind a stolid face, Hanaud towering over him, like an inquisitor. The fine courtesies of "Monsieur *l'Abbe*" and "Monsieur Hanaud" were discarded like the last year's frills on a lady's gown. "You did not find all your vestments in your sacristy this morning. For one of them is in the mortuary at Villeblanche stained with the blood of a young woman who dined at the same table with you in this house last night, and was savagely murdered afterwards."

Mr. Ricardo could hardly repress a cry, as he comprehended the careful scrutiny which Hanaud had made of the torn piece of fine linen in which the body of Evelyn Devenish had been wrapped. But the Abbé actually uttered one. His jaw dropped; he stood and stared at the detective, his face an effigy of horror.

"You are sure of that abomination?" he stammered, and he did not wait for an answer to his question. His defences were down. He had no big fat stone and no sling to launch it with. He tottered to the bench and, dropping down upon it heavily, fumbled for his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. But Hanaud would not leave him in peace. He stepped up in front of him. He suddenly uncovered the mask with its curious obscene beauty, and held it under the Abbé's eyes.

"Can you imagine a use for it?" he asked.

"At a time of carnival," said the Abbé with the wraith of a smile. He had not looked at the mask very closely. But Hanaud held it so that his eyes could not avoid it, and he looked at it and looked again, and shrank from it as from a touch that was contagious. He rose up on to his feet.

"There was a young woman alive in this house last night, who is now foully murdered," said Hanaud, standing in front of him.

"I shall pray for her soul," returned the Abbé.

"But there is also a young girl with all her life in front of her, a joy to herself and an inspiration to others, who has disappeared. What of her, Monsieur *l'Abbé*?"

"I shall pray that no harm may come to her."

"But you will give me no other help!" Hanaud's voice rang out over the terrace and the garden. His words were a reproach and more than a reproach—an accusation. But they fell upon ears which were quite deaf. The Abbé's eyes were now set upon a very distant horizon. A life or two? Some few hours of suffering? The

Abbd Fauriel was not looking at the garden, nor at the Gironde, nor at the rising shore beyond the Gironde. He watched a procession of the ages, in which a life or two, or a few hours of suffering, mattered not at all.

“Monsieur,” he said with a remarkable quiet dignity, “a terrible crime has been committed. Of that crime there may be some quite hideous explanation. You know more about it than I do. I beg you to excuse me.”

To Hanaud’s thinking he was a broken man. He had suffered a shock that afternoon from which he was not likely to recover. Even Hanaud stepped back as he moved away, and let him pass out of sight through the open window of the drawing-room without another effort to detain him. But as soon as the Abbé Fauriel had gone, Hanaud’s manner quite changed. He grimaced in the most childish fashion at the window.

“Ah, the old fox,” he cried in a low voice. “He knows a great deal more than he will tell. But he has told me, none the less, much more than he meant to tell me, by his reluctance to tell me anything at all.”

He turned upon Mr. Ricardo. “You dined here last night, and the Abbé Fauriel dined too?”

“Yes.”

Hanaud took Ricardo by the arm and drew him down beside him on the bench. “You shall tell me at once anything which he said last night—anything which he did.”

Anything which he did! Yes, there was something which he had done. Mr. Ricardo recalled the scene—There had been something said—yes—and the Abbé had ceased from talking—had made a little movement with his hand—yes!

“There was a moment when under the cover of the table-cloth he made the sign of the Cross,” said Mr. Ricardo.

“Oho! Tell me about that moment!” Hanaud urged, pressing his friend’s arm.

“Let me see!” said Mr. Ricardo. “It can hardly have been important or I should have remembered it. Oh, yes! I was puzzled at the time. I certainly was puzzled.”

“It is very interesting that you were puzzled,” Hanaud remarked patiently.

"Yes, that's it. I was puzzled." Mr. Ricardo was triumphant. His memory had not failed him. No; he remembered very accurately that he had been puzzled.

"Then, my friend, something puzzled you," said Hanaud.

"That's true," Mr. Ricardo replied, with a little disappointment. "To be sure, I wasn't likely to have been puzzled unless something had puzzled me. Now, what was it?"

"Yes! What was it? Make a scene of that dinner-table in your mind. Mrs. Tasborough here, the Abbé there—"

And suddenly Mr. Ricardo chirruped: "I've got it. One of them—sitting not so far from me—wait!—on the same side of the table—yes!" He held his hand in the air with a look of intense concentration upon his face. "Evelyn Devenish!" he cried. "She shivered suddenly and rather violently."

"Yes."

"And someone—oh, of course, it was that which puzzled me," and Mr. Ricardo leaned back against the rail of the bench and relapsed into contentment.

"But you haven't told me what puzzled you," said Hanaud in the gentlest voice.

None the less, Mr. Ricardo uttered a cry of pain. "You are hurting my arm."

Hanaud's fingers were gripped about it like a vice. He relaxed his hold immediately. "I am sorry, my friend."

"You have reason to be," said Mr. Ricardo rather indignantly, as he massaged the bruised limb. "I shall be terribly bruised tomorrow. The last time my arm hurt me as it does now was after an archery meeting in the country. I was not an adept with the bow—it was at a house in Berkshire—yes! Let me see! Whose—house was it?"

It was some while ago. Mr. Ricardo had already begun to run over the names of his acquaintances in Berkshire for the locality of that archery meeting, when Hanaud observed:

"And so Evelyn Devenish shivered unexpectedly and violently."

Mr. Ricardo stared for a second or so at his companion and came away from Berkshire by express.

"I ought not to have turned aside from what I was telling you," he said, looking at Hanaud with some severity. "Yes, Evelyn Devenish shivered, and Joyce Whipple exclaimed, she, too, rather violently: 'It's no use looking at me, Evelyn. It's not I who dispense the cold.' It seemed to me that there was an understream of hysteria in both Evelyn and Joyce Whipple. Undoubtedly both of them were nervous—Joyce particularly. Her voice, which was naturally low and sweet, had roughened and was harsh. I couldn't detect the least smallest reason for the excitement which was vibrating in those two young women. But it was evident suddenly, and as suddenly it passed—a zigzag of lightning. But the Abbé understood. He crossed himself secretly, and during the rest of dinner he spoke no more. Not a word! He just sat and watched with bright eyes ranging about the table—like—like—a bird's!"

Hanaud patted his friend upon the knee; and sat with a frown upon his face. "'It is not I who dispense the cold,'" he repeated, and he looked up at Herbesthal. "Those are very strange words, Monsieur Le Commissaire. Yet the old fox understood them. Well, we must understand them too. For I think they are the key to the whole affair."

He stood up, as though all his business with the terrace and the garden was at an end. But before he could move away, he heard a motor-car approach and stop on the other side of the house.

"The wanderers have returned," he said. He took out his watch and looked at the dial.

"Six o'clock!"

Time had passed swiftly for that party upon the terrace. Mr. Ricardo found it difficult to believe that the better part of three hours had slipped away since Diana Tasborough and Robin Webster had started out to send a telegram from Pauillac.

"They were very wise to take the air," said Hanaud. He fetched a packet of black cigarettes in a wrapper of bright blue paper out of a pocket. He offered one to the Commissary Herbesthal, who took it, and another to Mr. Ricardo, who did not. He struck a sulphur match, watched it fizzle into a flame, and with some ceremony lighted the commissary's cigarette. Then he lit his own and, resuming his seat, began placidly to relate an ancient experience of the days when he was a novice in the police.

Chapter 14

Hanaud is Startled

He broke off as "the wanderers" came out upon the terrace, and had a smile of congratulation for Diana Tasborough, to whose face some tinge of her fresh colour had returned.

"That is better, mademoiselle," he said. "You sent off your telegrams?"

"Yes," and she added: "Mr. Webster persuaded me to prolong the drive."

Robin Webster proceeded to justify his advice with that prim and exact articulation which never failed to strike Mr. Ricardo as a little incongruous in a young man of so much elegance.

"I argued that it would be of benefit to Miss Tasborough, that we should only hamper your investigations here by an immediate return, and that we might perhaps be a little useful to you ourselves if we made some inquiries of our neighbours."

Hanaud, who had been listening attentively, cried out with an explosive emphasis which the occasion did not seem to warrant:

"I am sure of it!" and noticing some surprise upon Robin Webster's face, modified his tone. "You could have done nothing wiser. Did you get any satisfaction from your inquiries?"

Robin Webster shook his head. "No one had seen Joyce Whipple."

The mere pronunciation of her name made his voice shake and his cheek turn pale, and distress so clouded his eyes that Mr. Ricardo wished for words wherewith to comfort him. He was in love, this young man, and for young men in love Mr. Ricardo had always a

tender corner of his heart. No doubt the candle burning late in his empty room had a suspicious look. That was not to be forgotten. But it might after all have been no more than a ruse to conceal a tryst with Joyce Whipple which she had not kept. Robin Webster might even have been searching for her desperately whilst the candle was burning down to its last fragment of wick. No doubt, too, Hanaud imagined that he had made yet another remarkable discovery in the chalet. Mr. Ricardo was not quite certain but that his sharp involuntary "I am sure" of a minute ago was a confirmation of that discovery. But Hanaud could blunder like everyone else. He could shout "Swan" when he saw a goose, as loudly as the rest of the world, and for tuppence Mr. Ricardo would tell him so. It seemed, however, that Hanaud had been impressed, too, by the sincerity of the young man's emotion. For his voice when he spoke was pitiful.

"You must not lose heart. Monsieur Herbesthal's men are searching the neighbourhood thoroughly, on the chance that this poor girl may, as it so often happens, have lost her memory. If on the other hand there has been foul play, I can tell you that not a motor-car, not a carriage, not even a cart will escape from the ring which has been drawn about this environment without such a search as will leave nothing undisclosed. Every road, every cart-track, every path is watched." Monsieur Herbesthal nodded his head. "Ever since this morning that has been so."

"Yes," Diana agreed hopefully. "We ourselves were stopped all through this afternoon."

Her hope was not shared by Robin Webster. "That is all very well," he said, staring miserably at Hanaud. "But what I am afraid of is that now not the whole French army encamped upon the roads could ever restore her to us. I fear—" but he choked upon the word and could not utter it.

"You fear murder," said Hanaud.

A spasm of pain convulsed Robin Webster's face. "Yes," he answered in a whisper.

Suddenly Hanaud rose up from the bench and astonished all who were about him on that terrace. Such a change came over him as quite transfigured his appearance. He towered erect and tremendous, and he spoke with the authority of a prophet ringing in his voice.

"I am sure of this. If Joyce Whipple is alive now, she will not die by violence."

Robin Webster drew in a breath as though he drank courage from the words. "You believe that," he cried. "You—oh, you have found her!" He seized upon that notion, was convinced by it and stared at Hanaud with parted lips and shining eyes.

"No! I have found some footsteps—nothing more. She ran across the lawn last night. Of where she is, monsieur, I know no more than you."

"Yet you declare that she is safe."

"Safe? No. I do declare that now murder dare not be done, if murder was ever planned. Once more, oh, for the hundred thousandth time in the long history of violence, it has been proved that the dead victim can hardly be destroyed. There is a fate in it. There is justice in it. Those who killed Evelyn Devenish dare not kill again."

"You are clear then that the murder of Evelyn Devenish and the disappearance of Joyce Whipple are part of the same crime?"

"Look about you," Hanaud returned. "This scattered neighbourhood. The few inhabitants. Is it possible that on the same night, in the same house, these two abominations were committed independently? No. Let us be reasonable. The only alternative is that Joyce Whipple was an accomplice"; and on the bench beside him Diana Tasborough started.

Hanaud swung round towards her on the instant. She was sitting with the strangest look of fear upon her face. "You believe that possible, mademoiselle?" Hanaud asked.

Diana shook her head violently. "Of course not. Joyce is my friend. I had never thought of it. Only your words reminded me that there seemed always to be—" Diana was at a loss how to put what she meant to say into words which would do no hurt.

"Yes?" Hanaud insisted gently, bending down to the girl.

"Well, there seemed always to be some curious ill-will between Joyce and Evelyn," she said reluctantly.

Hanaud drew himself up in surprise. "Is that so?" he said slowly and in a musing voice. But Diana hurriedly interposed. She would not have him dwell upon that revelation or give any weight to it in his thoughts.

"It wasn't of any importance," she urged eagerly. "They didn't hit it off quite. That's all there was to it—I am sure. They were just

naturally a little hostile to one another. Oh, I was a fool to mention it to you at all. I shouldn't have, unless you had suggested it."

Hanaud was at once anxious to lift from her any sense of self-reproach.

"Mademoiselle, it is much better, believe me, that you should have told me this frankly and simply as you have done, than that I should have discovered it later on for myself. It is a little detail to which I might have given greater weight, if I had thought that you had concealed it from me."

Mr. Ricardo was mystified. Hanaud's reasoning was no doubt very sound; but there was no need for it. Diana Tasborough had revealed nothing when she admitted the hostility between Evelyn Devenish and Joyce Whipple. He himself only this morning had told the story of the Cave of the Mummies, and had added to it this afternoon his account of Joyce's odd little outburst at the dinner-table. Hanaud already knew all that it was necessary to know upon that point. He was wantonly wasting valuable time in eliciting it a second time from Diana.

"He is losing himself in the by—ways of this case," Mr. Ricardo reasoned. "I must bring him back to the main road."

He had begun to make a little twittering noise as a preface to his expostulation when an unkindly cold glare in Hanaud's eyes changed his mind for him.

"Mr. Ricardo, I think, is about to observe very justly that we are making too much of a very small detail."

All eyes at once were turned upon Ricardo, who suddenly felt nervous and hopped from one foot on to the other. "That is so," he said. "I was on the point of making that observation."

All eyes, to his relief, were once more turned away from him, but he had even in his relief a biting thought that he was being neglected as a futility. Robin Webster brought the discussion back to the graver problem with which it had begun.

"You are very confident, Monsieur Hanaud, that if no second murder has been committed, it will not be. For my part, I wish that I could believe that. But those who killed Evelyn Devenish will be desperate people. They must go on. They are committed—whatever the risk they must go on, as I see their position. They will take their precautions."

"Did they take no precautions with Evelyn Devenish?" Hanaud interrupted. "They know that precautions fail."

Even so, Robin Webster was not satisfied. He stood with a white face twitching and eyes that sought and fled from the detective's. He had some fear in his mind which he could hardly bring himself to utter. In the end he launched a dreadful word in a low and toneless voice. "Burial," he said.

It was a question. Wasn't that the precaution which this time would not fail? And Mr. Ricardo in a flight of imagination kindled by that word of terror, ranged over the vineyards and the forests and found the mound of a small new grave hidden under leaves, and slowly sinking to the level of the ground about it with the passage of the seasons. Hanaud's answer to the question rolled out like thunder.

"It has been tried in England and it has failed. It has been tried in France and it has failed. Monsieur, if like"—he hesitated and corrected himself—"like someone whom I know, I wished for a good conviction at the Assizes rather than the saving of a life, I should say, 'A burial! Nothing could be better!'"

With that grim and rather shocking conclusion he turned again to Diana Tasborough.

"Mademoiselle, we shall spare you to the limit of our powers. The rooms of those two ladies must of course be sealed. There will be an agent of the police in the house, and others in the grounds. I trust indeed that they will be even welcome to yourself and your good aunt. For myself, I must return now to Bordeaux and it will, I think, since hospitality is at such a time an embarrassment, be more convenient if Monsieur Ricardo returns with me."

"You are very kind," Diana replied gratefully, but her voice hardened perceptibly as she added, "and certainly Mr. Ricardo will sleep better at Bordeaux than he managed to sleep at the Château Suvlac."

"Then I commend you to the care of Monsieur Le Commissaire," Hanaud continued briskly, "and for you, Monsieur Webster, may the success of your vintage be of good augury."

He bowed elaborately. To Ricardo he said, "You will have time to pack, whilst Monsieur Le Commissaire and I make our little arrangements," and he passed into the drawing-room. Ricardo bowed in his turn and followed at his heels. Hanaud crossed the room to the door opening into the hall—the door in the back wall—and

as he took the handle in his hand, he half turned about. He was looking back on to the terrace, and even he was startled.

"In the name of God!" he whispered. "Take one look, my friend—no more. You have seen nothing like that in your life!"

He himself slipped through the doorway into the hall. Mr. Ricardo imitated Hanaud's movements and glanced back at the appropriate moment through the glass window to the terrace with every assumption of indifference. But the arts of the actor were not at that moment needed. He looked straight at Robin Webster, who was standing lost to all the world, and motionless as a piece of stone, on the spot where they had left him. But his face was a white flame of wild fury. He was staring at Diana Tasborough with wide unwinking eyes. Hanaud was right. Mr. Ricardo had never seen anything so terrifying in his life. Even the mask could not compare with it.

Chapter 15

The Vicomte Paints His Gate

Mr. Ricardo sat on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands, whilst his servant packed. His head was in a whirl. All that he had seen and heard that day was jumbled together in his mind—the footprints, the mask, the guttered candle, the tumbled bed, the picture of the Grand Canal which meant nothing at all, the Abbé and his casuistries—oh, and Joyce Whipple's bracelet—yes, and Hanaud's astonishing declaration that the murderers of Evelyn Devenish dare not repeat their crime—and what Hanaud had seen in Diana Tasborough's bedroom and he hadn't—and what Hanaud had deduced from the books at Robin Webster's bedside, and he hadn't—and Robin Webster's stark, appalling fury on the terrace. His head ached as he enumerated his bewilderments and he felt very grateful to Hanaud for providing him with so convenient an exit from this tragic house. He would have time in Bordeaux to take out his tables and reduce if it was only his ignorance to some sort of order. He would also be relieved of the dislike for him which Diana so obviously felt. Accordingly he lit a cigarette and tried to banish the whole tangle from his thoughts.

But he couldn't do it. For his memory began to stir. He sat up erect and gasped. Elias Thomson looked up from his portmanteaux and saw his employer staring into vacancy with an open mouth.

"Are you indisposed, sir?" he asked, but Mr. Ricardo heard him not. An idea had sprung alive in his brain, a full-size complete idea, an illuminating idea, an *Aurora Borealis* of an idea. Elias Thomson took deftly from his fingers the cigarette which was on the point of setting fire to the quilt. Mr. Ricardo did not notice the precaution. Elias Thomson returned to his packing.

"It's this 'ere crime," he said. "You always was a oner for crimes, wasn't you, sir, ever since you made 'istory at Aix?"

Even those nattering words did not reach beyond the porches of Mr. Ricardo's ears. A more insidious flattery was warming his heart. He, too, had noticed something which no one else had noticed. Even Hanaud had been deaf to it, and blind to it. Yet it was of an importance which nothing could transcend.

There came a knock upon the door. Jules Amadee had brought word that the motor-cars were at the door and that Hanaud was waiting in the hall. Mr. Ricardo sprang to his feet.

"You will put the luggage into Mr. Hanaud's car and travel with it," he cried to Elias Thomson. He gave a handsome largesse to Jules Amadee and hurried along the passage. At the hall table Hanaud was carelessly turning over a number of cards which had been left at the house that afternoon. Mr. Ricardo dashed up to him.

"I have something to tell you, my friend," he exclaimed, excitedly, triumphantly.

"But you are wrong, Mr. Ricardo," said Hanaud pleasantly, as Elias Thomson and Jules Amadee carried the luggage past them and out to the cars.

"But I haven't told you what I was going to tell you," Mr. Ricardo cried indignantly.

"That is so. But what you were going to tell me was going to be wrong," Hanaud returned. "On the other hand, I have something to tell you which is really curious and interesting."

Mr. Ricardo stepped back a pace and choked. There was a mild phrase about throwing cold water upon a man. Mr. Ricardo felt that Arctic seas could not have drenched him more. Was there ever, he asked himself, a vanity so colossal? Nothing was worth noticing unless Hanaud noticed it. Nothing worth telling unless Hanaud told it. Very well! Now Hanaud should be punished for it. It was high time that he learned a lesson in modesty. Mr. Ricardo would keep his discovery to himself. He would work out all its ramifications alone in Bordeaux. Hanaud might implore him to reveal it. He would only do so in his own good time. He smiled: "You shall tell me," he said softly, "this thing so curious."

Hanaud looked out through the open doorway. Thomson and Jules Amadee were busy piling the bags into the smaller car.

"I find it very interesting that from those who have called this afternoon to offer their condolences, there is one remarkable omission."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Ricardo indifferently.

"Yes," said Hanaud and stopped there. He undoubtedly was a very annoying man. For now Mr. Ricardo had to ask who it was that had failed to tender his sympathy.

"The Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol," Hanaud replied.

"Oh!" The announcement did give Mr. Ricardo a little shock. Good manners should be so vital an element in the equipment of a Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol that he could not leave them at home like a pair of gloves, even if he wanted to. But Ricardo's feelings towards Hanaud at this moment would not allow him to admit so much.

"Monsieur de Mirandol was up very late last night," he said.

"So he was, but it's now very late today," rejoined Hanaud, looking at his watch.

"He may have caught a cold on his way home," Mr. Ricardo tried again.

"That need not have prevented him from sending a card."

"It is in any case a small matter," Mr. Ricardo remarked loftily. He meant in comparison with the tremendous matter which he was now determined to keep to himself.

"Is it? He is the nearest neighbour of all, and he dined here last night. I find it remarkable."

"Very well then. It is remarkable," Mr. Ricardo agreed irritably, and the two men went out from the Château Suvlac. Moreau and Elias Thomson were already seated in Hanaud's police car, and at a nod from Hanaud Moreau started.

"We shall follow them," said Hanaud, and Mr. Ricardo, with a memory of that morning in his mind, cried out quickly to his chauffeur; "To Bordeaux."

"I had already given that excellent driver his instructions," Hanaud remarked imperturbably as the big car glided from the door; and Mr. Ricardo jumped up and down restively upon the springs of his seat. He was finding his companion's obtuseness in the finer details of conduct very hard to bear.

"You are annoyed with me, my friend." Hanaud fetched from his pocket his blue packet of Maryland cigarettes and lit the pungent stick of tobacco with a match which seemed to fizzle for an eternity.

"I like certain things," Mr. Ricardo declared coldly, "and I dislike certain other things."

"I, too, have that extraordinary disposition," Hanaud replied gravely.

"For instance, I like to give my own orders to my own chauffeur."

At once Hanaud was all contrition. "Hanaud was wrong! Hanaud was inexcusable. Hanaud will appoint to himself some penances like the Abbé Fauriel," he cried remorsefully. "But I couldn't resist it. To give an order to the chauffeur of a Rolls, as if I owned it! No, you cannot expect a poor policeman to resist that temptation."

Mr. Ricardo was a trifle mollified by the explanation. It had a certain flattery in it. He might not be always so quick in the uptake as the great detective, but on the other hand he had a Rolls. It was therefore in a milder spirit that he expressed what he did not like.

"I do not like to be snubbed."

"Ah, but that is different! A thousand regrets first! Yes, Hanaud—he, the great one, is on his knees," and he turned and bowed with his hand upon his heart. "But consider! See in what a difficulty I am! You come running all hot with information into the hall, and Jules Amadee is on your heels with your luggage. If I let you speak, once we are gone, Jules Amadee—he runs too. But to his mistress! And that poor girl with enough distress already upon her young shoulders, believes without reason that we suspect her of complicity in this crime. Without reason—yes!" he asserted stoutly. "For she tells us frankly that she drove here and there amongst her neighbours. What more likely than that she should meet Monsieur Tidon, the examining magistrate, upon his inquiries? And if she meet him, what more likely than that he should say: 'That Mr. Ricardo did not sleep well last night in the Château Suvlac!' Ah, the snubbing—I had to do him."

Mr. Ricardo stared at his companion in a stupefaction. "You knew then what I wanted to tell you!"

"But of course I knew. It is my business. You wanted to say to me at the top of your voice: 'To only two people have I said that I slept ill last night—Hanaud and the magistrate. Yet Miss Diana—now she knows too!' Wasn't that it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ricardo, greatly humbled. His fine discovery amounted to just nothing at all. Hanaud had seized upon the point at the same time as himself and given to it its natural explanation. Whereas he had never followed out its implications at all.

"Yes," he continued with a trifle of bitterness. "The snubbing! You had to do him!"

But even while he spoke, a picture rose before his eyes, the picture of Robin Webster on the terrace gazing at Diana with a murderous fury in his face.

"But a little moment!" he cried. "But if I thought that Diana Tasborough made a slip, so did Robin Webster! That simple, natural explanation—no, it won't do. Yes, they met the examining magistrate! Yes, he told them—probably all that I told him in the Prefecture of Villeblanche. He is a fool, that magistrate. But it was agreed that she should know nothing of what I told him when we met afterwards—"

"Agreed between whom?" Hanaud asked sharply.

"Between Robin Webster and Diana Tasborough. And she forgot the agreement, and she made her slip, which we shall do well not to forget."

Mr. Ricardo leaned back with a pleasant sensation that he had turned the tables upon his complacent friend. He rubbed his hands together with a what—do—you—say—to—that? air about him. Hanaud was impressed by all this reasoning. He pursed his lips and shook his head.

"I cannot agree that Monsieur Tidon is a fool," he said thoughtfully. "I don't say that because he is my official superior. No! I think him, on the contrary, astute. He may have been loquacious, but he will have had a good reason. Yes, I think he will get to Bordeaux, since he wishes to do so. Paris—that is another matter. But Bordeaux—yes," and he smiled pleasantly, already congratulating the magistrate upon his translation. "As for Webster, that is another matter. Perhaps I give you him, eh? Perhaps he is"—and he dropped into English with his usual success—"warm material."

"Hot stuff," Mr. Ricardo promptly amended. He preferred that if vulgar idioms were going to be used, they should be used correctly. He had hardly made his amendment when the car came abruptly to a stop, and a sergeant of police flung open the door.

Hanaud jumped out, presented his certificates of identity and received some obsequious apologies. But he would not listen to

them. “The strictest guard is necessary. I beg you to treat everyone just so.” The car had been stopped at a pair of handsome iron gates, beyond which a broad carriage drive curved out of sight. “To whose house does that lead?” Hanaud asked.

“Monsieur de Mirandol’s,” answered the sergeant.

Hanaud was puzzled. He looked backwards along the road. The Château Suvlac was a good half-mile from where he stood; whilst the slated turrets of the Vicomte’s house could be seen behind a clump of trees not a hundred and fifty yards from the iron gates.

“I understood,” he said, “that Monsieur de Mirandol’s house was a long, low white house on the top of a hill opposite to the Château Suvlac.”

“Certainly the magistrate told us so,” Mr. Ricardo agreed. He had descended from the car and stood at the edge of the road with Hanaud.

“That is the old summer-house of Mirandol,” the sergeant explained. It could be reached both from the château here or by a road through the open country in front of the house of Suvlac. The Vicomte used it for his dwelling. It was quiet and he had his great library of books housed in it. The big château was now a guest-house and offices.

“I suppose that the young chatelaine of Suvlac paid a visit here this afternoon, eh?” Hanaud asked.

“Yes, monsieur.”

Hanaud smiled at Mr. Ricardo. “So, at last, we have the real reason why Monsieur de Mirandol did not call with his condolences. He had tendered them already in his own house.” He looked at his watch. “We will imitate the young chatelaine of Suvlac. Come!”

The two men left the car under the sergeant’s charge, opened the gates, and passed up the drive to the house. The chais actually adjoined the main building, so that in the yard and in front of the porch there was a continual passing to and fro of people. Hanaud spoke to a man who was giving orders.

“Monsieur Le Vicomte?” The man pointed to a continuation of the carriage road and went on with his work. The road now ran slanting upwards through a thicket of small trees, narrowed, and came to an end in front of a small white gate. Beyond the gate a footpath wound through shrubberies, and suddenly Hanaud and Ricardo found themselves upon an open plot of pasture rather than

kept grass, and the long, unbroken front of the two-storied house glistened in front of them. A single stone flag was laid before the door. All was as plain as could be in the architecture of the house, and completely satisfying to the mind and eye. Hanaud rang the bell, and the loud jangle gave the suggestion of an empty house. But in a little while the door was opened and a manservant stood upon the threshold. He was fat and rather bald and rather sly in appearance, and his years of service had clothed him with a superficial resemblance to his master. Mr. Ricardo wondered whether his hands were wet, and was thankful that he could go on wondering.

"Monsieur Le Vicomte?" Hanaud asked.

"He is along that path, painting the gate," said the man.

"We will find him." The path which the servant designated skirted the rough grass-plot and disappeared among bushes of rhododendrons on the side opposite to that by which they had come. It formed the second perpendicular of a triangle of which the base would be a line drawn between the two paths across the grass at the points where they emerged from the shrubs. Hanaud and Mr. Ricardo made their way along this second path, and after a turn or two came in sight of the Vicomte with his coat off, a paint-pot in one hand, a big brush in the other, stooping by a narrow wooden gate which led out on to a road. He saw his visitors as soon as they saw him and rose erect.

"Monsieur Ricardo," he said with a smile. "Alas! I cannot shake you by the hand. I am one big smudge of paint."

It was green paint. He had laid it thickly on his gate, fairly thickly on his clothes and hands, and not a little on his face. "Your companion, Monsieur Ricardo, I have not the honour to know. But my unhappy young friend of Suvlac brought me her bad news this afternoon and I can guess who he is. Monsieur Hanaud?"

Hanaud bowed. "At your service, Monsieur Le Vicomte."

"An obscure and terrible affair, Monsieur Hanaud. It is very fortunate for this neighbourhood that you chanced to be in Bordeaux."

"But I am at Bordeaux, Monsieur Le Vicomte, on another matter. I return to that city now. Here, I tell you frankly, I have not got very far."

"But you will come back to Suvlac," de Mirandol urged anxiously. "A crime so appalling cannot be left unsolved."

"I shall come back, Monsieur Le Vicomte. But in time? That is another question. A day lost, even a few hours, and what scent there was is cold."

"The honour of the district, and its safety, both are involved," the Vicomte pleaded.

"I shall do my best," Hanaud answered gloomily. There was no confidence in his voice. He seemed bogged to the neck in discouragement. "Where did she go to, Madame Devenish, when she slipped out of her window last night? Who shall tell us? All the country was asleep. There was no guard upon every road and path, as there is now. We lock the door, as Mr. Ricardo would say, after the horse has stolen the oats."

Mr. Ricardo let the error pass, Hanaud was so disheartened. It would have been cruelty to correct him.

"You will pardon me if I continue my work," said the Vicomte, and he stooped again to his painting. "I should like to finish the gate before nightfall, but I am not very adept, as you can see for yourselves." He splashed away with his brush, talking while he worked. "All my men are today amongst the vines. I left this gate until the summer suns had lost their strength. Today I waked up with the thought, 'Now or never.'"

"Monsieur Le Vicomte, you set a fine example," Hanaud said politely.

The Vicomte was holding the gate open by the latch with his left hand encased in a thick gardener's glove, whilst he painted with his right. Hanaud slipped past him on to the road outside. He was looking straight now across the hollow to the rose-pink Château of Suvlac. The road on which he stood slanted down the hill to his left and at the foot of it joined the broader road which passed the farm buildings and the garage of Suvlac, and rose to the great arch in front of the house. Hanaud stood surveying the scene, which was very peaceful and pretty in the sunset; and then was guilty of a piece of carelessness which Mr. Ricardo found it quite impossible to excuse.

"It is a convenient road," Hanaud began, making polite conversation and stretching out his arm towards the Château Suvlac. He had released his hold upon the mask beneath his coat. It slipped. The handkerchief in which it was wrapped came into view, and although Mr. Ricardo coughed and hemm'd and shuffled his feet and clicked his fingers, before he could attract Hanaud's attention,

it fell to the ground. Worse still, the handkerchief opened. The mask with its red head, its livid countenance and purple lips, lay full in view for all the world to see.

For a moment Hanaud stood aghast. Then he swooped upon the secret thing, covered it up, placed it at his breast and buttoned his coat over it.

"What is the use of that now?" Mr. Ricardo asked himself, troubled and indeed indignant at such laxity. "Indeed, he is locking the stable after the horse has stolen the oats."

As for the Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol, he pretended to have noticed nothing. He continued to paint his gate, working lustily.

"I am proud of my work," he said to Mr. Ricardo, who was standing behind and over him. "For an amateur whose life is in his study, it is not so bad. All this morning I burnt the old and blistered paint off the wood. All this afternoon I paint it fresh." He laughed as a big blob of the thick oil paint splashed on to his bald head. Another drop or two flew wide on to Mr. Ricardo's neat grey suit—and with a start Mr. Ricardo understood why. Inexpert no doubt the Vicomte was, but his hands were trembling. The latch rattled under his left hand, the paint-brush nickered in his right. He could talk steadily—yes, he could control his voice—and he did talk to hide from his visitors that he could not control his hands.

"It is a convenient road," said Hanaud, recovering from his confusion. "It makes a visit to your friends or a visit from them the easiest affair, and I can see that both of you make use of it." He pointed to the tracks on the road. More than one car had stopped beside that gate and turned.

He turned back into the garden and de Mirandol plunged his paint-brush into the pot, stood up and, with a grimace of pain, stretched his back.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he said, laughing at his discomfort. "This was, after all, work for younger men. I shall be in bed with the lumbago for a week."

"A hot bath at once, Monsieur Le Vicomte, and you will write a learned paper full of new ideas before bed-time," said Hanaud with a smile. "We shall not delay you."

The Vicomte made his apologies. He would have liked to have tendered to the famous Hanaud some of the hospitality for which the district was renowned. But they saw his plight. He stripped off

the thick leather glove from his left hand and extended it with a laugh.

"This is all of me which is not coated with paint. As for the other"—and he looked ruefully at his right hand, stained and besplattered to the wrist—"will all the essences of all the chemists in Bordeaux ever get it clean?"

They left him standing there, and returning by the way they had come got again into Ricardo's car. Hanaud waved a hand to the sergeant of police.

"To Bordeaux," Mr. Ricardo commanded, speaking down the tube; and the car slid smoothly away along the white and dusty road. It passed a château or two famous for its vineyards, swept through a village aligned upon each side, and then Hanaud spoke:

"A great student? Yes. Very learned? Yes. His papers upon philosophy send the young ladies of Bordeaux into ecstasies of admiration. Yes! But, my friend, he was not studying in his library at two o'clock of this morning. No! For his library is on the ground floor of that summer-house and to the left of the door. I looked in as we passed. Yes, Hanaud looked through the window and saw so many books mounting to the ceiling against the walls, that his heart was oppressed with the weight of all those treatises." His voice lost its mocking tones and he leaned a little nearer to Ricardo. "But what Hanaud would really like to know—and see—is the long room upon the first floor in which all the lights blazed until the morning."

He fell to silence again for a little while and then, with a grim chuckle: "The hands—what traitors they are! A voice, the expression of a face, one can control them. Yes, even an amateur who spends his life in his library. But the hands? Not even the most astute."

"You noticed that his hands trembled?" cried Mr. Ricardo. "But you were out upon the road."

Hanaud smiled with a modesty detestably false. "Yes, I noticed. It is my business, dear friend."

"Perhaps it is also your business to drop remarkable masks about the highways of France," Mr. Ricardo retorted with a good deal of spirit. But the shame upon Hanaud's face disarmed him the moment he had spoken. If this was not the Hanaud of the old days, it was kinder to hide his decline from him as long as he could.

"The very best of us must blunder at times," he said with magnanimity.

"Just like the criminals," Hanaud agreed. "The Vicomte did a very subtle thing in the end. He showed us his hands," Ricardo continued, and Hanaud looked at him swiftly with an odd, appraising glance. "Yes, he showed me both his hands," he said.

"To prove to you that they did not shake. He was anxious that you should see how steady they were!" Mr. Ricardo exclaimed, and Hanaud took his eyes from his friend's face and leaned back at his ease.

"Oh, it was for that reason, was it?" he said slowly. "But here we are!" and the car stopped with a jerk opposite a stately building in a tiny street.

"In Bordeaux! Impossible!" said Mr. Ricardo, grasping the speaking-tube in his hand.

"In Bordeaux, no!" Hanaud answered imperturbably. "But at the post office of Pauillac. Let us go in!"

They descended from the car and entered the great hall. Hanaud presented a card at a guichet and was ushered with his companion into a private room. A little consequential, bearded man came in and offered his services.

"I shall be obliged, postmaster, if you will tell me whether, early in this week, a Mademoiselle Joyce Whipple received a registered package from England."

The postmaster fetched a long book and ran his finger down the entries on one of its yellow sheets.

"Yes. On Tuesday morning."

"She fetched it?"

The postmaster went out, made an inquiry, and returned. "No, Monsieur Hanaud. The little parcel was delivered to her at the Château Suvlac."

"She signed for it, of course?"

"Of course."

"May I see the signature?" Hanaud asked; and when the receipt-book was laid before him, he laid it before Mr. Ricardo. "That is her signature?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure!" Hanaud insisted. "It is very important."

"She wrote to me once to remind me of the conversation we had in London. I have seen her signature, too, in a visitors' book," Mr. Ricardo replied with a little less of assurance.

"We can make certain," said Hanaud. He felt in his breast-pocket and drew out the yellow paper cover of a French novel. Upon it, underneath the title, was written the name "Joyce Whipple."

"The book was lying upon the table in her bedroom. It was published a few weeks ago. It is on all the bookstalls. It is allowed to assume that mademoiselle bought it at the Quai d'Orsay for her journey to Bordeaux."

He laid the leaf against the signature in the receipt-book, and the names tallied exactly in the formation of their letters.

"They were both written by the same hand, then," said Hanaud. "It is certain then that Miss Whipple received the registered packet in her own hands." He looked up again at the postmaster. "Can you tell me its weight?"

The postmaster once more consulted his book.

"Two hectograms."

"Seven of your ounces then," Hanaud explained to Mr. Ricardo. He remained, his face clouding and clearing and clouding again, as he guessed the contents of the packet, and then rejected the guess. "But I waste time," he said abruptly. "I will send a telegram."

The postmaster put a form in front of him, and Hanaud took from his pocket the letter from Sir Henry Brewer of the laboratory at Leeds, and wrote the name and address in the body of a long telegram.

"I shall send it to your Scotland Yard," he said. "They will get me what I want to know most quickly. The telegram will go at once? I thank you. And we shall go too."

He shook hands with the postmaster. "This time it is really to Bordeaux," he said, and he said no more until the car stopped at Mr. Ricardo's fine hotel in the Cours de L'Intendance.

"Probably I shan't see you tomorrow. But if anything of interest happens, I will let you know," he remarked. "Meanwhile there is

a question for both of us to consider. Why must the Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol paint that particular little gate with his own hands? The other one by which we passed on our way to the house—that wanted its fresh coat of paint too! Why did that one opening on to the road above the Château Suvlac alone receive his attention? The blisters of the sun? Blague, my friend! Why wasn't it painted before the vintage? Why couldn't it wait to be painted until after the vintage?" And with a nod and a smile he walked away.

Chapter 16

Blackett Adds to Diana's Story

Mr. Ricardo tried to push the crime of Suvlac altogether from his mind. Thus he would come fresh to its perplexities when once more his assistance was needed. He began his day to himself, accordingly, with a stroll through the Botanical Gardens and without any intention came to the ornamental water where *Le Petit Mousse*, with its hand-driven paddle-wheels, was moored awaiting the holiday folk on the Sunday afternoon. At once he remembered the *gabare* and its patron, and his sly hints that the sloop would very soon belong to him without the necessity of paying for it. He stood stock-still, suddenly realizing that he had told Hanaud nothing about that conversation. Hanaud was aware of the *gabare* to be sure; Hanaud could have no doubt that it had left its harbour hours before the tide had turned, in order to sink the basket with the murdered victim in the middle of the broad river whilst the darkness still enveloped it. Hanaud could be trusted to look after the patron and his two sons. Yes; but his own unrelated conversation was vital. It had taken place in the afternoon, and the crime had been committed during the night which followed the afternoon. It proved, or if it didn't prove it distinctly suggested, that the murder of Evelyn Devenish was premeditated. Mr. Ricardo turned abruptly away. This was certainly not putting the affair out of his thoughts. He walked out of the gardens and setting off any whither at a good round pace, found himself in a fine square and opposite to a magnificent old house, set back in a courtyard behind a long wall, such as nobles once inhabited and municipal officers use now.

"And what building is that, if you please?" he asked of a passer-by.

"That is the Archbishop's Palace," the man returned. "It is of the sixteenth century, and has some fine pictures and carving which strangers are welcome to visit."

This was the very place for Ricardo this morning. He would enter by that great door in the long wall. He would recreate the ancient splendours of the Archbishops of Bordeaux, and contrast them with the twilight of today. He would people the corridors with courtiers in doublets and great ruffs. He would re-enact historic scenes if he could think of any—he would solace his soul with—in a word, he would shake off the obsession of the Suvlac mystery.

He was approaching the great door when to his amazement Hanaud came out from the courtyard. Once more Mr. Ricardo was brought to a stop. What in the world was Hanaud doing in the Archiepiscopal Palace? Asking for a special benediction upon his work? Common sense and propriety alike rejected this explanation. An idea of a more pedestrian nature commended itself to Ricardo. Hanaud had had a word or two to say about the Abbé Fauriel. He was seeing to it that that close-lipped man should have his ears properly pulled by the Archbishop for his contumacy. And quite right too, Mr. Ricardo reflected. Anyway, it was obvious that he was not to rid himself of the crime at the Château Suvlac. So he turned upon his heel and marched back to his hotel. There he added question to question upon his tables, and conjecture to conjecture, whilst Elias Thomson crept about the room soft-footed, ministering in admiration to the needs of his master who was such a "oner for crimes."

By five o'clock in the afternoon, after reading all that the newspapers, through the mouths of their special criminologists, had to say, and exhausting the faculties of his mind in deductions, a priori reasonings, comparisons and flights of fancy, he came to a conclusion. In all other affairs of the kind that he had ever heard of, there were innocent people. There were indeed more innocent people than criminals, and up to the last moment before the police pounced, the chief instigator had often an outward appearance of propriety and lawful behaviour as complete as a churchwarden's. Mr. Charles Peace was the historic example. But the affair of Suvlac was unique in that there didn't seem to be one innocent person about the place. The nearer you approached anyone, the more obvious it became that the one you approached was deeply involved. Diana's room held a secret, although it was not hidden in the copy of a Tintoretto. The Abbé Fauriel's conduct was of a most suspicious kind. Robin Webster was clearly the warmest

material ever known. Evelyn Devenish had certainly not a nice nature; whilst Joyce, of the tumbled bed, trim and charming as she was, had a great deal to explain before faith in her could be said to be firmly established. Mr. Ricardo had clung to the belief that the scion of the Crusades would be found true to the traditions of his nobility. But even that prop had been knocked away. The Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol of the trembling hands was no better than the rest of them. Mr. Ricardo had now very little doubt that five minutes of intimate conversation with old Mrs. Tasborough would even prove her to be sunk in a profligacy as profound.

"Everyone at the Château Suvlac is tainted," he cried aloud with a despairing sweep of his arm; and at that moment Hanaud opened the door and walked into the room with that default in ceremony which Mr. Ricardo so gravely deplored.

"One knocks upon a door," he said, the tips of his fingers playing with a match-box. "One asks permission to enter—"

"And one presents a gentleman of the highest importance," Hanaud said serenely.

A smallish, wiry man in the fifties, with a clean shaven, rather narrow face, and a pair of eyes of an extraordinarily piercing blue, entered the room. He was dressed in a dark suit of tweed with a double-breasted jacket, and from the dust and disorder of his dress and a grimy look he had, it was clear that he had only this minute come to the end of a long journey. He came in reluctantly and regarded Mr. Ricardo with no particular favour. Hanaud closed the door and Ricardo invited his unknown guest to an arm-chair. But the man shook his head.

"I'll sit there," he said in a hard, grating voice, and pointed to a chair at the table. He laid down his hat.

"This is Monsieur Dennis Blackett," said Hanaud. "Some mention of the tragic death of Madame Devenish appeared yesterday in a late edition of one of the evening papers in London. Monsieur Blackett started by aeroplane last night."

"I went at once to the Prefecture from the aerodrome," Dennis Blackett continued, "and found this gentleman there who is in charge of the case. I speak very little French, and I understand from Mr. Hanaud that though his knowledge of English is much wider than his countrymen usually possess, there might be an idiom or two used with which he was not familiar—" Dennis Blackett stopped and looked about the room to discover the reason for the stupefaction which overspread Ricardo's face.

Mr. Ricardo, indeed, nearly fell off his chair; so overwhelmed was he by such an amazing confession on the part of his friend. "Your idioms! I know him!" How often had he suffered under that phrase, and still more under the dreadful distortion of the English language which invariably followed! Yet here was Hanaud admitting his inadequacy! It seemed incredible. It was incredible, and abruptly Ricardo realized why the admission had been made. It was an act of friendship. It was the only possible excuse which Hanaud could offer for Ricardo's presence at this interview. He was keeping his dear Mr. Ricardo along with himself in the very thick of the mystery. Ricardo directed towards the detective a look of recognition and gratitude; and Dennis Blackett resumed:

"He mentioned that you were his friend, and since I don't wish what I have to say to go further than is necessary, I was grateful to accept his suggestion that you should act as interpreter."

He took the chair at the table to which he had pointed. Mr. Ricardo's stupefaction at Hanaud's amazing exhibition of modesty was transferred to Dennis Blackett. There was not a trace of any feeling either in his voice or in his face. He might have been speaking of some not very important deal in shares instead of about the brutal murder of his daughter. Ricardo had to force himself to realize that this man had started off at no more than the notice of an hour or so upon his long aeroplane journey to Bordeaux.

Hanaud drew up a third chair to the table. "I have not one expectation of what Mr. Blackett is to tell us. But I promise him now that, apart from us three and Monsieur Tidon, the examining magistrate, no one shall know anything except what in the interests of Justice must be known. So!" And he turned to Dennis Blackett, who resumed at once:

"You have heard, I understand, what Miss Tasborough knew of the estrangement between my daughter and myself. But neither she nor anybody else in the world, except my daughter and myself, knew the whole truth. I was never and am not now concerned to defend myself against any charge of harshness, and she for her own sake would be certain to keep her mouth shut. I am breaking this long silence because I want her murderer brought to justice and execution"—though there was no break in the flow of his grating voice, a faint tinge of colour crept into his white face, and his lips tightened—"and what I have to tell you, for all I know, may help."

He paused for a few moments to arrange the order of his sentences. Mr. Ricardo hitched his chair closer to the table, the epicurean of

sensations in him savouring the moment and rejoicing in its retardation. Hanaud sat like stone, his eyes upon Dennis Blackett's face.

"From the day of my daughter's birth"—and it was noticeable that never once would he pronounce her name—"I began to collect pearls, so that she might have a string of them worth having upon her twenty-first birthday. I took a great deal of trouble in their selection. I bought four or five a year, and when that birthday party assembled in Morven, on the Sound of Mull, I had in the house a very valuable string for her, consisting of a hundred and twenty large pearls, carefully graduated in size and of a purity and a lustre which could hardly be equalled even amongst the treasures of the great reigning Houses. I had made no secret of my intention so far as my daughter was concerned. She knew of it. She knew that I meant to give it to her on the morning of her birthday. But the night before"—he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue—"she stole it. When she and her lover sailed down the Sound and across Loch Linnhe to Oban, she took that necklace with her."

Dennis Blackett looked down at his hands which rested on the table in front of him, loosely clasped together; and Mr. Ricardo, following the direction of his eyes, had for the second time the opportunity of observing what traitors the hands can be. Not an inflection of Blackett's voice, not an expression upon his face, conveyed anything more than that he was putting a fairly interesting proposition before a couple of business associates. But his hands betrayed him. They were ever so slightly trembling.

"I said nothing aloud," he resumed. "But I whispered in private to the dealers in Hatton Garden and the jewellers. Pearls of value are known. A good pearl can no more get away from its history and colour and weight than one of Monsieur Hanaud's clients can get away from his fingerprints and his previous convictions. I was pretty sure that this string would, sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, come into the market; and I didn't want anyone-else ever to wear it. It was twenty-one years of my life. But don't misunderstand me, please!" and he lifted his eyes from his hands to the faces of the two men who were listening.

Both of them were sitting, careful not by a gesture or a change of attitude to interrupt the curious story. They were spellbound by this calm, smooth revelation of himself by a man who surely had never stripped himself so bare before. Nor did they answer him now.

"No. I was not moved by any sentiment," Dennis Blackett explained. "To me, the necklace was the proof of a gigantic folly. And it existed—out there in the world. I was uncomfortable. I wanted it back. I wanted it sunk at the bottom of the Sound of Mull. It was like a compromising letter which a man has once written and knows to be in existence, and will pay to get back. The message I sent far and wide through the dealers was that I would pay for that necklace if it was brought to me complete—the hundred and twenty pearls and not one missing. One missing meant a sentence of my compromising letter torn off and kept. Well, a fortnight ago the necklace was offered to an important jeweller in this town. It was offered at a price far below its value. For some reason, perhaps because it was offered at so low a price, the jeweller hesitated. But eleven days ago it was offered to him again. He knew exactly what it was. He knew that he could make his profit on it. And this time he bought it. Two days later I learnt that it was in his possession. I telegraphed to him to keep it until the end of the month, when I should be free to come out in person, assure myself that it was in very truth my compromising letter, and take it back with me. But this"—and for the fraction of a second the man of iron did flinch—"this brutal murder suggests to me that perhaps before the sale there was a theft. If so the jeweller might help you."

"The name of that jeweller, monsieur?" Hanaud asked.

"Domenique Pouchette, Alees de Tourny."

"I shall send for him and for the necklace at once," said Hanaud.

Dennis Blackett got up from his chair. "I have been travelling without intermission for nearly twenty-four hours," he said. "I should like a bath and a meal and a change of clothes. It is now six o'clock. If the jeweller can come at seven, I shall be better prepared to meet him."

Hanaud was clearly in a fret, and Dennis Blackett pressed his point with a smile. "I am really at the end of my resources, Mr. Hanaud. The entr'acte of an hour is very necessary."

Indeed, now that his story had been spoken, exhaustion had got the upper hand with him. He moved with a faltering step to the door. Hanaud sprang forward and rang the bell.

"Monsieur's suit-case has been taken to his room?" he asked of the waiter. "Yes?" and he turned to Dennis Blackett. "In an hour's time, then, and meanwhile I beg you to assure yourself of my gratitude and respect."

"That's all right," said Blackett, and he reeled rather than walked out of the room.

Chapter 17

How a Jeweller Pays His Taxes

Domenique Pouchette, a big, formal man with a square brown beard, dressed in an old-fashioned frock-coat of broadcloth, bowed from the doorway, relieved Moreau of a small black brief bag and placed it upon the table. Moreau, then, at a nod from Hanaud, went out of the room and closed the door. Domenique Pouchette took a small key from his waistcoat pocket, unlocked the bag and lifted out of it a jewel-case. He looked in turn at Hanaud, at Ricardo, at Dennis Blackett, and then without any hesitation offered the case to the last of the three. The case was worn, the leather here and there broken, and for a moment or two Blackett turned it over in his hands, shrinking from opening it. He unfastened the catch with an abrupt and violent movement, and taking out the necklace let the smooth, softly gleaming beads slip between his fingers. He was smiling now rather bitterly. They were the twenty-one years of his life. Each bead celebrated some shrewd stroke of business, brought to its culmination after much labour, and all for the sake of the idolized daughter.

"Yes, this is the string. Here is the diamond clasp with her initial 'E' "; and he dropped it on the table and looked at it as though it were an iridescent adder with a forked tongue ready to strike.

"So!" said Hanaud. "We are sure of this first condition. The necklace belonged to Madame Devenish. Now for you, Monsieur Pouchette. You hesitated to buy it even at a price far below its value. Why?"

"It was offered to me," the dealer returned carefully, "by someone about whom I was not quite satisfied."

"A man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"A young woman?"

"No."

The answer, reluctantly given, was a surprise to all sitting around that table, but especially to Mr. Ricardo. He had been working out in his mind the dates which Blackett had given. The day on which he had seen Evelyn Devenish in the Cave of the Mummies fitted in with them very well. He had had no doubt up to this moment that it was Evelyn Devenish herself who had sold the string of pearls to Pouchette, and that she had travelled to Bordeaux upon that day precisely to sell them.

"An old woman then," cried Hanaud with a touch of exasperation in his voice. "Let me hear about her, if you please. Who she is and why you distrusted her."

"A little moment," the jeweller objected, pressing neatly the fingertips of one hand against the fingertips of the other. "My business involves many confidential communications and could hardly prosper if secrecy were not observed. I am in a difficulty. Between myself and my customer there must be the same kind of relationship as between doctor and patient."

"I am afraid that the law cannot recognize that relationship," said Hanaud, whose patience was wearing thin. "You will be good enough to tell me all that you know about this woman."

"Know?" Pouchette seemed to be picking up the word delicately. "I really know nothing."

"All that you suspect then."

Domenique Pouchette looked this way and that way. He caressed his beard with soft strokes of his hand.

"Suspicions may land a man in the most unpleasant position. I invite you to excuse me."

"And I invite you not to waste my time," Hanaud suddenly bellowed across the table. "What? Here is a crime committed and we are to be held up by the scruples of a jeweller!"

"A crime?" Pouchette exclaimed, quite taken aback.

"Well? You have read of it in your morning's paper. You heard me speak the name of the owner of this necklace a minute ago—Madame Devenish."

"Monsieur must pardon me—I did not connect the name with the crime of Suvlac," stammered Pouchette the jeweller.

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Will you too try to play the fox with me? Let us have no more scrupulosities, my friend. Come, who was this woman?"

No doubt Pouchette might have declined to answer to anyone but a judge; and Hanaud's blusterings suggested certainly to one listener in that room that he was aware of the doubtful ground on which he stood. But Domenique Pouchette, since now he must be brought into the affair, was shrewd enough to realize that his inconvenience would be the less, the more whole-heartedly he was on the side of the police.

"It was the widow Chicholle who brought the necklace to me."

"The widow Chicholle," Hanaud repeated slowly, like a man searching amongst his memories. He shook his head. "She is unknown to me."

"It is true that she has never, so far as I know, taken her seat on the bench of the accused," Pouchette continued. "But it does not follow that she has therefore a good name. And I tell you frankly, Monsieur Hanaud, that the name of the widow Chicholle is scabrous. She is of the bad quarters of this town. You will hear of her only very deep down in the underworld."

"Yet you know of her, Monsieur Pouchette."

"I shall explain that to you," Pouchette returned, eagerly stretching out his arms towards Hanaud, so that the sleeves of his coat shrank back, and the cuffs of his shirt shot out. "There is no difficulty. A little moment! Once or twice she has come to me and always very privately and always with something of value to sell. I knew nothing about her. I said after examining her wares: 'I do not know whether I can dispose of this. Take it away and come back to me in three days' time.' From time to time, as no one knows better than you, Monsieur Hanaud, we receive our little lists from the police of jewellery which has been stolen or lost. Always I looked through my list very carefully. Never did I find any description corresponding to the pieces offered to me by the widow Chicholle. Even then I had my scruples. I made it my business to find out who was this widow Chicholle. Yes—I admit it to you—her name stank like an onion. Her house had a dark and evil name. No, she was not reputable. So when after three days she came again I asked her sternly how she had come into possession of these valuable things. She had her explanation. Certain ladies wished from time

to time to dispose of part of their jewellery without publicity. She received a little commission on the sale for meeting their wishes. There it was—an explanation feasible—enough. These fine ladies have their little affairs. I for my part had my business."

Monsieur Domenique Pouchette smiled. Nothing could have been more frank and loyal than his demeanour. He was the honest business man keeping within the law, and bearing his share of the enormous burden of the national taxation by assiduously pushing along with his business.

"So I put my delicate shades of feeling into my pocket and these fine little pieces of jewellery too. But there came an occasion. Perhaps I took the instructions of the police too much at the foot of the letter. I don't know. Perhaps I should have given to them a wider connotation. You shall tell me," and he directed a dazzling smile at Hanaud's immobile face. He was a conscientious tradesman anxious to be corrected if he had construed in too literal a spirit the recommendations of the authorities.

"I will tell you," said Hanaud stonily.

"That will be kind," the grateful Pouchette remarked. "Well, the widow Chicholle brought to me a ring in which was set, amongst some brilliants of no particular value, a very beautiful big emerald. It was, so far as I could see, quite flawless, and you gentlemen will know how very difficult it is to find an emerald without a flaw. It was of the deepest, purest green, and a flame burnt within it. It was a stone for a rajah. It was, I think, a present from a rajah."

And suddenly Hanaud, who had been sitting still as a mummy, with his hands upon the arms of his chair, heaved himself out of his seat and stood erect, staring at the jeweller.

"To Jeanne Corisot?" he said in a strangled voice.

"I imagined so. That little lady was, I believe, in Bordeaux during the early summer."

Jeanne Corisot was one of those golden-haired comets which flame very prettily for a season in midnight skies. At Bordeaux you may perhaps catch a glimpse of them if you are fortunate, but the line of totality where you can see them at their brightest runs from Deauville across Paris to Monte Carlo. Stationed at one of those famous viewpoints you will see them, annexing fresh satellites as they curve and blaze and riot and cause a good deal of disturbance amongst the sedater comets. In the end they crash into the moon they have always been asking for, or the earth or Mars, and

go whirling away into darkness, dropping into this or that pawnbroker's shop their bits of fire as they go. Jeanne Corisot had ceased to reign over her Eastern prince some six months back. She had dropped out of the firmament—to what dark spot no one knew and no one cared. For other lustrous stars, bright from youth's mint, were trying their curves and gyrations within the range of vision. Jeanne Corisot was "one of those ladies," as politeness puts it quite sufficiently, and her day was just over.

So much Mr. Ricardo, the man of the world, knew. He knew that it was in the nature of things that she should begin to sell here and there stray pieces of her jewellery. What he did not understand was why Hanaud should make such a pother of an everyday affair. There he was, startled by a surprising revelation, looking rather terrible, yes, and rather frightened too. Hanaud lowered himself slowly into his chair.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," Pouchette resumed. "I did not take that emerald. I did not offer a price for it. No. I said to the widow Chicholle: 'Bring it to me in three days' time.' I had an idea that that ring was on my list of jewels which were missing. And it was. Yes, Monsieur Hanaud, I took the list from my safe the moment the widow Chicholle had gone; and there it was."

"And you didn't inform the police," said Hanaud.

"Ah!"

Domenique Pouchette brought his chair a little nearer to Hanaud's. He turned towards him confidently and innocently smiling.

"It is there that I should welcome your advice. I read the police notices with the greatest care. They were very clear. I was to inform the Prefect of Police the moment that any of these pieces of jewellery came into my possession. Those were the words. But this ring had not come into my possession. Nor did it ever. For of course I refused it three days later. It may be that I should have set a more liberal meaning upon that phrase. I don't know. I argued to myself: 'The police know what they want. Who am I that I should know better than they?' Now you shall tell me whether I was right or wrong," and Pouchette leaned back, still quite innocent and smiling.

Hanaud, however, brushed the question aside. He asked another instead. "When exactly did this woman Chicholle offer you this ring?"

“A little moment!”

Pouchette drew from his waistcoat pocket a tiny diary and consulted it. “It was on the second day of June. I can fix the date. For I had been that morning to an important luncheon of my business associates at the ›*Chapon Fin*.‹ The widow Chicholle came that night at ten o’clock.”

Hanaud raised his eyebrows. “A late hour, Monsieur Pouchette, for you to remain at your office.”

Just for a moment Domenique Pouchette showed signs of discomfort. “She came to my apartment, not my office.”

The admission was quite enough for Hanaud. He accepted it. It threw perhaps a rather sinister hue upon the relationship between the widow Chicholle and Domenique Pouchette the jeweller. The widow Chicholle brought her wares in the darkness—yes! And Domenique practised a discreet silence when wares were offered to him which it would be imprudent to buy—yes! These little matters might be considered later on. Meanwhile there was the pressing need of Joyce Whipple, who must be found somewhere hidden under all this litter of crime and dishonesty.

“And so you refused the emerald of Jeanne Corisot, Monsieur Pouchette. Yes, I understand that. And you were very careful, henceforth, how you dealt with the widow Chicholle. But you took the necklace of Evelyn Devenish.”

“Yes!” Monsieur Pouchette rose from his disculpations with a gasp of relief like a swimmer from a dive in deep waters. “The police were unconcerned about that necklace. I made sure. It figured in no list. But I knew that a Mr. Dennis Blackett would give a price for it. So I bought it,” he rose from his chair, “and perhaps Mr. Dennis Blackett will do me the honour tomorrow to consider with me the price which should be paid.”

He took up the necklace from the table in front of Dennis Blackett, let it ripple and gleam and vanish into its case, just as a viper will slip into a bush, and was about to restore the case to the bag when Hanaud reached out a hand.

“I will take it into my charge. I shall give you a receipt for it. There are witnesses here who will bear you out that I have taken it.”

He wrote swiftly on a paper at a writing-table, subscribed his name and brought the paper back to Pouchette.

“Now I shall ask you for the address of the widow Chicholle.”

Monsieur Pouchette considered. No one of those present doubted what he was considering. Would it be prudent to deny all knowledge of that old woman's address? Could he say "I was careful as a business man to display very little interest in her position and surroundings" and get away with such a defence? On the whole—no, definitely no!

"It is not in one of our best streets that this woman resides," he replied with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I am sure of that," said Hanaud.

"She lives in the street Gregoire."

"And the street Gregoire?" Hanaud asked, writing the name down.

"Lies over there," said Domenique Pouchette, pointing to the window opening on the Cours de L'Intendance. "To the east of us. It is in the parish of St. Michel. It runs from a little square in that parish, tall and narrow and dark, to the quays."

And Mr. Ricardo could suppress himself no longer. The parish of St. Michel? Very well, then! The street Gregoire was close to the Cave of the Mummies.

"You bought the necklace on the Monday of last week, then?" he cried to Pouchette. "Today is Friday. Eleven days ago you bought that necklace?" he cried excitedly.

Domenique Pouchette replied:

"A little moment!" and he consulted his diary once more. To Mr. Ricardo in his excitement the sight of the tiny book manipulated by the jeweller's big splay finders was incongruous, absurd.

"I made a note—yes. It was brought to me first on a Friday. I bought it on the Monday—just eleven days ago," answered Domenique, watching this new participant in the discussion warily, and speculating why the date should so excite him. But Mr. Ricardo had eyes only for Hanaud. Another link in the chain was being hauled up within his vision.

"You remember?" he cried. "It was at the Tower of St. Michel that I saw Evelyn Devenish that afternoon. She had handed over her necklace to the widow Chicholle in the street Gregoire. She was on her way back—"

And Hanaud interrupted him with a nod of the head. "She was on her way back," he repeated, "the price paid, eh? She visits the Cave of the Mummies. She sighs that long-drawn sigh of longing that the

days of such cruel punishments might come again—eh? Is that the truth at the end of it all?"—and he looked across the table, his eyes burning in his massive head, his face white with horror. "Was the price paid just that those days might return?—But then—Yes, but then—!"

Mr. Ricardo could fill up these broken sentences. But then ... it was Evelyn Devenish who was destroyed. Did she plan and pay for the punishment of Joyce Whipple? Did that murderous glance in the drawing-room at Suvlac mean that fulfilment was nearly—But then—it was Evelyn Devenish of the severed hand who was the victim—of a sadic vengeance.

All this while Domenique Pouchette was stroking his brown beard nervously and glancing from one to another of his companions at the table. There were questions being asked here with which he wished from the bottom of his heart to have nothing to do. He rose from his chair.

"If I may go now? There are some small matters of business waiting for me. And I have my office to close."

Hanaud looked at him with more good-nature than Ricardo had expected. There was even a trace of a smile upon his lips.

"Yes. After all, you have made no difficulties for me. You might have protested that you would say nothing except before the *Juge d'Instruction* and in the presence of your legal adviser. I shall remember that in your favour. You should, of course, have notified the police the moment that fine emerald was offered to you. But yes, life is difficult and taxes are high. Run along with you!"

No schoolboy at the hour of release could have disappeared from his class-room with the celerity now displayed by Domenique Pouchette.

"That poor devil! We give him the shock! He will go by the foot of the letter," Hanaud said with a grin. "Now we turn to our small matters of business," and he raised his voice. "Moreau!"

Moreau, who had been standing sentry outside the door, was on the inside of it like a genius in an Arabian tale.

"The widow Chicholle in the Rue Gregoire," Hanaud recited as he wrote hurriedly. "You have a gendarme with you? Yes. You will send him at the gymnastic step to Monsieur Le Prefet with this letter. Very quietly and carefully the house of the widow Chicholle must be watched from now on—a man at the end of the street on

the quay, another in the little square at the head of the street, and the house itself. A good man in control. No action to be taken—except under necessity. But word to come to me of any visitors."

He sealed up his note and handed it to Moreau. Then he turned to Dennis Blackett.

"To you, monsieur, all my thanks. We shall do what we can. Meanwhile you will stay in Bordeaux?"

"Yes, here," said Dennis Blackett.

"Good! For you, Mr. Ricardo, I shall ask you to dine with me and now. At my little hotel. It is not so magnificent as this, but one eats well, and when there is much work to be done it is wise to eat well before we begin it."

There was a note of excitement in his voice, his eyes had the curiously bright and rather cruel look of a retriever's when a gun is brought into its view. He was as Ricardo had seen him twenty times when the bits of the puzzle were falling into their places and the whole picture was there for a shrewd eye to anticipate. Hanaud, in a word, was in a mood which imposed upon any true friend of his the duty of steadying him, and Mr. Ricardo was not the man to flinch from the task.

"There is something to be done, my good friend, before we dine," he said. "I do not charge you with carelessness. No, you have so much to think of. It is inevitable that from time to time some important precaution should be neglected."

A subtle change came over Hanaud. His confidence vanished. His voice proceeded to shake with anxiety. "A precaution which I omit?" he cried despairingly. It seemed that he would tear his hair out by the roots. "Tell met I am in the dust at your feet!"

Mr. Ricardo smiled graciously.

"There is no need for any heroics. The omission can tonight no doubt be repaired. The moment of forgetfulness might have happened to anyone. I am, of course, speaking of the patron and the crew of the *gabare* which left the tiny dock at Suvlac against the tide hours before the appropriate time of casting off."

The liveliest disappointment chased from Hanaud's face the eager desire to repair a fault. He shook his head reproachfully. He spoke dejectedly. "My dear friend—the *gabare*—and is that all? But, of course—of course—the patron and his two sons have been locked up in separate cells ever since their arrival in Bordeaux yesterday

evening. They will not even be able to drive *Le Petit Mousse* in the Municipal Gardens on Sunday afternoon. You will come with me?"

Mr. Ricardo, considerably abashed, answered with humility.

"Yes. A little moment"—he was rather taken with Domenique Pouchette's favourite phrase—"a little moment to wash the hands."

"Two little moments," replied Hanaud, "and you will order perhaps your car. I am a snob. Yes. I prefer to ride in a Rolls-Royce. Besides, it goes very fast, without seeming to go fast at all—and—and—we shall have need to go fast and far tonight!"

There was a thrill in Hanaud's voice, a gleam in his eyes which dispersed in an instant Mr. Ricardo's ill-humour. He had been inclined to be touchy over this matter of the *gabare*. He took it rather as an offence that Hanaud had remembered to lay his hands upon it and its crew. The *gabare* was his contribution to the elucidation of the case, and he resented the fact that the contribution had already been made by someone else. But Hanaud was obviously up on the tips of his toes. He was going to bowl the wickets down. He had the measure of his enemies. He was to be swift and terrible.

"Yes," cried Ricardo in an enthusiasm, running to the door and ordering his car and running back again. "The Rolls-Royce is yours. You shall give the orders to my chauffeur. You shall own it. We go fast and far tonight!"

"But not at once, my friend. In an hour and a half at the ›Golden Pheasant.‹ Even then he will wait," Hanaud replied. "For in this we shall be different from Domenique Pouchette. We shall not close our offices tonight."

Chapter 18

Hanaud Dines

The small hotel at which Hanaud put up was on the edge of the spacious *Place des Quinconces* and opposite to the great white memorial to the Girondins. A restaurant occupied the ground floor and Hanaud and Mr. Ricardo sat down by the open window. Outside, a few marble-topped tables and iron chairs were ranged upon the pavement beneath an awning, but two men only were drinking an aperitif at one of them, and they were out of earshot.

"Let us follow their example," said Hanaud, after he had ordered dinner. "Some vermouth, I think. Yes, I promise you we shall eat well here."

He tore open a new bright blue packet of Maryland cigarettes and smoked one of the black tubes of tobacco contentedly. Hanaud was not perhaps as marvellous as he invariably, his assistant Moreau generally, and Mr. Ricardo sometimes thought him to be. But he had one quality without which greatness is seldom found. He could disburden himself of all his anxieties the moment there came an interval in his labours. As the clock struck he closed his book and was in the playing-fields. He leaned back in his chair, smoothing out his mind and laving it in the peace of that vast quincunx of trees and of the river running red towards the sunset. Mr. Ricardo, however, had not the professional mind. He must always be busy, and the river with its load of great ships only recalled to him the pastoral reaches beyond the city and set before his eyes a big wicker basket gently rocking nearer and nearer to a bank of grass.

"You must tell me where we go to-night after we have dined," he cried. "Not to know is more than I can bear."

Hanaud came out of an abstraction very slowly. "Where do we go?" he repeated, with an air of profound astonishment. He looked anxiously at Ricardo, reached out a hand and felt his pulse. "You ask me that now that all this cloud of mystery is clearing away? There can be but the one place."

"You can keep it to yourself if you want to, just as I like to keep my pulse to myself," Mr. Ricardo rejoined sulkily, as he wrenched his hand away.

"Hanaud was wrong," the detective exclaimed with his detestable habit of speaking of himself in the third person. "Hanaud should have recollected that he was in the proud position of being Mr. Ricardo's host. Instead he must be the cat with the mouse—not nice—no!" He saw indignation gathering on Mr. Ricardo's brow at the use of so objectionable a simile, and hastened on: "I tell you where we go. We go to the Château Mirandol and we interrupt the Vicomte in the act of writing a most interesting paper on the esoteric rites of the Rosicrucians, to be read to the young ladies of Bordeaux. And then we ask him very politely to show us that upper room where, two nights ago, the lights blazed to so late an hour."

The tone of Hanaud's voice more even than his words opened a tiny window in his companion's mind. He saw again the long row of lights blazing across the sleeping country. What was going on in that big room? What strange ceremony was being conducted? For him too little pieces of the puzzle began to fall into their places—the theft and the return of the priest's vestments, the priest's obstinate strange silence, Hanaud's visit this morning to the Archiepiscopal Palace.

"Then you think—?" he exclaimed, and sat staring at his friend, on the brink, as he felt, of some dreadful revelation.

Hanaud nodded his head. "What took place two nights ago took place in that long upper room."

"The murder of Evelyn Devenish?"

"Yes."

"And of—no, I won't believe that!"

Hanaud's face grew dark and savage. He raised his hand and let it fall again. "About that I can tell you no more than you can tell yourself. For I don't know! I don't understand!" he cried in a sudden exasperation; and he sat with gloomy eyes fixed upon the tablecloth and his big face working. After a moment or two he leaned

forward and whispered: "We two shall make a little prayer each in his own heart, that the brave Joyce Whipple shall tell us all we want to know with her own lips before the morning comes."

He drew quickly back as the proprietor approached the table with his little dishes of radishes and black olives. "Come! Let us eat! We shall be fit for nothing unless we do."

Hanaud had prophesied truly. One ate well at the little restaurant of the "Golden Pheasant," though the only waiter was the proprietor in a tweed suit, and each step that he took sounded upon bare boards. Mr. Ricardo realized that he had eaten nothing that day except a very small luncheon at the ›*Chapon Fin*;‹ whilst Hanaud had all the appearance of having eaten nothing for a year.

"This lobster Cardinal is delicious," Mr. Ricardo observed, and very regrettably with his mouth full. He was already taking a rosier anticipation of the night's adventure.

"It is not so bad," Hanaud agreed. "There is a *caneton de la presse* to follow with a salad."

"Admirable," said Ricardo.

The proprietor brought tenderly to the table a black bottle in a wicker cradle, and laid it down as though it were a baby and he its loving nurse. "I thought that it would be appropriate on this night of all nights," said Hanaud, "if we drank a bottle of old Mirandol. It is a second growth, to be sure, but according to many judges should be classed with the first. You shall tell me!"

Yes, it was Mr. Ricardo's turn to tell. He was on his own ground. The red wines of the Medoc! Not for nothing had he travelled once a year from Bordeaux to Arcachon! Hanaud tipped a tablespoonful first into his own glass and then filled Mr. Ricardo's. Mr. Ricardo beamed. Good manners and good wine—could there be a more desirable conjunction? He held the glass up to the light. The wine was ruby-red, ruby-clear. He lowered it to his nostrils and savoured its aroma. "Exquisite," he said. Then religiously he drank of it. "Adorable!" he cried; and drank again. He swam upwards into rosy clouds. That little affair at Suvlac would be settled in no time. "A wine for two friends to drink in a rapturous silence by the side of an historic square in *la belle France*."

It was a pity that he must end his flight of poesy with so dreadful a banality as "*la belle France*." But that was his way, and Hanaud took the compliment to himself as though he was la belle France all in one. And that was Hanaud's way too. "The cellar here is not so

bad," he remarked. Ricardo drank again, and after much rolling of the wine upon his tongue, put down the glass with a vigour which threatened to break the stem.

"It is '93," he declared; and Hanaud bowed in admiration of the subtle palate of his friend. Oh, certainly, Ricardo reflected, stretching out his legs beneath, the table, with the great detective of France to begin with, and a friend who could announce right off the year of a '93 claret to help him, the mystery of Suvlac was as good as solved, the criminals practically in the dock.

"To the widow Chicholle," he said, leaning forward cunningly and holding up his replenished glass.

"But certainly," Hanaud returned. "To the widow Chicholle!"

The word, however, brought to him no gaiety. It brought him a black mood. He declined into a vein of self-disparagement very unusual with him. "I think myself a very fine fellow, of course," he said, "and so do you."

"I don't quite agree that I think myself a very fine fellow," Mr. Ricardo objected.

"I expressed myself ill," said Hanaud. "I meant that you think me a very fine fellow."

"I am not always quite sure about that," Mr. Ricardo answered upon reflection.

"No? There are times when we all fall below our true selves. But you recover, my friend, very, very quickly. For a minute there may be a doubt and then I do a little thing and at once you say—oh, with such a relief!—'That Hanaud! What a prodigy!' But, even so"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"how often when I am in a tangle a little accident sets me on the road. The little accidents—yes—they happen. To know them when you see them, to catch them, to use them—that is half my business. But, of course, you must be always alert for them."

It was Hanaud's old doctrine many a time pronounced. Chance was the most willing of goddesses, but the most jealous. She demanded a swift mind and a deadly hand. She showed her face for the fraction of a second, just the time to breathe her message, and the clouds closed again. It was your fault if your ears were not quick to catch the words.

"Here's Jeanne Corisot, for instance. You know something about these women, of course, a man of the world like you. A few of

them marry, a good many of them put their money away in a safe place, but the rest when their youth is over"—and he made a gesture as though he were dropping a stone into a pool. "They have no friends to inquire for them. Some other woman looking round a cabaret at two o'clock in the morning may say carelessly: 'The little Fifi! I have not seen her for a month. It is curious.' But that will be all. The little Fifi has gone into outer darkness. She is nobody's business. She will die in the gutter, possibly is dead already. Granted?"

"Yes," the man of the world agreed.

"Very well," Hanaud continued. "Jeanne Corisot was saved from a similar oblivion by just one circumstance. Her parents, a couple of old peasants owning a little farm near Fontainebleau, had been living for years upon Jeanne's presents. Each season, you see, there arrived a little more money to buy a little more land and to stock it afterwards, and every year there was a ceremonial visit of Jeanne and her lover. They came down in their car, took their luncheon in the parlour with the antimacassars, and after the luncheon sat outside in the porch while one by one the family passed them in a procession, each one, you understand, receiving a few kind words and more than a few kind bank-notes. Ah, you must not look shocked, my friend! The family Corisot is not the only one. Take it from me!"

Then a year passed without presents. There was no day of ceremonial visit. Consternation reigned in the family Corisot. Was Jeanne turning her back upon her poor relations? No, Jeanne was a good girl. A letter with much heavy breathing and much labour of gnarled fingers was written to her. It returned in due course through the Dead Letter office. Her princeling had sailed back to the East. Jeanne Corisot had disappeared—and with her her money and her jewels.

"Now I come to the one circumstance," Hanaud continued. "Jeanne Corisot had made a will sharing out her possessions amongst her family, and that will was safe in the walnut bureau in the room of the antimacassars. All that treasure mustn't be lost, you see. No! Steps must be taken. So a deputation from the family Corisot, consisting of the old man and one son, knocked at the door of the *Sûreté Generale*. The case came to me, and I thought it would be easy. Jeanne, you see, was a careful wench, and to prevent mistakes and trouble, what particular pieces of her jewellery were to go to each member of the family was set out in that will very clearly. Domenique Pouchette gave you an idea of the sort of steps we take, but

we never heard a word. If any rogue had got hold of those jewels, he was lying very quietly on the top of them. But after a time we got a line upon Jeanne herself. She had come to Bordeaux in the winter. So far we traced her, and then she disappeared again. I told you yesterday that I was at Bordeaux on quite other business than the Château Suvlac affair. Jeanne Corisot was my business, and the first news I have had of her was given to me tonight by Domenique Pouchette. But I have learnt other things. For instance, three women of the town, as the phrase has it, besides Jeanne Corisot, have disappeared in Bordeaux during the last year."

He lowered his voice as he spoke and leaned forward out of the window to make sure that no one could overhear him.

"Three?" Mr. Ricardo exclaimed.

"Yes," Hanaud answered with a nod. "Three of the kind I have described. Women no one would give a thought to, if they did disappear. And I am wondering whether the widow Chicholle has come at night to the apartment of Monsieur Pouchette to sell him cheap any of their little trinkets."

Mr. Ricardo leaned back in his chair, all the exhilaration of his dinner quite sobered out of him. The disappearance of the three women—the furtive visits paid after dark to a dealer in precious stones by a woman with an evil name—the certainty that one, at all events, of Jeanne Corisot's jewels was offered by her for sale—these facts gave a very sinister significance to her possession of Evelyn Devenish's necklace.

"That necklace was not stolen," said Mr. Ricardo. "For it was bought by Pouchette nine days before Evelyn Devenish's death. She must have missed it, had it been stolen. She parted with it of her own accord, that afternoon when we met in the Cave of the Mummies. For a price, then—yes, for a price"; and again he saw the drawing-room of Suvlac and the flare of hatred in Evelyn Devenish's eyes as Robin Webster leaned over Joyce Whipple's chair. But then—and he was swept back into the old circle. It was Evelyn Devenish who had paid the price!

Mr. Ricardo looked across the table towards Hanaud, who was smoking a cigar as black as one of his cigarettes.

"You think Joyce Whipple is in the Château Mirandol."

Hanaud would not answer.

"You suspected it yesterday when you were so careful to tell everyone that the neighbourhood was surrounded by police."

Hanaud would not admit as much. "I was taking my precautions. I had no right then to do more. You will remember that I uttered another warning."

"Against a second murder—yes. But desperate people don't heed warnings."

Hanaud replied with a deliberation which suggested that he was seeking rather to convince himself than his companion. "Mirandol knows that I suspect his house. I visited him to show him that I did. I spoke of the wheel marks in the road to show him that I did. I dropped the mask in the road to show him that I did. And his trembling hands acknowledged that he knew it. They dare not commit another crime in that house now. If that young lady is there, they will try to get her away. They will try tonight."

"They will take her to the river," cried Ricardo, and Hanaud shot the queerest glance at him, and shivered.

The movement of fear, so intense, so utterly strange in just that one man, threw Ricardo into a panic. "We ought to go at once," he exclaimed, starting up. "We waste invaluable minutes over the delicacies of the table," and in disgust he pushed away his empty glass of fine champagne.

"You are wrong, my friend," said Hanaud gravely. He seemed to cast about for excuses. "It is barely eight o'clock. If we start in your car now, we shall reach the Château Mirandol before half-past nine. Too early! The neighbourhood will be awake. We should simply give them warning that we are at their heels."

They spoke of "they" and "them," Ricardo not daring to assign names, Hanaud, with all the spirit of his profession in his blood, maligning no one of whose guilt he was not sure. Ricardo recognized that the true reason for their delay had not been given to him, and lit another cigarette. But the dusk was changing swiftly into darkness. Beneath the great lime trees across the road the chauffeur switched on the lights of the car; and marvelling at his companion's patience, Mr. Ricardo twitched in every limb.

Then an obstacle occurred to him which would surely spoil all their plans. Yesterday Hanaud had made clear to the Vicomte de Mirandol that he suspected that long white house of his. But he had no right to do more. He had confessed it.

"You had no authority to enter the house yesterday?" he asked.

"None," replied Hanaud.

"Do you think that de Mirandol, who did not invite you into it yesterday, will be more likely to do so tonight?"

"Less likely," Hanaud returned.

"Then you have authority now?"

"Yes. Even if I had not, I should assume that I had."

"Isn't that a risk for you?"

"But it is one that I have made up my mind to take."

"Since when?"

"Since I have learnt why the Vicomte Cassandre de Mirandol was painting his gate with his own hands."

Mr. Ricardo had to be content with an explanation which to him at all events was no explanation at all. Hanaud shut tight like an oyster. Not an answer to any conjecture, not a comment upon any theory. He just sat and smoked and smoked, lighting a fresh cigar from the stump of the old one, placid, unperturbed, a man enjoying the quiet digestion of an excellent dinner. To all appearances? No, to almost all. Mr. Ricardo would have been so tortured by exasperation that he must have flung reproaches, prayers, objurgations and threats in one incoherent spate across the table but for a lesson which he had learned on the day before. For though Hanaud smoked and smoked, and the disc of red waxed and waned at the end of his cigar with the regularity of a machine, his hands trembled from time to time even as de Mirandol's had trembled when he was stooping at his gate.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, and all his agitation was revealed in that spasmodic movement.

"Here is, I think, someone for me."

A *sergent-de-ville* was walking at a stiff pace from the direction of the Cours 30th of July. Hanaud leaned out of the window and the sergeant came straight to him.

"Monsieur Hanaud?"

"Yes. Give it to me."

The sergeant handed in the note through the window. Hanaud tore open the envelope and read, whilst Mr. Ricardo studied the changing expressions of his face. The note was fairly long though hurriedly written, and the expressions, beginning with disappointment, melted into boredom, graduated into perplexity and ended

in laughter. Mr. Ricardo was never more startled. Hanaud was laughing aloud—he who ten minutes ago had shuddered. He was laughing pleasantly and happily. He was amused and he was glad. The full-throated roll of the laughter struck upon Mr. Ricardo's ears as something quite unfamiliar and odd. And he realized with a shock that for two whole days he had heard no one laugh until this moment.

"You have good news at last," he cried.

Hanaud shrugged his shoulders. "It is not the sort of news you would write to the house."

"What house?" asked Ricardo in perplexity.

"But your house, of course, my friend," Hanaud returned.

Julius Ricardo reflected and saw light. "I've got it," he announced resignedly. "It's not news to write home about, you mean."

"Mean?" Hanaud inquired indignantly. "It was what I said."

"Oh, very well! You said it! Now may I hear it?"

"Certainly! There has arrived yet another visitor from London. He, too, read the evening paper. He crossed by the night boat and caught the Sud Express from Paris. The Sud Express is late. Very well, he will write to The Times about it. He drives from the station to the Prefecture. Where is the Prefect? The newspaper says that Hanaud is on the case. Very well, then! Where is Hanaud? Goddam, where is everybody? Oh, I tell you again, he will make money in the City—that young man."

"Bryce Carter," Julius Ricardo exclaimed. "He is here?"

"Yes; the Knight of the Burning Letters. Oho! I have still to blow on my fingers when I think of them—so! He takes charge of the Prefecture of Bordeaux. They dare not tell him that Hanaud is eating his dinner. No, for he break up everything if they do. No! But, Goddam, Moreau is a clever fellow. He tells him Hanaud is disguised. Hush! That helps a bit. Hanaud is wearing a beard! What a blessing! Hanaud is once more the Cheka King! So Moreau sends him to your fine hotel on the Cours de l'Intendance and promises him a note from me if only he will not break up the town. Aha, we must write him a little note. Georges," he called to the proprietor, "some ink! What shall I write, my friend? A little dose of morphia, eh?" and with that his hilarity ceased and he sat gloomily nodding at his companion.

"Not so easy to concoct—that little dose of morphia—"

He wrote and tore up the sheet on which he had written. "That promises too much." He wrote a second time and tore that sheet up too. "That does not even hint a promise of anything at all, and he has come so far." He smiled ruefully and scratched his head, and set to work again. "So! And I underline those words. So! See—I write this:

> *Some time before morning I come to you. Meanwhile it is wise to put on the clean collar and shave.*
>
> *Hanaud.*

And I underline the clean collar and the shave. What do you think?" and he leaned back asking for admiration with every crease of his waistcoat.

"It is not so bad," Ricardo approved indulgently.

"It is very good," said Hanaud with simplicity. He put the letter in the envelope, and fastening it down, addressed it and handed it to the *sergent-de-ville*. "It is a pleasant touch. That young man rushing across England and France to bully the Prefecture of Bordeaux. Where is that lazy-bones Hanaud? Why isn't he waiting for me on the steps? Goddam! Yes, it is a pleasant touch, and I tell you"—he lit again the cigar which whilst concocting his little dose of morphia he had allowed to go out—"I tell you, we shall need all the pleasant little touches we can find when this dark and ugly story comes to be told from its beginning to its end."

He relapsed once more into silence. The river was running grey now. The dusk deepened into night. The red and green lights on the great pillars of the *Place des Quinconces* by the quay glowed into significance. Under the limes the lamps of Ricardo's motor-car shone bright. Once or twice Hanaud looked towards them. Almost he had made up his mind to wait no longer. But each time he caught himself back. "I must be right," he said in a low voice; and now not only his hands, but his voice shook to keep them company. Ricardo had never seen him torn by so much doubt or plunged in a distress so deep. A dreadful responsibility weighed upon him and set him now to shuffling his feet upon the floor, now to beating upon the table with his fist. "I said at the beginning that I shrank from this affair," he muttered, and then with an exclamation of relief he pushed back his chair and ran out on to the pavement. A

man was running towards him, a short, stocky, broad man, Moreau.

"At last!" said Mr. Ricardo. He waved his hand to his chauffeur, who climbed down from his seat and opened the door of the limousine. He took down his hat. "Now we shall go," he said, and he hurried to the car. But he looked back, and to his amazement the two men, the chief and his assistant, with their heads close together, were slowly pacing the dark avenue. The door of the car was open, the engine running, night had come, the Château Mirandol was fifty kilometres away—and there they were palavering. Ricardo could have screamed with indignation.

"Wonderful!" he cried, bitterly appealing to the world with outspread arms. "Miraculous! Do they think that I have no nerves—?"

His invocation was cut short. Hanaud turned and ran towards him, with Moreau at his heels.

"Quick!" he said in a whisper, and there was a thrill of excitement in his voice.

He bundled Ricardo unceremoniously into the car, and jumped in after him. Moreau took the seat beside the chauffeur and the car glided out from beneath the trees. At the top of the square it turned to the left. At once Mr. Ricardo was in a state of extreme agitation.

"He is wrong. He should turn to the right for the *Rue de Medoc*," and he leaned across Hanaud to seize the speaking-tube. But Hanaud already held it.

"He is right. He should turn to the left for the *Rue Gregoire*," said Hanaud.

The car glided without noise or effort down the long, straight street, left the great clustered lights behind it, and came into a cool gloom of narrower ways and shuttered houses. It turned to the right and again to the left. A wide space opened out. On one side of it the mass of a great church loomed immense and black. In the middle a great tower shot upwards like a giant's spear, and the top of it was lost in darkness. By the side of that tower the car stopped.

"The tower of St. Michel," Mr. Ricardo whispered.

"Quick!" said Hanaud. "We have not a moment to lose."

At the very spot where Ricardo had stood when he had hesitated at the entrance to the Cave of the Mummies, ages and ages ago, it seemed, this party of pursuit descended.

"Keep close to me," Hanaud breathed, "and not a word."

He crossed the square to the mouth of a little street. A gendarme stood near a lamp, the light shining upon his accoutrements. He did not shift from his position. Hanaud and his company were engulfed in the street. It was short and straight. At the far end the lights of the quay were visible. But here the houses, squalid and forbidding and black, rose to so high a level that they seemed to be walking in a cavern. Suddenly two men seemed to spring from the stones of a wall and closed in behind them.

"Not a sound," whispered Hanaud.

Half-way down the street two other men emerged from the archway of a great porte cochere. "It is here," said one of them.

"The door," whispered Hanaud. For the great double doors were closed.

"We opened it when we saw the lights of your car," said the man, and at his touch the door swung open. One by one they slipped in, and behind them the door was gently closed again and gently locked. They stood in a vault of darkness. Once in the days of the greatness of Bordeaux, when a king held his Court there and Monsieur de Tourny was summoning the great artists of Europe to rebuild it in beauty, this house in the Rue Gregoire sheltered some wealthy merchant. Now fallen upon an evil day, the far end of its archway built up with bricks, in a street grown infamous, it stood noisome and decrepit, its grimy walls running with moisture.

Mr. Ricardo stood in the blackness of the pit, his heart hammering within his breast. He had clamoured for thrills and excitements; he was shaking with them like a leaf. He heard the tiniest clink as though one key touched another, and a whispered "Hush!" from Hanaud. For the fraction of a second, the pencil-light of an electric torch showed him the keyhole of a house door and one of the men bending down in front of it, and then the door opening.

"There is one step," said Hanaud, but in a breath so low that Ricardo's neighbour could not have heard it. Ricardo felt his arm grasped firmly and lifted when he reached the step. The air, hot and close and stifling, warned him he was within the vestibule. Once more Hanaud's voice breathed in his ear; "The house of the widow Chicholle!"

Chapter 19

Home Truth for Widow Chicholle

For a few moments they stood in silence, their ears alert, holding their breath. But no voice was lifted anywhere, no foot knocked upon a floor. Not even a board creaked or a door rattled in that old house. They might have been standing together in a catacomb a hundred feet beneath the earth. Then the pencil of golden light clove the darkness again, flickered over mildewed wall and discoloured ceiling, and shone steadily upon a distant door. Hanaud moved forward into the light and noiselessly opened that door inch by inch. He let it swing wider and went in. The others followed—Mr. Ricardo with a delicious thrill of fear running up and down his spine. At that moment he would not have exchanged his position for any other in the world. For he was dramatizing himself with a concentration so intense that but for some apprehension of Hanaud, he would have claimed the lead and issued orders aloud. He was his own spectator too. He sat in the stalls and whole-heartedly admired his performance. "The great ones of the earth!" he reflected. "Pooh to them all!" He had seen them or met them—more often seen them than met them, to be sure—and thought nothing of them at all. Which of them had crept at night with plain-clothes men into a house of infamy, searching for a—well, what? He stood stock-still and asked himself that question. The widow Chicholle? Yes, no doubt, since there was so close a cordon round Suvlac that no one could get through. But after all—the widow Chicholle? Were all these precautions necessary?

Hanaud had taken the electric torch into his own hand, and was exploring with its beam this inner hall. But it was rather a cor-

ridor than a hall, with a window at the end, a couple of doors upon the left, a broad staircase on the right, and close to the foot of the staircase another door of tattered green baize. But no sound penetrated from behind any of the three doors, nor did any light gleam beneath them. Hanaud opened the two doors upon the left to make sure. The rooms faced the Rue Gregoire, but they were both shuttered and empty. One of them was furnished cheaply as a sitting-room; the other was merely a place of cupboards and bare boards. Thereafter he stood for a while looking up the staircase and listening, it seemed, with every nerve of his body. But the upper storeys were as silent as this hall in which they stood. The stillness of death lay brooding throughout the house.

The door of green baize led to the offices and the kitchen, and here at all events they came upon signs of life, for a clock ticked upon the wall and the grate showed the dull red of an expiring fire.

"There will be good cellars to this old house," said Hanaud, and though he spoke in a low and quiet voice, to Ricardo's strained fancies it seemed loud enough to wake the town.

He came at the end of a passage to a narrow flight of stone steps which wound downwards into darkness. He bent his head, then turned it and shook it at his companions. By the light of the torch he carried his face showed white and desperately afraid; and the fear leaped from his face to the faces of all about him. For a moment they were numbed by the chill of an immense failure.

"But it must be!" Hanaud whispered. "It must be!"

No one contradicted him, but no one agreed. They even closed together a little as men will in the presence of some dreadful catastrophe. That tiny movement drove the dismay from Hanaud's face. He threw back his head with defiance.

"My God, but it has got to be!" he said stubbornly.

With three swift flashes of his hand he bade two of his men and Ricardo to stay where they were and the rest to follow him. Himself he moved downwards, but he was still within their view when from beneath their very feet, so close at hand it seemed, a piercing scream shattered the silence.

Mr. Ricardo was startled out of his wits. Panic seized him by the heart. He reeled back against the wall, gasping for breath. But he was astounded as much as startled. For his eyes were upon Hanaud's face, and he saw relief and triumph transfigure it. It took Mr. Ricardo a few seconds to reconcile that look with a scream of

such terror as he had never thought human being could utter and go on living. Then he understood. Hanaud was in time; Hanaud was right.

He heard a heavy door slam and felt it shake the house. He saw Hanaud leap. Behind Hanaud the whole party clattered and trembled, Ricardo and the two men bidden to wait, with the rest of them.

"This is the moment to disobey orders," cried Mr. Ricardo, with a vague recollection of other national heroes; and, "Attention!" cried Hanaud in a ringing voice.

The warning reached him just in time. For he tottered on the edge of a gaping hole in the floor of the cellar, and with a gasp recovered his balance. He recovered it to see a line of light beneath a door across the cellar suddenly vanish and to hear a heavy lantern crash upon a floor. Before the sound ceased to echo Hanaud was at the door. It was of thick, solid wood. Hanaud shook it; it was bolted. But there was a Judas at the level of the eyes to ventilate the cellar within. Hanaud tore it open. For a second his torch, held in his left hand, played upon wall and ceiling and floor. Then his right hand flashed to his pocket, something gleamed in it—a pistol barrel—and that hand too slipped within the Judas.

"Up with the hands—all three of you," he cried. "So!" Then he spoke to the men behind him. "A lantern! Quick!" A match was struck, a lantern lit. "Now you, the widow Chicholle, open this door!"

There was a pause and then the shuffling of feet dragging in carpet slippers across the flags. "The paws up, mother, till you reach the door!" he commanded. "That's better!"

He withdrew the pistol as the woman approached, so that it could not be snatched from his hand; and then the bolt grated rustily out of its socket and the door swung open. Hanaud passed through the doorway and hung the lantern upon a nail. He stood in a small square cellar lined with plaster which was flaking off from the brick walls, and no air entered it but through the Judas and beneath the door. It was at once stiflingly close, clammily damp. Shut that heavy door and close the Judas fast, and it was a dungeon as black as night itself. The woman who had unbarred the door had retreated to the corner at the right of the door, and crouched huddled with her companions. There were three of them, all women—a young girl with a sullen face and jet-black hair who crouched on the ground, a woman of middle age, broad and big and strong as a man, with hands covered with clay, and the widow

Chicholle herself, a ghoul of a woman with eyes sunk deep in a face which was splashed with black as though even before her death her body had begun to corrupt. Though she shuffled in carpet slippers, she wore an old dress of black silk, as the "*patronne*" of such a house should, and in spite of its shabbiness, with its trimmings and bugles of a past day, it added a nightmare touch of incongruity to the scene.

"I have done her no harm, m'sieu," she whined, and, "You can see."

"No, indeed! You have given her a fine boudoir to rest in whilst her bedroom was being prepared next door, eh, widow?" Hanaud cried with a savage irony, and the old woman shrank from him whimpering excuses and promises.

"Ah, there are others high up in the world more to blame than me! Come now! I am a poor woman , . and ignorant too—What should I do when those great ones order me—terrify me—? Oh, I shall tell you about them—very sure, I shall tell you—They are wicked ones, trust me—" And with a snarl Hanaud cut her short.

"And that?" he cried, thrusting out his arm. Over his shoulder Mr. Ricardo saw a noose and a foot or so of rope dangling from a hook driven into the low ceiling to hold a lamp. "That pretty necklace goes very well with the boudoir! A present for a good girl, eh, widow? Monsieur!" and he turned to a man in the doorway who waited with an air of authority. "Those animals are for you."

As this man and two of his assistants filed into the cellar and surrounded the three women, the corner opposite to the door became visible to Mr. Ricardo; and in that corner, as far as possible from the widow Chicholle and her confederates, huddled against the wall, stood Joyce Whipple.

And in such strange guise that Mr. Ricardo was toppled from amazement to amazement. Was he standing on his head or on his heels? Verily, the whole world was upside down. The odd fact, to be sure, that Joyce Whipple had left her glittering frock behind on the night when she had disappeared was now accounted for. But it was only accounted for by a circumstance still more unaccountable. Joyce was dressed now in what seemed to Mr. Ricardo a boy's Sunday suit of black velvet, knee breeches, black silk stockings and all. Certainly the black satin shoes she was wearing were her own—the imprints in the garden of Suvlac had demonstrated that. But the meaning of her masquerade was quite unintelligible to Mr. Ricardo. To make her attire still more remarkable she wore over the velvet suit a sort of short surcoat of a scarlet hue. It had no

sleeves and was cut low at the shoulders, to slip over the head like a jumper, and it reached just to her hips. A surcoat, such as pages wore in mediaeval days—yes, that was it—or a short cassock in scarlet.

"It is all very peculiar," Mr. Ricardo began to say to himself, but he looked at Joyce Whipple's face, and a wave of pity and horror swept over him which made him forget everything but the extremity of her distress. Her eyes, wild with terror, blazed out of a white and twitching face. She trembled so that it was a miracle that she could stand, and with her hair and her dress dishevelled and soiled with plaster and dust she gazed from face to face quite distraught. But her eyes lighted upon Ricardo. He was the only one in all that company whom she had ever seen before; and her eyes stayed upon him and recognition struggled with doubt and gradually mastered it.

"It is you! You!" she said from a throat dry and hoarse with thirst, so that though she cried aloud a murmur would have drowned her cry. Suddenly she stretched out her hands to him, and he saw that they were handcuffed together at the wrists.

"Take them off my hands," she implored, and she shook her arms so that the links of the chain rattled. "Oh, please! Quick! Oh, I shall die of fear."

But Hanaud was already at her side. "Courage, mademoiselle! See, it is done! You are free!"

"Yes," she whispered, separating her arms and joining them and separating them again, incredulous of her release. "Yes, I am free."

Hanaud removed his eyes from her to the handcuffs in his hands. He turned them over and bent his head down to them and nodded to himself.

"Moreau! Look here! And here!" He pointed to some marks upon the steel, and an exclamation broke from Moreau.

"They are the property of the State," he cried. "Ah! Ah! They are of an insolence, those fine fellows!"

"But it was to be expected, Moreau," said Hanaud very softly. "Let us not lose our heads! Handcuffs, after all, don't grow upon the bushes. No, when we want them to keep inquisitive young ladies in order, we must get them the best way we can. It was certainly to be expected, Moreau," and as he handed them over to his assistant, Joyce Whipple with a sigh slid down in a heap at his side.

He stooped over her. “Courage, mademoiselle!” he said chidingly; and Joyce Whipple from the floor laughed weakly and said:

“It is all very well to say ‘Courage, mademoiselle.’ But what is mademoiselle to do, monsieur, my friend, if mademoiselle’s legs give way under her? She can only sit on the floor, poor girl, and tell sad stories of the death of kings,” and her voice trailed away into silence and her shoulders bowed as she crouched upon the floor. She covered her face suddenly with her hands, and in a moment she was shaking from head to foot with great sobs like a child, and the tears were running out between her fingers.

Hanaud had been left completely at a loss by Joyce Whipple’s words, but her distress he did understand. He called for water in a peremptory voice, and when the glass was brought he knelt down by her side and put his great arm about her shoulders, raised her head and held the glass to her lips.

“Oh!” she sighed as she drank, and fearing that he was for handing back the glass before she had finished, she caught his wrist and held it fast with both her hands.

“More?” he asked when she had finished. “Oh, ever so much more,” she cried in a stronger voice, and now she laughed without hysteria and Hanaud laughed in sympathy. Moreau was holding a jug of water in his hands, and he filled the glass again. Hanaud stood up in front of her as she drank it, and with a movement of his hand commanded the removal of the prisoners. They were hustled out whilst she was drinking, but not so quickly but that she uttered a cry and, rising up on her knees, pressed herself against the wall.

“You are safe, mademoiselle,” said Hanaud, but she didn’t hear. Her eyes were fixed on the door through which the women had been taken and the dark cellar beyond. She knelt straight up, bruising her shoulder against the wall by the violence of her pressure. She shivered. She was once more upon the edge of panic.

“No, no, mademoiselle,” said Hanaud. It was an order that he gave her. “There is nothing to fear. It must not be!” And to Moreau he added: “See that they lock those women up in one of the rooms until we go, and send someone into the square to fetch Mr. Ricardo’s car.” He turned again to Joyce Whipple. “I tell you what we shall do. We shall take you in Mr. Ricardo’s fine car to Mr. Ricardo’s fine hotel, where a friend is waiting for you—”

“A friend?” Joyce asked with a frown of perplexity; then with a cry of alarm: “Not from—”

"No, no, no, not from the Château Suvlac at all. Will you please to listen to me?" Hanaud interrupted with an accent of the utmost testiness. "I dispose of you tonight. I am your goat."

"Your nanny, he means, Joyce," Mr. Ricardo explained, and they all fell to laughing foolishly and yet wisely. Joyce Whipple from an instinct that she must grapple herself fast to the light and trifling things if she were ever to repair the hurt and horror of this day; Hanaud because laughter would be the saving of her if it was kept on this side of hysteria. He was not very sure indeed of the occasion for laughter. Nothing that he had said could have provoked it. At an appropriate moment he had used an admirable idiom—that was all. But he was very content to laugh, with an ear alert to catch the first waverings of hysteria; and he kept the broad bulwark of his shoulders solidly between the girl upon the floor in the tattered masquerade and the horrid apparatus of her death. The noose with its short foot of rope promising slow torture and dreadful disfigurement dangled from the hook. But they laughed beneath it so that the walls of that deep-sunk, sinister chamber rang with a joyous sound which they could hardly have heard before. To Mr. Ricardo it seemed that their laughter was laying the ghosts of many crimes and exorcizing the cellar of its horrors.

"Come," said Hanaud to the girl. "I carry you since the legs won't walk."

He lifted her up on her feet and thence into his arms with no more effort than if she had been in very truth a baby. There were only the three of them now in the cellar. "You will take the lantern, yes?—and you will leave this cellar just as it is for Monsieur Le Commissaire, and you will light me very carefully so that I do not bump this young lady's head too often against the wall."

Mr. Ricardo went forward with the lamp into the outer cellar. He saw clearly now the hole on the edge of which he had tottered. Some boards had been removed, a shallow trench had been dug in the clay—a grave. And the thought that if Hanaud had yielded to his appeals in the restaurant of the "Golden Pheasant"; or if he had yielded to his own doubts; or if Moreau had been late in coming to summon them; or if that shrill cry of death by terror had not risen up from beneath their feet, the grave would already hold its occupant, set his heart sinking in his breast and filled him with an unforgettable dismay. He would himself have had his share in that crime. Remorse would have stalked him for the rest of his days, and his soul went out in gratitude towards his friend. Even now, he noticed with a smile, Hanaud so held Joyce Whipple in his

arms that her back was towards that open trench. She never saw it as she passed. The big porte-cochère was now wide open; there were gendarmes in uniform now at the door and in the street; the car, with its lights burning, stood beneath the archway. Hanaud carried Joyce Whipple out to it and set her feet upon the footboard and helped her in. He beckoned to one of the men in the vestibule to mount beside the chauffeur.

"So!" he said as he closed the door. "We keep you one moment. You are no longer afraid?"

"No," she answered, smiling at him from the window and drawing in a long breath. "But—"

"Yes? Do not hesitate, mademoiselle. Our little world is yours to command tonight."

"Very well, then! I ask something. I would like to breathe the fresh air, to feel it on my face, my neck. In a word, will you please have the car opened?"

Slowly there dawned upon Hanaud's face a look of real delight. "Mademoiselle, the car does not open. It is my friend Ricardo's car, and it does not open. No. I tell you. Only the better class of cars are made to open. Tomorrow I take you in my Ford and it will all be different,"

He turned back towards the vestibule with an impish grin at Mr. Ricardo. But he atoned for the grin the next moment.

"I have a little remark to make to the widow Chicholle. You shall hear. It will be interesting to see how she takes it."

Hanaud was spacing out his words, savouring them with a grim smile which only once or twice Mr. Ricardo had seen upon his face. In a fanciful flight, he had called it the coup de grace. He hurried back on Hanaud's heels. Hanaud would want him at his side if only to show him how wonderfully well he shot. Already orders were being given, and a key grated in a lock. A gendarme threw open the door of the sitting-room.

"Here, you! The widow Chicholle. Out with you here!" and the old woman with her white hair and the black hollows in her face came out into the light and blinked.

"You wanted me, monsieur? Yes? I am at your service. You will remember that no harm was done. A little fear—yes! That was all that we intended. Yes! No doubt it was not right and we must suffer a little—yes."

"I invite you to be silent," Hanaud cut in—oh, very softly. "Your excuses—you shall make them to the President of Assize—and no doubt he will listen. For me, I have a little warning to give you—just for what it is worth. You have visited no doubt upon some Sunday or other that very beautiful ornament of this town—the Cave of the Mummies."

"Yes, m'sieu. I have been there," said the widow Chicholle, with her eyes fixed in a desperate anxiety upon Hanaud's face.

"Good! I have in the course of my researches in Bordeaux today come upon a startling fact which cannot but interest you. This house is, Chicholle"—and his voice rang out a trifle louder, a trifle less soft—"this house is built upon that ancient cemetery from which the mummies were removed."

The widow Chicholle blinked at him, seeking for the meaning of his words. He did not keep her in suspense.

"Is she there?" he cried aloud, pointing downwards to the floor. "Is she there—Jeanne Corisot? And the others who have vanished from the earth? Tomorrow we shall see." And as he turned and strode towards the door the widow Chicholle screeched and dropped like a stone.

Chapter 20

The Face at the Window

At the door of the hotel in the Cours de l'Intendance, Hanaud jumped out.

"Wait!" he said to Joyce Whipple. "I borrow a cloak"; and in a minute he was back again. Joyce wrapped it about her and was led up to Ricardo's sitting-room. Hanaud had entered the hotel with her and Ricardo had ascended the stairs with them, and yet he had conjured into his hands by some magic, on the way, a plate of biscuits.

"Now, mademoiselle, you will sit here," he ordered, arranging a chair for her at the table, and setting down the biscuits in front of her, "and you will eat perhaps a couple of biscuits, whilst I make the arrangements."

He whisked out of the room, and was back again as swiftly as if his energy had annihilated time. Joyce Whipple was still at her second biscuit, and Hanaud calmly lifted the plate from before her.

"That will do," he said.

"No!" cried Joyce, and she clung with both hands to the plate. "I am hungry."

"It certainly is not much of a dinner," Mr. Ricardo observed reproachfully.

"It is not a dinner at all," said Hanaud. "But it will spoil a dinner. Will you let the plate go, if you please, mademoiselle?"

But Joyce Whipple shook her head with determination and clung still more to her plate. She looked so like a mutinous little boy

that Hanaud began to laugh; but still with one great hand he drew the plate of biscuits away, and still with both her small ones she clutched it back again.

"I am starving," she said with a whimper in her voice, and the tears in her eyes.

"I know, my little friend," he replied gently. "I know that very well," and his free arm went round her shoulders. "Now you shall listen to me and say how wise I am. Look! I engage a room for you—so, No. 18—here is the ticket—a room with a bath—ah, ha, you do not know, you are the chimney-sweep's boy. Also I order a dinner for you with a little bottle of champagne, for all of which Mr. Ricardo shall pay. And I borrow a nightdress from the manageress. The pyjamas of burnt orange—no! She lost them on the Lido. So you meet your friend for a minute—here. Then you get all white again in your bath. Then you lose yourself in the manageress's nightgown and get into bed. Then your dinner is brought to you, and perhaps whilst you eat it you talk to your friend. Then you go to sleep—oh, quite free from any fear, because I put a gendarme at your door. There is no need, you understand, for any gendarme. I only post him there because I am very kind and very efficient. If you wake up in the night and suddenly imagine you are in a less pleasant place, you have only to cry out, 'Are you there, Alphonse?' and he will answer, 'Yes, mademoiselle, armed to the teeth,' and if you say instead, 'Are you there, Hyacinthe?' he will answer just the same."

So Hanaud rattled on, striving to bring back some laughter to that wan face; and suddenly she did laugh and laid a small hand upon his big paw.

"Very well," she said, and she got up unsteadily on to her feet. "But you talk of a friend and again of a friend. Except you two I have no friends in Bordeaux."

"We shall see."

Hanaud went to the door and opened it and beckoned, and Bryce Carter entered the room. At the sight of him Joyce uttered a cry of astonishment.

"You?" She plumped down in her chair again and stared at him. "But when did you come?"

"This evening," said Bryce Carter. "There was a word about you last night in a London paper."

"And you left at once?"

"Of course. I came at once."

"Oh!" Joyce ran a grimy finger backwards and forwards along the tablecloth and her lips twitched and melted into a slow smile.

"That was terribly nice of you," she said. Hanaud glanced at Mr. Ricardo and threw up his hands in despair. There was no need for him to blow upon his fingers now. He of the burning letters—there he stood as unmoved as a pillar in a desert, with his "Of course," and his "I came at once," like a doctor. And there she sat looking at her little dirty finger and saying politely, "How terribly nice of you!" What a people—Goddam!

"Well, we go, Mr. Ricardo and I," he said, making his announcement as dramatic as possible. But it fell just as flat as his introduction of Bryce Carter. Neither of the young people asked whither he and Ricardo were going, or took the most fleeting interest in their movements. Bryce Carter stared at Joyce; Joyce stared at the tablecloth. Hanaud tried again. He smiled confidently at Ricardo as one who knew an infallible magic to attract a girl's attention.

"We go to bring back your clothes to you, mademoiselle," he said.

Certainly the remark had an effect, but not the effect which he expected. He awaited enthusiasm, and a show of gratitude. All that happened was that Joyce raised her eyes shyly to Bryce Carter's face and said with a little bubble of laughter: "He says that I look like a chimney-sweep's boy."

Bryce Carter looked at as much as he could see of her very seriously. Then he replied:

"I have never seen a chimney-sweep's boy, but I should think that he's right."

Hanaud was defeated. He rushed from the room, and Mr. Ricardo found him leaning against the wall of the passage, incredulity upon his face, his arms helplessly gesticulating.

"What a people!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Ricardo on the other hand had a different view. Discretion and self-control never failed to touch a responsive chord in his heart.

"It is not our habit to make a public exhibition of our emotions even under the most seductive circumstances," he said primly.

"I was wrong about that young man," Hanaud declared gloomily. "He has not the temperament. He will not make money in the City."

But a little cry rang out behind the closed door. Bryce Carter's voice, passionate and low, followed swift upon it. "Joyce! Joyce!"

Hanaud turned in a flash and opened the door. For the fraction of a second he stood, he in his turn like a pillar of stone. He saw Bryce Carter standing by the table and in his clasp the chimneysweep's boy, her arms tightly locked about his neck, her face buried in his coat. Hanaud softly closed the door.

"He has. He will," he said, sublimely admitting an error of judgment. "Let us go!"

This time the car slipped along the Rue Fondaudege and out by the route du Medoc. The clocks of the town were striking ten whilst it still ran between the houses. Immediately afterwards the interminable street fell away behind with an abruptness which was startling, and the car shot into the darkness of the open country. But in front of the strong headlights the road lay brilliant as a riband of snow, and the trees which bordered it continually met to make an impenetrable forest and continually opened to let the travellers through. Every now and then they jolted over cobbles between ghostly white houses, and left another village behind them; every now and then, too, the lighted windows of a bar fought with their lights for the illumination of the road, and vanished behind them. Hanaud sat very silent in the darkness of the limousine, and Mr. Ricardo was at pains not to interrupt his reflections. No doubt the great man was planning and planning and planning. Already a rare light or two showed that they were approaching Pauillac. The adventures of the night were nearing their climax. Suddenly Hanaud spoke. "I have been thinking, my friend."

"I was careful not to break in upon your thoughts."

"I have been looking back upon all that was said and done this evening."

"It is very natural that you should."

"And one thing puzzles me."

"Only one thing?" Mr. Ricardo asked enviously.

"Only one thing, my friend," Hanaud returned. "But it is one which you shall explain to me."

A series of little movements in the other corner of the carriage suggested that Mr. Ricardo was settling his collar, squaring his shoulders, pulling down his cuffs and generally trimming himself up to fit the occasion.

"I shall do my best. Speak, Hanaud!"

Hanaud accordingly delivered himself of his perplexity.

"To sit on the floor and tell sad stories of dead kings—that is an English custom, eh?"

"No, my friend, but it is an English quotation, when it is right."

Hanaud turned in the darkness eagerly. "Aha! The charming Miss Whipple—she makes a phrase in the cellar, eh? She use an idiom?"

"You may call it so."

"Good," said Hanaud with contentment. "I too use him."

Mr. Ricardo was never able quite to comprehend the professional mind which having made its careful plan and set it irrevocably in motion can turn to trifles whilst awaiting the result.

"Do you mean to say," he cried, "that all this while in the corner of my car you have been considering the preposterous question whether or no you will sometime be able to drag into your conversation an unusual phrase which you have just heard for the first time? You are approaching Mirandol. Dreadful duties lie before you—and you are trifling with an idiom. I don't wish to be censorious, but levity is levity."

Hanaud was altogether unmoved by this rebuke.

"A field-marshal, my friend," he replied, "once he has prepared his battle, and given the order to begin, may go and fish with his little rod for a trout. He can do no more. He cannot alter his strategy that day. So with Hanaud. His scheme is complete. His subordinates are carrying it out. Himself he learns an idiom."

He had hardly delivered himself of this immodest comparison when a lantern swung to and fro ahead of them, and with all its brakes clamped fast the car came to a stop. The headlights showed a stout wire rope fixed across the road at the level of the bonnet, and three gendarmes in uniform with a local inspector of police dressed in plain clothes. The inspector opened the door of the car and, seeing now who was within it, saluted.

"The Château Mirandol is surrounded. You will only have to blow your whistle and there will be assistance at once," he said.

"The Vicomte is alone?" asked Hanaud.

"No, the *Juge d'Instruction* has returned to him. Oh—Monsieur Tidon—he is ambitious. It is known that he aspires to Paris and

here is the case to lift him up the ladder. He has not let the Vicomte de Mirandol for long out of his sight today, I can tell you," the inspector observed with a quiet laugh.

"And what of Suvlac?"

"No one has moved beyond the grounds all day."

"Good!" Hanaud leaned out of the window and spoke in a whisper. Ricardo heard the inspector answer "Yes," and again "Yes," and then Hanaud turned his head towards Moreau on the seat beside the driver. "We will go in by the gate that was painted"; and as the gendarmes removed the barrier from across the road, he turned again to the inspector.

"There is no need for that wire rope any longer. Anyone from the Château Suvlac or Mirandol—yes, you shall stop him. But the travellers—now they can pass without inconvenience."

The car, purring like a great cat, slid along past the high iron gates of Mirandol on the left hand, and the plantations of Suvlac upon the right. It reached the arch and the house of Suvlac, the pink walls glimmering under the stars and not a light in any window. It turned down the slope by the farm buildings and the garage, crossed the pasture-land and ascended the hill. Fifty yards from the gate, Hanaud tapped upon the front glass and the car stopped. From that point the three men proceeded quietly on foot. The hillside fell away upon their right, the hedge of the Mirandol property rose high upon their left, and they walked by the faint gleam of the white road. At a corner they came to a gap in the hedge. Mr. Ricardo stepped forward busily and reached out a hand to the gate. But Hanaud snatched him back violently.

"Don't touch it!" he whispered.

"A little wet paint—what does that matter?" Mr. Ricardo returned in the same tone.

"There may be more than a little wet paint. Let us take care!"

He drew a glove over his right hand. But noiselessly though the party had moved, he had not touched the latch before a thread of light shot out, nickered over their faces and was gone. A man moved forward from the shrubs within the garden and opened the gate for them.

"That is very good watching," Hanaud murmured. "I thank you."

They slid between the high bushes to the lawn in front of the low house. At the edges of the thick dark curtains which were drawn

across the library window there was a trickle of light. But nowhere else. In that room there, thought Ricardo, sat the ambitious *Juge d'Instruction* keeping watch over the rogue whose conviction was to waft him away to Paris. He crept forward across the drive in the hope that at one of those edges where the light shone he might catch a glimpse of the interior of the room. What were those two doing? Chatting over a bottle of wine like two good friends? Not a sign that on one side of the hearth sat a criminal and on the other a judge with a knowledge of the crime? Or did they sit in a dreadful silence, one with eyes shifting from chair to table, from book to ornament, from picture to bright fire-iron—anywhere, so that they did not meet another pair of eyes; the other watching steadily, unblinkingly out of a face of steel. Mr. Ricardo had got to know. He crept close to the window and peered in; and then with a low cry rattling in his throat he leaped suddenly back. Hanaud caught him by the elbow.

"Hush!" he whispered. "What do you see?" But Ricardo had suffered from an unexpected shock, so strange a thrust of terror that he could not answer. His blood seemed to him to stand still and his belly to turn over.

"Look! Look!" he gasped at length, and pointed to the window. Hanaud, in his turn, approached and saw. And he too was startled. Standing between the curtain and the window, with his face pressed against the glass, and his hands curved about his eyes to shut out any glimmer from the room, the Vicomte de Mirandol stared out into the darkness, motionless like some old Indian idol. He was watching them as some late student, disturbed by the cracking of a twig in a lonely garden, might watch from his curtained study and, discerning robbers, stand rooted to the spot. There had been only the thickness of the pane between Mr. Ricardo and that big white face with the full, mincing lips and the bald forehead; and it had not moved. Ricardo had never seen anything more disturbing, more ghostly. He came to Hanaud's side reluctantly, uneasily. A foot away from the window the two men stood and stared. Did the Vicomte imagine that he had not been seen? That they were staring at him and overlooking him? No! For he did move, and the movement was even more grotesque and somehow more alarming than his immobility. For his face expanded in a grin which showed both the rows of his teeth and, lifting a fat finger, he beckoned. For a moment the heavy curtain swung aside, and both the men in the garden saw the examining magistrate leaning forward from a chair in the lighted room with the most baffling look of suspense upon his face. The curtain swept down again and hid the room.

But the one brief glimpse had given to Ricardo a new and vague idea of Arthur Tidon, the examining magistrate. The astute judge, sitting over against his victim, playing with him, playing David to his Jonathan until the police arrived? No! There would have been exultation in his aspect if that had been the case. As it was, there was suspense. And fear? he asked himself. No. Calculation, perhaps, but above all suspense with its parted lips and wide, staring, expectant eyes.

Mr. Ricardo's conjectures were cut short by the opening of the door and the great panel of light which stretched of a sudden across the white pebbles of the drive.

"It is Monsieur Hanaud?" The mincing treble voice floated out softly to the watchers.

"It is."

"Will you come in? Monsieur Tidon is with me. I was a little alarmed to see so many unexpected visitors in my garden at so late an hour. But you shall tell us all that you have done in Bordeaux."

"All? I have been very busy, Monsieur Le Vicomte," said Hanaud, in a dry, uncompromising voice. "Moreau!"

Moreau stepped out of the darkness, and the three visitors followed the Vicomte de Mirandol into the vestibule. But only two of them crossed the threshold of the library. Moreau remained outside the door.

Chapter 21

Mustard Gas

The examining magistrate was buttoning a glove upon his right hand. He nodded pleasantly to Hanaud and to Mr. Ricardo.

"Alas, my good Hanaud, you disappoint me," he grumbled ruefully. "I am no nearer to Bordeaux than I was two days ago."

"On the contrary, sir," Hanaud retorted, smiling. "You are as good as there already."

Tidon, the magistrate, was a little taken aback. "That is excellent," he said. He seemed upon the point of asking for an explanation, but thought the better of it and contented himself with repeating in an even heartier tone: "Yes, that is excellent! Ah, the Paris police! Nothing is hidden from it for long."

Hanaud shook his head. "Monsieur, the longer I practise my profession, the humbler I grow—" And of all the untruths, and the name of them was legion, which Mr. Ricardo had heard Hanaud utter, this most took his breath away and plunged him in a state of admiration. "For more and more clearly do I observe that the chief of our success we owe to chance and the mistakes of the other man."

"You shall try to persuade me of that tomorrow morning," said the Judge of Instruction very politely, and he rose from his chair and with his left hand he reached for his hat.

Hanaud did not respond to that invitation. He had come straight into the room and across it, and now stood with his back to the fireplace, and as far from the door as in that room any man could possibly be. Yet to everyone he seemed to hold the handle.

"You are going, Monsieur *Le Juge*?" he asked quietly, and Tidon stopped, and he had quite the air of a man begging permission to go, as he answered:

"My car has been waiting for me for some while—"

"For the best part of an hour," Hanaud interrupted.

"You must have passed it in the courtyard of the old château."

"We came by the gate which Monsieur de Mirandol was so careful to paint yesterday," said Hanaud; and Mr. Ricardo, realizing somehow that the air was heavy with stupendous events, but quite at a loss to guess what events, said to himself: "All this is very singular. Here is the chief, the very powerful Judge of Instruction, asking permission of his subordinate to go away, and here is a roomful of people turned into pillars of salt by the mere mention by that subordinate that he came in by a newly painted gate."

It certainly was extraordinary. There had been an extremely faint, an extremely subtle menace in Hanaud's speech. He lingered ever so slightly on the words, but he did linger on them, and both the Vicomte and the Judge were disturbed. The Judge was the first to recover his serenity.

"Oh, you came by that longer way," he said with a smile. "It took you past the Château Suvlac. Yes, I understand that you of all men would wish to see what was going on there."

"There was not a light in any window," said Hanaud.

Tidon the Judge leaped at that interruption. He had his cue, and like a good actor, he took it up at once.

"No. We provincials are early in our beds," and he looked at his watch. "Oh, la, la, la! I ought to fine myself. What will the good people of Villeblanche say, when Monsieur *le juge*'s car rattles home at so voluptuous an hour?"

"You have certainly not far to go," said Hanaud; and his words were the stroke of a hammer upon an anvil. The Judge swung round upon his heel, as though a masterful, invisible hand was on his elbow.

"Hardly a step, Monsieur Tidon," Hanaud continued suavely. "Hardly a step."

But there was no misreading the glances which those two men exchanged. One asked: "What do you know?" and the other answered: "I shan't tell you." And again one asked: "You dare to threaten

me?" and the other replied: "I dare to do my duty." Thus they stood staring at one another, and more than ever Mr. Ricardo was distressed to see how far the examining magistrate fell below his conceptions. Why, the whole hierarchy of the Law was coming down with a crash in a shower of dust like some old house which had stood a century too long. Oh, it wouldn't do. It wouldn't do at all!

"After all, there are some provincials who turn night into day," Hanaud continued. "Monsieur *Le Vicomte*, for instance."

The Vicomte was very unhappy at being dragged into the discussion. He smiled unsteadily. "Yes, yes. I work late at night."

"And not in your fine library." It was rather a question than a statement. "I am a little surprised at that."

The Vicomte, however, was in no difficulty about the reply. He replied, indeed, a little too quickly and complacently, like a man who has foreseen an awkward inquiry and discovered the perfect explanation.

"In the winter I do my unimportant work here. I am shut off from the wind by the trees. It is quite still here when every window is rattling upstairs, and warm. But in the summer I use my big room on the floor above. It is really, of course, a room for our literary and philosophical conferences. Oh yes, we have quite a small society in the Medoc and many people do me the honour to come out from Bordeaux to attend them. Women, alas! for the most part. I know that to achieve permanence one must reach the men, but that we minor people cannot hope to do. The ladies, however, yes! It would surprise you to see how many blue-stockings we count in this little corner of France—"

Hanaud broke with a savage irony through the smooth, mincing phrases spoken by that too small mouth with the too red lips.

"And amongst those blue-stockings you reckon, no doubt, the widow Chicholle?"

Mr. Ricardo had a fancy that the very hearts of those two men were between the anvil and the hammer and received the blow. They stood so stupidly, like dolls or like living people mortally hurt. Then the Vicomte felt the palms of his hands and wiped the perspiration away.

"The widow Chicholle?" he repeated in a faint and curious tone, but his lips trembled and the name was pronounced all awry. Ti-

don glanced at his friend and his eyebrows went up into his forehead, as much as to say "the man's mad," but, nevertheless, his face was deadly white and his eyes burned in it like flames. "The widow Chicholle?" de Mirandol continued. "No, I have never heard of her. It might perhaps interest you, Monsieur Hanaud, to see the room in which I work whilst the weather is warm. You will appreciate, in an instant, my choice of it."

Hanaud shrugged his shoulders. "Since you invite me, sir, there will be nothing to see," he replied, but de Mirandol would neither accept nor understand the retort.

"But you are wrong, Monsieur Hanaud. For once only, to be sure. I beg you to come and bring your friend."

He was all smiles again and civility. He threw open the door and recoiled sharply.

"I had forgotten that there were three of you."

"Monsieur Nicolas Moreau, my assistant." Hanaud stepped forward without the least eagerness. He was merely gratifying the wish of his host, had the air, indeed, of a man a trifle bored. Mr. Ricardo, on the other hand, was all agog. He felt that it was very likely that he would observe some detail of importance which the rest had overlooked. Give him a few minutes in that room to use his eyes and feel its atmosphere and he would pluck its secret out. He was in the very mood for subtle discoveries. The Vicomte led the way. The corridor turned to the left beyond the library and at the side of the house a staircase mounted to a small landing. A big door confronted them. De Mirandol opened it and switched on the lights. Hanaud and Mr. Ricardo entered a long room with a panelled wall upon their left hand and a row of windows upon their right.

Mr. Ricardo would not at first go far. He remained by the doorway. This long, low room had a message; from that row of windows upon his right the lights had blazed till two o'clock in the morning and then had gone out. What was the message? Mr. Ricardo emptied his mind of its preoccupations. He yielded himself to the room. Let the air pulse out its message, he would be the wax cylinder of a dictaphone to receive it. However, he received nothing.

So he looked about the room. There was a row of chairs ranged against the wall, chairs ready to be set in place for a conference or a lecture. There was a long table in the middle on which, at one end, were some books, a blotting-pad, ink, a great red quill

pen, and a pile of sermon paper by the blotting-pad. At the far end opposite to the door was a dais such as you may see in any schoolroom raising the master's desk and chair above the level of the floor. A table with a baize cloth stood upon the dais against the wall, and above the table were the doors of a big cupboard. There was nothing subtle, obscure, exotic, suggestive, bizarre or alarming about the room. It had no message. It was the very place for a philosophical conference at which the ladies predominated. Mr. Ricardo was at a loss. Here he stood in the centre of mysteries like a ship in the centre of a cyclone. On every side of him the hurricane raged, here in the centre was a treacherous calm. Never had he been so disappointed.

"You see the difference on a summer night between this room and the library," said the Vicomte de Mirandol. "It is cool and airy. I sit at my place at this table here. If I raise my eyes, I look through the open windows across Suvlac and the Gironde. I see the lights of the ships upon the river. I lave myself in the peace and the open spaces of the night. Thoughts come, the mind receives."

Oh, the Vicomte did not make the mistake of Diana Tasborough and admit a knowledge that Mr. Ricardo had seen the lights blazing at two o'clock in the morning. He was content to explain the blaze. He sat himself down in his chair at the long table, facing the window, and waved his hand to demonstrate the width and spaciousness of the dark open country of land and river and stars within his view.

"Wonderful!" he murmured. "Wonderful!"

"And from this table you deliver your lectures?" Hanaud asked from the dais.

"We pull the table forward from the wall and set a chair behind it," said the Vicomte. A smile spread over his face. "I shall make a confession to you, Monsieur Hanaud. I begin to live when I take my place at that table and see all those poor people at my mercy for an hour."

Hanaud shot the oddest quick glance at de Mirandol. "You begin to live, then? Yes, Monsieur *Le Vicomte*, you have said nothing truer, I think, in all your life. I understand you very well," he said with a great solemnity, dropping the words one by one and very clearly. Mr. Ricardo was conscious of a thrill of excitement. A scene of a very different kind rose before his eyes. He was seated again on one of the benches of the City Lands in the principal court of the Old Bailey. Standing in front of him was a celebrated King's Counsel, and addressing the jury over against him on the opposite side

of the court he wound up the case for the prosecution in a murder trial with just that clear deliberation and just that deadly use of simple words.

Hanaud raised his hands to the cupboard doors, of which there were two, meeting in the middle and rounded at the tops. Before he could try them, de Mirandol said:

"There is a drawer in the table and in the drawer the key." Hanaud lifted the edge of the baize which overhung the sides and disclosed the drawer. But he suddenly stood erect again, holding the baize in his hands and staring at it.

"The old cloth was so ink-stained and shabby that I was really ashamed of it," the Vicomte explained before he was asked for any explanation.

"So we put a brand new one on the table—yesterday?" Hanaud remarked.

"Yesterday—or the day before—or a month ago. My servant will know," de Mirandol replied, and ever so slightly his voice shook.

"Yesterday, I think," Hanaud insisted quietly, and now the Vicomte did not contradict him.

He took the key out of the drawer and unlocked the cupboard doors and swung them back against the wall. He disclosed a shallow recess, quite empty, without a shelf, and glistening with white paint. Hanaud delicately pressed the tip of his finger against the paint and drew it back again whitened.

"Aha! It is not only our gate we paint, I see."

"One idea leads to another," said de Mirandol with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, yes, white paint to green paint, and perhaps green paint to red paint, eh? I think red is the colour we give to our guillotines."

The Vicomte smiled in a sickly fashion. He glanced at Mr. Ricardo, deigning some community with him of breeding and good manners. Jests of this raw kind were to be expected from the police, and wise men would ignore them.

"You have seen all that you want to see?" he asked of Hanaud.

"I have seen at all events more than I expected to see," Hanaud replied, locking the cupboard door and putting the key in his

pocket. “Besides, we are keeping the examining magistrate waiting, and that is not at all seemly.”

He opened the door of the room as if he were the host and invited his companions to pass out.

“Monsieur Tidon has without doubt already gone,” said de Mirandol.

“I think not,” Hanaud retorted, smiling politely, and locking the door of the conference chamber; and he was right. For after they had descended the stairs they saw upon the wall of the main corridor the distorted shadow of the judge flung through the open doorway by the library lights. Moreau was still on guard in the hall, and Hanaud spoke to him.

“Could you find the inspector for me? I will wait here. It is important.”

Moreau saluted and went out of the house. The shadow upon the wall moved abruptly and then was still again. It seemed that the judge had an impulse to interfere and thought the better of it, and decided to wait. Nobody, indeed, spoke at all whilst Moreau was away. He had left the door open, and the soughing of the boughs in a very light wind filled the corridor with the sound of the sea rippling over a beach of pebbles. It was drowned by a tramping of feet, and Moreau and the inspector appeared at the door.

“You wanted me, Monsieur Hanaud?”

“Yes. In the room upstairs there is a cupboard above a table on a dais. I shall be obliged if it is sealed. Then the room itself should be sealed. You will need Monsieur le commissaire’s consent, no doubt. I beg you therefore to obtain it as soon as possible, and meanwhile to set a guard upon the door. Here is the key.”

The inspector called in a man from the garden and placed him at the head of the stairs, and himself took charge of the key.

“I shall see to it,” he said, and Tidon’s voice was heard summoning Hanaud into the library. Mr. Ricardo followed him as far as the door, and there hesitated, decorum and curiosity once more battling within him. But the examining magistrate, who was sitting in an arm-chair, gloved, his hat upon his knee, his stick in his left hand, invited him in.

“Yes, I have nothing secret to say. De Mirandol, you too, my friend! Will you close the door? So!”

The magistrate was very civil, but his face was white, and at times twitched as with some spasm of bodily pain.

"Monsieur Hanaud," he began in a quiet, formal voice, "whilst you were upstairs, I have been reflecting upon an idea which I have had in mind the whole-day. I am anxious, of course, in an affair of this importance not to be premature, and not to be unjust. But the time has come, I am convinced, for me to exercise my authority. I relieve you from now on from all duties in connection with this case."

Mr. Ricardo was dumbfounded! Hanaud relieved of his functions, disgraced, Stellenbosched, by a little magistrate of the provinces! Such an announcement bordered upon blasphemy, such an action upon sacrilege. It was an absurdity, too. Mr. Ricardo certainly had been forced once or twice to correct the famous detective and to put him on the better road. But the corrections had been made and Hanaud had triumphed. And here was a little Mr. Tidon taking it upon himself, in the plenitude of his ignorance, to snap at the great man's tail, like a Pekingese with a Labrador. One little sentence—that was all that it was necessary to speak—and the Pekingese would be scurrying under the nearest sofa for shelter. Mr. Ricardo, too, was the man to speak it. He seethed with indignation and chivalry. He would have spoken it but for the extraordinary grin of appreciation which broadened over Hanaud's face. Hanaud was delighted.

"I am not, of course, unaware of Monsieur Hanaud's well-justified reputation," continued the examining magistrate, who was himself a little taken aback by Hanaud's reception of his dismissal; "nor must he regard my action as in any way a slur upon his abilities. Certainly not! I shall make that quite clear in my final report. But this particular crime is of an unusual complexity and removed from those more obvious affairs with which the Sûreté of Paris is as a rule called upon to deal. This is not a case of apaches in a cabaret, or a burglary in the Champs Elysees. The social position of all the parties concerned makes it a case where the utmost delicacy must be observed. It must be sifted here on the spot at Suvlac. It was"—and the magistrate shifted in his chair. His voice grew stronger and took on a stern note of disapproval. His own words were wine to him, and gave him confidence. "It was a grave disappointment to me when Monsieur Hanaud removed himself to Bordeaux. I know perfectly well that he has a troublesome investigation there which requires all his time and energies—" Hanaud nodded his head.

“The case of the widow Chicholle,” he interrupted.

To Mr. Ricardo it was quite extraordinary how that old harridan’s name created a perturbation whenever it was mentioned. The Vicomte de Mirandol had bent under it like a stalk in a wind. Now Monsieur Tidon was shaken out of his wits. He sat staring open-mouthed like a natural, all his eloquence frozen upon his lips, and his hands twitching on the arms of his chair. The widow Chicholle was the testing phrase, the litmus-paper of the experiment. But as Hanaud had recognized from the beginning, Arthur Tidon was a man of a great force.

“Whatever the case may be,” he resumed steadily, “it no doubt demands your concentration and your presence. That being so, I shall ask de Mirandol’s permission to use his telephone.”

“But certainly, my friend,” de Mirandol exclaimed, rubbing the palms of his hands together. “My house is yours.”

The examining magistrate hoisted himself with one hand out of his chair. His words were firm enough, but his legs were shaky. He stood balancing himself upon his feet, and took a step forward. But the telephone instrument was at the inner end of the room, and between it and the magistrate stood Hanaud; and Hanaud did not move.

“Monsieur *Le Juge*, with all respect,” he said, with a deference which quite surprised his friend, “I beg you to tell me now the message you propose to send. I am asking a favour.”

“I shall do you no harm,” Tidon replied with kindliness. “I am going to telephone to the Commissaire of Police that your invaluable services are required at Bordeaux, and that I therefore with the utmost regret dispense with your services at Suvlac”—and he paused—“from this instant.”

And still Hanaud did not move.

“That means—I ask the question without impertinence—that the orders which I have just given for the official seals to be placed on the conference room are not to be carried out?”

“It means that I shall decide that matter, with all others connected with the case, for myself, and by myself. I invite you to stand aside.”

Mr. Ricardo was looking now for something heroic and of ancient times—the examining magistrate defied, if necessary dashed with a single blow to the ground. But he was in a country where the

grades of authority are sacred. Hanaud stood aside. "I regret, monsieur *le juge*," he said meekly. "I had a hope that you would return with me to Bordeaux tonight."

Tidon stopped in his walk and looked sharply at Hanaud. "It is you who return," he said with an unpleasant smile, "and I who will not go with you."

It was a strange moment, no doubt, to insist upon accurate words. Mr. Ricardo was a little puzzled by the Judge's pedantry. But he had the upper hand, and even in little things was disposed to keep it.

"It is a pity," Hanaud replied, and he began to talk in riddles. "For your hand really needs the skilled attention that you can only get in a clinic. And even then it will be six weeks before the wound is healed."

"My hand!" cried the Judge furiously.

"The right one," Hanaud continued. "It was obvious, when Mr. Ricardo and I had the honour to discuss the Suvlac crime with Monsieur *Le Juge* yesterday morning, that monsieur was in considerable distress. And the pain will get worse, steadily worse, unless the proper treatment is applied."

The Judge stood and sought to stare Hanaud down. But during the last few moments he had lost his predominance. His gaze was certainly imperious enough to quell an army of subordinates, but he had lost assurance none the less. He broke out roughly:

"And if I burn my hand, Monsieur Hanaud, what in the name of God has that got to do with you?"

"Nothing at all—if you burn your hand," Hanaud retorted coolly. "But you didn't burn your hand, monsieur *le juge*. You laid it on a gate two nights ago—you and Robin Webster too."

"A gate! A gate! The man's mad!" cried Tidon.

"Monsieur *le vicomte*'s gate, which he was so careful to burn clean and repaint yesterday," Hanaud continued imperturbably. "And indeed he was quite right. There was a sticky varnish upon that gate of which the chief ingredient was"—and he produced a blue telegram from his pocket and consulted it—"was dichlorethyl sulphide—"

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! He's quite mad," the magistrate interrupted sympathetically, nodding his head at de Mirandol.

"Absolutely," de Mirandol agreed, and Mr. Ricardo was leaning reluctantly to the same conclusion, until Hanaud produced the telegram from his pocket. Hanaud had sent a good many telegrams yesterday evening from Pauillac, amongst them one to Scotland Yard for the chief of a pharmacological laboratory in the north of England.

"More commonly known," Hanaud resumed, "as mustard gas"—and now there were no interruptions to charge him with lunacy. "The varnish was invented in the year 1917, when the fortunes of the Allies were low. It became advisable to know who the actual people were who forgathered on certain nights in a certain cottage on the west coast of Ireland. This varnish was spread on the gate, and everybody who went in smeared his hand with it. For an hour nothing happened. But at the end of an hour a sore began to spread. Under the best conditions, it takes six weeks for that sore to heal; so that identification became more certain and more simple than even finger-prints could make it. The same ingenious device was used upon your gate, Monsieur de Mirandol, two nights ago. And three people were trapped by it."

"Three?" exclaimed Mr. Ricardo, who had been listening open-mouthed and could hold himself in no longer.

Hanaud looked from de Mirandol, who was standing with his elbow on the mantelshelf, to Tidon, who had sunk down into a chair, and he laughed pleasantly. "You will notice, Mr. Ricardo, that you alone exclaim when I say three. The number is no surprise to these gentlemen."

The Vicomte turned and spread out his hands. "It is extraordinary," he said with a tremulous sarcasm, "that I have not a trace of this mysterious poison upon my hands."

"But how could you have?" Hanaud returned easily. "You went home from the Château Suvlac early and by the ordinary road. Of course you did! Early because you had your little preparations to make, and by the ordinary road because you wished no break in your habits to be noticed. The mustard gas was spread only on the little sequestered private gate which was used by certain of your visitors after all the world was long in bed."

"But three, you say?" Mr. Ricardo repeated. It might be very wrong of him to break into a discussion so official, but he had really got to understand this point, before other arguments swept it under. "Two—I agree—yes. Monsieur Tidon and Robin Webster—but the third? Who else wounded a hand upon that gate?"

“Evelyn Devenish,” said Hanaud.

Chapter 22

The Judge Smokes a Cigarette

Mr. Ricardo fairly jumped in the air when he heard the third name. He looked at Hanaud anxiously. How could he know? He was just guessing with more than his usual audacity, more than his usual self-confidence. But no protest broke from the lips of the two men who were thus arraigned. Tidon the Judge sat hunched in his chair, his face white as paper, his eyes pinpoints of fire. The Vicomte de Mirandol stood like an enormous flabby child detected by his governess in one of the crimes of infancy. He shook from the crown of his bald head to his feet, and little wordless deprecating cries were whispered and caught back and whispered again. And gradually the damning argument was unrolled like a parchment before Ricardo's eyes. It was to this house that Evelyn Devenish had come when all the world was in bed. In the conference room she had met her violent death; and her hand showed the same wound as the hands of Tidon the magistrate and Robin Webster the manager at Suvlac. It was for that reason that it had been lopped off after her death. A precaution had been taken, brutally by men in a panic of fear, not a sadic punishment exacted. It would never do to plunge that dead woman into the Gironde, however held down by lead, with the selfsame wound upon her palm as that which gnawed the hands of Robin Webster the manager and Tidon the magistrate! No, no! Bodies were recovered from rivers. Drags would certainly be used. Precautions must be taken lest it should come to light that, on the same evening, Tidon the magistrate and Robin Webster the manager passed through the same gate,

"As to Madame Devenish," said Tidon, who was the first to recover his self-control, "I of course know nothing. I do not deny, however,

that I used that gate two nights ago. Why indeed should I? De Mirandol is my friend. You spoke of traps, Monsieur Hanaud. Yes, but you set a trap for a stoat and a young pheasant loses its leg. Traps catch the innocent—"

What a change in a man! thought Mr. Ricardo. Five minutes ago it was, "Out with you! You are dismissed!" Now it was, "There are explanations. Just listen to me, and hear with what a tongue of sugar I can speak!"

But Hanaud was prepared. "Monsieur Le Juge, I beg of you," he protested. "I am, as you have pointed out to me, the subordinate. It is not fitting that I should listen to—shall I say exculpations?—from my superiors. But, on the other hand, the Prefect of Bordeaux has charged me with a letter to you. He, too, is anxious about this case. It seems to reach out tentacles. It is a very octopus of a case, and he is eager to hear all that you have to tell him."

"The Prefect of Bordeaux," the magistrate repeated. He stretched out a hand as Hanaud produced a letter from his pocket. He read the letter through once and a second time. "You should have told me at once that you had such a letter," he said sternly. "But it seems to me that you have dared to play with me, Monsieur Hanaud. I have yet to learn that a clinic and the Prefecture are synonymous terms. I shall certainly feel it my duty to represent your conduct in the proper quarter—just as I feel it my duty to respond to the wishes of the Prefect, and accompany you, even at this hour, to Bordeaux."

He carried off his defeat with an admirable assurance. Mr. Ricardo did him that justice. But it was a defeat. There was no longer any question of ringing up the Commissaire at Villeblanche upon the telephone and countermanding Hanaud's directions. He rose from his chair.

"You have this gentleman's car at your disposal, I understand?"

Hanaud bowed. "Mr. Ricardo is very kind to me," he said politely, and opened the door of the room. Moreau in the passage stood to attention. "Moreau, Monsieur *Le Juge* wishes to return with us. Will you direct him to the car? I follow."

For the fraction of a second Tidon hesitated on the threshold of the room. Did he realize that though the formal words were not spoken, he, the ambitious magistrate of the district, was really under arrest? Or was he already deep in some subtle argument which would clear him from all participation in the crime? Mr. Ricardo

could not tell. He set his hat upon his head with his left hand, adjusted it even with jauntiness, and went out of the room. A moment afterwards Ricardo heard his footsteps and those of Moreau upon the pebbles of the drive. Inside the room Hanaud had turned to the Vicomte de Mirandol.

"Sir," he said, "whether the law can touch you or not I don't yet know. Or whether it must leave public opinion to scourge you to the bone, as without doubt it will do. For the moment you are at provisional liberty."

Hanaud turned on his heel and went out of the house. He took Mr. Ricardo by the arm and led him towards the gate.

"I have one more anxious moment," he said. "We shall see."

The examining magistrate was already seated in the car when Hanaud and his friend passed through the gate. They mounted in their turn, Ricardo seating himself by the side of Tidon and Hanaud facing him upon the opposite seat.

"Switch on the headlights, Moreau, and look out," he said, and he himself, turning in his seat, watched the road between the shoulders of Moreau and the chauffeur. The car slid down the hill, crossed the pasture-land and passed the garage before the thing for which Hanaud waited occurred. A man stepped forward from the side of the road carrying a suit-case. The car stopped, the suitcase was handed up to Moreau, and Hanaud leaned out of the window.

"Did no one hear you?" he asked anxiously.

"No one. The ladies were still in the drawing-room when I went upstairs. I am sure."

"Good!"

The car went on again, swept round by the rose-pink arch of the Château Suvlac, and almost like some living person, conscious of a prolonged and strenuous task, settled to a swift, steady and regular progress along the road to Bordeaux.

The examining magistrate spoke with a mild interest in his voice. "That was a suit-case, I think, which was handed into the car?"

"Yes," Hanaud answered.

"From the Château Suvlac, then?"

"Yes," said Hanaud. "I asked the inspector upon the road to secure it for me as quietly as he could."

Then followed a few moments of silence, and then the magistrate remarked: "That is curious. It contains, no doubt, some pieces of important evidence."

"No," said Hanaud. "I shall tell you, Monsieur *Le Juge*, about that suit-case. It was very important that I should get it without the household of Suvlac knowing anything whatever about it. I cannot myself move until tomorrow. For I shall not know until tomorrow the whole truth of this affair. I may have my suspicions, but they are not enough. Now if it were known in the château that that suit-case has been packed and taken secretly away—it is very possible that the Law's work might be taken out of the Law's hands."

The magistrate was silent for a little while, and as still as he was silent. It was not indeed until the car had flashed through Pauillac that he spoke again.

"I should be obliged, Monsieur Hanaud, if you could find it possible to be more explicit about that suit-case."

"But certainly," he replied cordially. "Amongst us three there is no need for concealments. The suit-case contains some clothes for Mademoiselle Joyce Whipple."

From the darkness of the car Tidon asked quietly: "That young lady has been found, then?"

"Happily, yes," Hanaud returned. "One of those strokes of chance, by which it is my business to profit, led me to the house of the widow Chicholle in the Rue Gregoire. I was just in time."

"She is alive, then?"

"Yes. She has been roughly treated. But she is young. She has found, I think, tonight some compensations, so that tomorrow we shall know all that happened two nights ago at the Château Mirandol."

"That is the best of news," said the magistrate. "I had hardly dared to hope for it."

"You can understand, therefore, my relief," Hanaud continued, dwelling upon this matter of the suit-case with what seemed to Mr. Ricardo a needless particularity, "that it was secured without the knowledge of the household. Were it known there that Joyce Whipple was safe and that the whole truth must be known no later than tomorrow—why, as I say, the Law's work of punishment might be taken out of the Law's hands—"

In other words, there would be a suicide—perhaps two—perhaps even three, reflected Mr. Ricardo. For who knew how many of the household of Suvlac were implicated in the mystery?

"I understand you very well," said the magistrate, and again he relapsed into silence.

But as the loom of light began to show in the sky above Bordeaux, he said: "I shall smoke," and he felt in his pocket for his cigarette case.

Hanaud laughed with a very evident note of relief. "I have been longing to hear you say that," and a rustle of paper informed Mr. Ricardo that the bright blue packet of Maryland cigarettes was in Hanaud's fingers.

"I have a match here. You will allow me," he said. A scratching, a spurt of fire, for a few seconds a tiny creeping blue light and then the yellow flame; and the dark interior of the limousine became a place of wavering shadows with two faces brightly lit. Hanaud held the light to Tidon's cigarette, then he lighted his own; and for a few momenta the two men looked at each other with a steady gaze.

"I thank you," said the magistrate quietly.

The match burnt out and once more darkness fell. The two men smoked in silence, the glow of their cigarettes waxing and waning; and then Tidon's cigarette fell to the floor, and as Hanaud stamped upon it a smell as of bitter almonds filled the car. Hanaud let down the windows.

"Your mouth to the air, my friend," he cried, and Ricardo obeyed, squeezing himself away from the thing which now, shaking and swaying with every jolt of the car, lay behind him in the corner of the carriage. Already, however, they were traversing the city. A few minutes and the car stopped at the hotel in the Cours de l'Intendance. It was half-past two in the morning, and not a light was in any window, not a wayfarer in the street.

"Moreau shall ring for the night porter,"—said Hanaud; "You will say nothing of this. I am a servant of the law. I will not have it shamed more than need be."

"You executed him," said Mr. Ricardo with a shiver of horror.

"Better I than the man with the guillotine," Hanaud answered sombrely. He helped Mr. Ricardo out of the car and steadied him across the pavement. He placed him in a chair in the hall and bade the

porter fetch a tumbler full of brandy, and stood by whilst Ricardo drank it.

"Shall I help you to your room?" he asked solicitously, but Mr. Ricardo shook his head. Holding by the balustrade he walked, his legs trembling beneath him, up the stairs. Hanaud returned to the car, and a minute later the street was empty again.

Chapter 23

Mr. Ricardo Lunches

Julius Ricardo had spent a wearing day which would have taxed even a younger and more adventurous person; and such a shock had befallen him at the end that his sensibilities were quite stunned. It was not to be wondered at, then, that he slept like a log. Tidon the magistrate, the Vicomte de Mirandol, Evelyn Devenish, Robin Webster, Hanaud, the old, throned captious lady of Suvlac, the Abbé with the furtive walk, Diana Tasborough, even Joyce Whipple, who occupied the tenderest corner of his heart, thinned to the texture of gossamer. Away they went, carrying their questions and perplexities with them. Not one ghost haunted his pillow, not a question plagued him with dreams. He slept as boys sleep after a football match. Neither the brightness of the morning nor all the clocks of Bordeaux could awaken him. The hour of noon had struck before he passed in a fraction of a second through one of those excruciating nightmares which at times precede the actual awakening. Excruciating, because he could neither cry out nor move, but must lie like another Merlin under a perpetual spell. He dreamed that he lay in an inferno of acrid smoke, and that while Tidon, the magistrate, held his hand and pointed and said, "There! That is the place," old Mrs. Tasborough, delicately and without effort, severed his arm at the wrist with a fruit-knife. He sat up with a cry upon his lips and his heart racing. Hanaud was sitting by his bedside, with a black cigarette between his teeth and his fingers on Mr. Ricardo's pulse.

Mr. Ricardo, aware as he swam upwards into consciousness that he had cried out in alarm, eyed his visitor with disfavour.

"I may be old-fashioned," he said, flapping a hand up and down

in the air like the fin of a fish, "but I cannot endure any but the mildest of Turkish tobacco in my bedroom."

"Good!" Hanaud answered cordially, without, however, letting him off one single puff. "Then the more I blow the Maryland, the sooner you will rise from your bed."

The events of yesterday crowded back into Ricardo's mind. "You will want me," he cried. "I must give my evidence. A judge died by his own hand in my Rolls-Royce car. It is all most important. I beg you to retire."

Already Mr. Ricardo had flung back the bedclothes and rung the bell for Elias Thomson. He was on his way to the Prefecture within the hour, where, indeed, he had little on that day to do but corroborate Hanaud's narrative. He learnt, however, the actual mode of Tidon's death. He had carried a cigarette in his case of an especial thickness. At each end there was a tiny wad of tobacco, but the case was really filled by a glass tube containing a ninety-per-cent dose of prussic acid.

"I told you that he was a very clever man," said Hanaud as he sat down afterwards to luncheon with his friend in the restaurant of the ›*Chapon Fin*.‹ "He was ready, you see."

"And you knew that he was ready," said Mr. Ricardo.

Hanaud shrugged his shoulders. "I suspected it, and—I shall be frank with you—I was glad when he took the way out that he did. He was of the magistracy. The scandal will be enormous as it is when all the truth is known, as it must be at the next assizes. It would have been dangerous, had Monsieur Tidon lived to have received the sentence of the court."

"He would have been sentenced for the murder of Evelyn Devenish?" Mr. Ricardo exclaimed in bewilderment, and Hanaud hastened to interrupt him.

"Oh, no, no, my friend!"

Mr. Ricardo threw up his hands. "I am adrift in a mist," he cried. "I hear sirens and fog-horns on this side and that telling me my position, but the more I hear the more the mist thickens, and less and less am I sure of my position."

"Try this smoked salmon," said Hanaud, and looking round the great room. "On the rare occasions when a wealthy friend has taken me to lunch with him at the ›*Chapon Fin*‹ I am never quite

sure whether I am lunching in a rock-garden or at the bottom of an aquarium."

Mr. Ricardo was familiar with these disconcerting moods of this officer of the Sûreté, when, knowing everything, he would play the man of mystery. In a sort of desperation he cried out: "You shall tell me one thing. You shall tell me how you came to know that Tidon had damaged his hand."

"Yes, that will interest you," Hanaud answered with a laugh. He filled his companion's glass and his own with a Lafite of 1899. "First I had a little idea. Then your chauffeur strengthened it. Then you very wonderfully confirmed it."

Mr. Ricardo drew himself up. He spoke with a good deal of dignity.

"A certain amount of raillery, I expect from you. More! When you are hot upon the trail and I interrupt you, I know that I shall be leapt upon and gibbeted. I may not like it, but I don't resent it. I know that I am merely an elderly gentleman of no consequence, who has had the good fortune to become the friend of a very interesting personage. But when the whole affair is, as you tell me, over, and you are at your ease whilst I am dancing upon hot plates, I should prefer, I admit it, to obtain some relief from my perplexities."

At once Hanaud's big face clouded with remorse. "But, my dear sir," he cried, "no one could value a friendship more than I value this one I have the honour to share with you—I do not play with you. No! I tell you the truth!" He was pleading earnestly, a man very much moved. "Listen! We—you and I—we go to the Prefecture at Villeblanche. Good! We meet Monsieur Tidon and he takes us into his room."

"Yes," Ricardo agreed.

"He lays down his hat and his cane on a side-table. Good! But he keeps on his gloves. All through that interview he keeps on his gloves. Now I tell you. On the stage—yes, they keep on their gloves. Why, I don't know. And Monsieur Clemenceau—yes, he too. But apart from the actors and Monsieur Clemenceau, people in a room take off their gloves. So I wonder. Then a moment came whilst you were telling your story, a very curious moment. You speak of that room at the door of which you knocked in the dead of night. You say, 'It is Diana Tasborough's room,' and in an exasperation at the difficulty of the problem, he strikes his right hand flat upon his table. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"At once he turns his back upon us and his face to the window."

"Yes."

"He lifts his left arm and plays with the bolt."

That scene in the magistrate's room was growing clearer and clearer to Ricardo's recollections under the stimulus of Hanaud's narrative.

"Yes," he agreed.

"But to me, it seemed that he was holding himself up by that bolt. His body swayed a little. I had the clearest impression of a man about to faint. Then he spoke, and in a voice so weak and feeble that I cannot but pity him. And it was a long while before he turned round and showed us his face again. So I wonder all the more. And I remember that Robin Webster has a wounded hand. And when we reach the Château Suvlac I make an excuse to send you on and I speak privately with your chauffeur. Aha, you did not like it that I converse with your chauffeur. No, but it was well I converse with him. I learn two things—yes, first an idiom, which I will use in due time, and next an important confirmation of my idea. I say: 'When that gentleman hangs himself by the left hand to the bolt of the window, what air had he?' I ask him that, and he answer—now let me get it right—he answer: 'Gorblimey, he was all in. He looked for it.' Gorblimey—yes, that was good—I make a note to remember him, but the rest, 'He was all in. He looked for it.'—that I found, even with my knowledge of your tongue, a little difficult. So I have to do the examination, and I find the chauffeur means just what I expected. Tidon was about to faint. He had dashed his hand down upon his desk and was in such pain that he must hang himself to the window bolt to save himself from falling. There, then, are I and the chauffeur. Now for you."

"Yes, now for me," said Mr. Ricardo, leaning forward with enjoyment, all his dignity and indignation quite forgotten. He was to hear what a fine part he had played in this investigation. He was not very sure about it himself. But he was going to be told now.

"We were on the terrace of Suvlac, you and I. You look through the window and you see in the shadow of that room a man with his back to you."

"Yes."

"And you cry out in a voice of great certainty; 'The Examining Judge.'"

"Yes."

"But it was not the examining judge at all. No, it was Robin Webster. Now those two men, they are not so unlike one another. No! On the other hand, they are not so like one another, either. So I ask myself, indeed I ask you, if you remember, why you make this mistake with so much conviction. You cannot tell me. Nevertheless, I wonder. There must be some reason. And then I see. That poor man supports his right hand between the buttons of his jacket, just as Robin Webster supports his right hand in a sling. That little fact opens a world to me of conjectures and possibilities. The injury done to Webster by the wine-press—it may be—yes, no doubt. But I think it more likely that both the examining judge and Webster receive their hurt at the same place and in the same way. You see, I begin to ask myself, have I an enemy in that excellent examining judge? Oh, you help me—all through this case you help me very much."

"How? How?" Mr. Ricardo asked greedily as he helped himself to a filet mignon. "For instance?"

"In the little things and the big things," Hanaud replied. "For the little things you tell me of the great change in Mademoiselle Tasborough—how she, who had queened it in her small set, was now the submissive poor companion and did not seem to notice the alteration in her position. To me that was very interesting. The old lady of no account for years, suddenly finding herself in authority, seizing upon it, presuming upon it, becoming captious and petulant—that I understand easily. But the young queen with her fine clothes and her money and her houses, submitting to orders and reprimands—in these days—and untroubled by them—no, that puzzled me. The little pinpricks, the continual finding fault—they get on the nerves. One resents them more and more instead of ceasing to notice them at all. It was significant, that curious detail—much more significant than the fact that she had given up London in the season for Biarritz out of it. You suggested to me some very strange revolution in that Miss Tasborough's character, the coming of a great obsession. Yes."

Hanaud sat for a little while with a smile upon his face. Morning and evening he was in the habit of warning himself, "You have to deal with people, not with marionettes," and it was a very definite pleasure to him, when he was led to the truth out of a very jungle

of mystery by some curiously illuminating little sidelight thrown by a variation in conduct and character, which at first sight might seem of no more importance whatever. Mr. Ricardo, however, was not content to leave him long in this contented muse.

"And in the big way I helped you too?"

"To be sure. This Brie is excellent, isn't it? At the ›*Chapon Fin*,‹ whether it be an aquarium or a rock-garden, one eats well. So! Some coffee and some fine de la maison? Yes? And one of those big fat cigars which spoil the fit of your fine tourist suit. Good. I light him, and I tell you quick what you want to know. Else the next time you give me a cigar, I find a ninety-per-cent dose of prussic acid waiting for me within it. Yes, my friend, in the big things you help me. For if you had not seen the lights blazing in the conference room of the Château Mirandol at two o'clock in the morning, we should all still be adrift in the mist you speak of, and the adorable Joyce Whipple would be lying still and silent under the clay of the Rue Gregoire instead of sauntering in with the pretty nonchalance of her kind in her smart blue frock, her taupe silk stockings and her shining little decorative shoes, to take luncheon with her lover at the ›*Chapon Fin*.‹"

A very pleasant and friendly look lit up his face as he spoke, and Mr. Ricardo turned about in his chair. Joyce Whipple was standing just within the doorway of the restaurant, heeding no one except Bryce Carter, who was asking the head waiter for a table. The newspapers had not as yet any further developments of the crime of Suvlac to offer to their readers. No one in the restaurant, except Hanaud and Ricardo, had a suspicion that the very trim and pretty girl standing by the door was the one whose disappearance was supposed to be utterly baffling the police. Though there were signs to Mr. Ricardo's eyes of the ordeal she had been through in the pallor of her cheeks and the shadows about her big eyes, and in a certain gesture and look of wonder when she took her seat at her table, as though she could not believe that she was alive and free. But her eyes very quickly returned to her companion's face.

"We shall take no notice of them, eh?" said Hanaud. "Not a glance! Not even at those slim young legs. No! We leave them to talk, and I tell you they will not talk about dead kings. No, Gorblimey!"

Julius Ricardo let the uncouth phrase pass without a reprimand. If Hanaud had the ambition to talk like a chauffeur, that was his affair. Ricardo would not interfere. He was suddenly in pain. He had been pierced by the injustice of his friends.

There was Joyce Whipple at the table across the restaurant, her eyes shining, dimples coming and going in her cheeks, and not a thought for him. Had she or had she not told the story of her adventures that morning? Yes, she had. And Hanaud knew that story? He did. He had no doubt taken some action upon it? He had. Well, then! Here was the man who had helped kept in the dark. What a scandal!

"I do not even know who killed Evelyn Devenish," he exclaimed, spreading out his hands.

"To that I can answer," Hanaud replied gravely, "this: Robin Webster was arrested at eleven o'clock this morning on a charge of murder."

"And Diana Tasborough?" Mr. Ricardo asked.

"Oh, no, no, my friend. That young lady had nothing to do with it."

"In spite of that obsession?"

"Because of that obsession," replied Mr. Hanaud, and Mr. Ricardo was conscious of an immense relief.

"And the old lady on the throne?" he pursued.

"Still on the throne," answered Hanaud, and Mr. Ricardo, to his shame, had no feelings of relief or otherwise.

But at last he had persuaded Hanaud into a mood of disclosure, and his questions tumbled out of him, leaping and clashing and swirling like a mill-race through a half-opened sluice.

"Why did Robin Webster kill Evelyn Devenish? And where? And what did Joyce Whipple mean when she cried, 'It is not I who dispense the cold'? And why did the Abbé Fauriel cross himself and creep about so furtively afterwards? And what was it that you, Hanaud, discovered in Diana Tasborough's room? And where was Diana when Joyce Whipple snapped off the light and I rapped upon the glass door? And how did the mask come to be caught up in the tree? Yes, and a word about that tumbled bed, if you please. And how, in spite of your fine cordon of police, was Joyce brought to the Rue Gregoire? And how did you learn of her coming? And why did you seal up an empty cupboard, and a room with nothing in it but for a few chairs and tables? Yes, and since we are talking of the Château Mirandol, who spread the mustard gas upon the gate, and why? Give me an answer to some of these perplexities and then I have a hundred other questions for you. For instance, how did Joyce Whipple's bracelet find itself in the basket? And how—"

But at this point Hanaud clutched his forehead with his hands in so desperate a frenzy that Mr. Ricardo faltered.

"If you continue," Hanaud warned him, "in one minute I go blah-blah."

"Blah, one word," Mr. Ricardo corrected, the habit of accuracy re-asserting its authority.

"Well, blah, then, if you insist—though I should have said—well, let it go. More of your questions and I am blah. Yes, for just at this moment I cannot answer half of them. In two days' time, perhaps. Oh, you shall know all, my friend, never fear, but first let me get smooth and straight the history of this dark and lawless business."

He sat and smoothed out the white tablecloth with gentle sweeping movements of his palms, as if he were wiping away the creases and folds in the record of the amazing crime. Then he smiled a little and raised his eyes to his companion's face.

"Meanwhile I give you an answer to two questions you have not asked. Why was there something familiar and precise and pedantic in the utterance of Robin Webster? Aha! You jump. Yes, you had forgotten. And why was the flyleaf torn from some of the volumes in that queer little collection at the head of his bed? Aha! You jump again. Good! You do well to jump. The answer to both those questions is the same: Robin Webster is a renegade priest."

If Ricardo had jumped a little at the questions, he rose clean out of his chair at the answer. For a moment he felt his hair stirring upon his scalp. Then he slowly let himself down again.

"Of course," he said in a whisper. Then he lifted his eyes in a piteous appeal. "When I read a book, I must first of all look at the last page. I cannot bear it unless I do."

Hanaud smiled. "You have only, I think, to look across the room to see the last page of this book," he said. But he started as he spoke, and directed a warning glance at his companion. For Joyce Whipple and Bryce Carter were crossing to their table. Joyce held out a hand to each of the two men.

"I have only this instant seen you. How shall I thank you?" she asked in a low voice, but tears sprang into her eyes, and to both of them they were thanks enough.

"I shall tell you how," Hanaud replied. "You shall sit down and take your coffee with us."

But Joyce shook her head. "We hurried over our coffee, because I want to get back to my bed. I could sleep for two days," and though she laughed, she delicately yawned. It was as much as she could do to keep her eyes open.

"I have an idea," cried Hanaud. "You shall sleep for two days, mademoiselle. That is the time I want. And in two days' time we dine together, the four of us, at my little hotel on the *Place des Quinconces*, and then we tell, each in turn, what each one knows, and then this poor Mr. Ricardo will be able to sleep too, Gorblimey!"

Joyce Whipple looked a little puzzled, but as Mr. Ricardo was delighted to observe, she was too well bred to pass any comment on the unexpected ejaculation.

Chapter 24

Meaning of the Conference Room

A fortnight passed, however, before routine had finished its work and placed the woven pattern of the crime in the great detective's hands. Hanaud then sought out once more Mr. Ricardo and his fine Rolls-Royce car, and an hour afterwards the two men stood at the top of the staircase outside the conference room. It was eleven o'clock in the morning, the sunlight pouring in through every window and lying in great splashes of gold upon the floor; and the house as still as a tomb. For the Vicomte, still at provisional liberty, had gone to his lodging in Bordeaux, and only the police occupied this château on the Gironde. The broad linen bands with the official seals had been removed, but the door was still locked, and Hanaud, in his most vexatiously dramatic mood, took a portentous time to discover the key in his pockets.

"It was within this room, then, that Evelyn Devenish was murdered," said Mr. Ricardo in a voice of awe.

"It was here," said Hanaud. "Perhaps at—the very moment when you were looking out towards the lighted windows from your bedroom."

"I heard no cry," said Mr. Ricardo, shaking his head. He had not forgotten the distance between the two houses, but he could not believe that so direful a crime had been committed in that bright room without some message floating across the night's dark silence to call him out of his indifference.

"There was no cry," Hanaud replied. From his sombre certitude he might have assisted at the scene. "A moan perhaps, a rattle in the

throat, hardly even that—" and turning the key he threw open the door.

Like a good stage-manager he had prepared his effects. The long room was no longer a conference room though more than ever it was a place of assembly. For the leaves of the long table had been removed, and the table itself, dwarfed into insignificance, barely occupied a corner. On the other hand, the chairs which had lined the side wall were now ranged in orderly rows facing the dais, with a straight passage from the door dividing them like an aisle. But it was the aspect of the dais itself which riveted Mr. Ricardo's attention and set his eyes blinking. The table had been set forward from the wall, and in place of the green baize it was draped now with a black coffin-pall bordered with white. Upon the pall were laid out three great books with broad markers of crimson silk and gold clasps which locked, a chalice and a box of gold inlay, and two big golden candelabra, each with six branches, and each branch holding a tall black candle compounded of sulphur and pitch. The candles were lit, and burned with a blue flame and an evil stench. And a great crucifix of ebony with an ivory Christ stood upside down. Mr. Ricardo realized with a shock of repulsion that he was gazing at a horrid parody of an altar.

He lifted his eyes above the dais. The cupboard was open, its doors rounded at the top lay flat on either side against the wall, and the white paint, so fresh and thickly bedaubed over the recess on his last visit, had now with infinite care been scraped away. He was gazing at an altar-screen painted by a degenerate who had dipped his brush in nightmares. On one panel nude figures holding hands danced wildly back to back; on the other, deformities with white fat human faces to turn the heart sick, crawled and swarmed in a house of pain. The rewards here, the tortures there, and between them on the wall of the recess, a youth, a figure of sheer beauty, slender, erect, and white as a girl, with a face too delicate for a man's, and blue lustrous eyes which seemed to claim all other eyes and burned with an unutterable sadness. With a shiver Ricardo averted his gaze. He turned to the windows and saw the good sunlight lying broad on green vines and brown river and the white sails of ships. But, even so, he felt those blue eyes intolerably bright burning into his back, and bidding him turn and share their immitigable misery.

"The room, then, was in this array that night when I looked across from my window in the Château Suvlac?" he asked in a low voice, as a man speaks in a chapel. But he spoke still looking from the

window to the Gironde, and though he was unaware of it, his hands clung to the frame.

"There was one great difference," said Hanaud behind him, and for once Mr. Ricardo's curiosity was stilled. He shrank even from a guess as to wherein that difference had lain. With a movement of real violence, he unlatched and flung open the window and leaning out drank in the clean, fresh air. He was afraid now to know what had happened in that room. He had a glimpse into an abyss where loathsome creatures pullulated in a slime. He heard Hanaud move down the room and blow out the candles.

"Those three books?" he asked.

Hanaud answered with some pride, like a man who has just learnt a new thing. "They are 'The Grimoire of Honorius,' 'The Lemegeton or Lesser-Key of Solomon Rabbi,' and 'The Grand Grimoire.'"

Mr. Ricardo was no wiser. "What do they contain?"

"Conjurations, rituals. This," he said, touching 'The Grand Grimoire', "evokes the supreme Fly-the-Light by means of the Blasting Rod which drove Adam and Eve from Paradise. This," and he touched 'The Lesser—Key', "sets out the prayers by which the evil spirits can be conjured to harm one who is hated, and this," his hand rested on 'The Grimoire of Honorius', "has been held to advocate murder."

He had begun upon a satirical note, but it did not carry him beyond the first of the volumes. For the other two he had only scorn and anger, knowing the deed which they had been ranged upon that table to set off.

"And the youth painted on the altar-screen?" Mr. Ricardo asked.

"The lord of all evil," Hanaud replied. "Lucifer, Satan—another name too, Adonis"—and, as Mr. Ricardo started—"yes, Adonis."

He seated himself by the side of Ricardo in the recess of the window. "My friend, it is not always as a goat that the devil is worshipped. Even in the old days he was supposed to appear in silken habiliments, the young man, beautiful and cold as ice, who gave nothing in return for worship but disappointment. Adonis is one of his names."

Mr. Ricardo, however, was not thinking of that queer identification of the Devil with the shepherd of the legends. He was recalling the scene at the dinner-table on the night of his arrival at the Château Suvlac, when Joyce broke out in a little crescendo of hysteria to

Evelyn Devenish: "You needn't look at me. It's not I who dispense the cold." Mr. Ricardo turned himself about now and faced the picture of the marvellous youth, his sandals laced about his legs, his leopard skin girdled about his waist and his long spear in his hand. Wherever he turned the blue eyes seemed to follow him, unutterably sad, commanding his allegiance.

"So Joyce knew," he said, forcing himself from the contemplation of the appealing figure upon the wall. "Already on that night she knew of this room!"

"Something of this room," Hanaud corrected.

"And understood its rites."

"Again, something of its rites."

"As you did—at once. Yes," and Mr. Ricardo marvelled as he recollected here a detail, there another which had been, which still was, a mystery to him, and yet from the beginning had been lucid as glass to his companion.

But Hanaud was quicker to read Mr. Ricardo's mind than he had been any of those mysteries. "No, my friend," he urged. "You may turn Adonis into the Devil if you like, but you mustn't turn me into a God. I understood not the first little least thing about that saying of Joyce Whipple's. I was as puzzled as you—yes, until that hour when you saw me coming out of the Archiepiscopal Palace at Bordeaux."

"But I never told you that I saw you," Mr. Ricardo exclaimed.

"No, but you did see me. I saw that you saw me. There were you in the centre of the square standing with the mouth open and the eyes all poppy, saying to yourself 'Gorblimey!'"

"Never," Mr. Ricardo interrupted energetically. "Nor are my eyes poppy. On the contrary. In moments of agitation they recede."

"Gorblimey, or the words to that effect," Hanaud continued calmly. "I had spent an hour, then, with his Grace's librarian and I had learnt some things, I can tell you. Oh! Oh! Oh! Very disappointing, the Devil. Even the meat at those old Sabbaths was offal, and he himself spreading the cold of the glaciers about him." Suddenly he stretched out a hand towards the left-hand panel of the ingenious altar-screen. "No wonder they danced furiously, those poor people in their forest glades. No wonder the first in favour was the one who danced faster than the others. They had to keep warm," and again the note of satire died away. "Yet let us not forget. All these

ludicrous mad fancies led to a great crime—committed here—in this sunlit room in which we sit—as in other places they have often done before."

He looked about the room, reconstructing in his thoughts the succession of events, and resumed:

"I have brought you here not to tell you what happened. That Joyce Whipple can do far better than I, for with her own eyes she saw. But I prepare you for it. I made nothing of her cry, 'It is not I who dispense the cold.' No, but certain other things perplexed me. The fact that the Abbé Fauriel secretly crossed himself. Eh? I was interested. Then his vestments had been stolen—curious?—and the next morning, or the same night, returned. Aha! I begin to smell a skunk. Yes! Then in the room of Mademoiselle Tasborough I come across a remarkable thing."

"Yes," said Ricardo. "I am there. A picture of the Doge's Palace on the Grand Canal, though for the life of me I could not see anything remark able in it at all."

"There was nothing remarkable in it," Hanaud observed. "No. What I did see was that," and again his hand darted out towards the altar. "A crucifix with an ivory figure of the Christ hung above her writing-table against the wall with its head down, the feet up. I didn't move it."

"I agree," said Ricardo. "You touched nothing."

"You and I went on to Villeblanche, and whilst we were away the Abbé Fauriel called."

Again Mr. Ricardo agreed, but he was able to add a trifle to their common store of recollections. "We found when we got back that he was with old Mrs. Tasborough."

"True. But before visiting madame he had paid a visit to mademoiselle, who was still resting in her room. And he, too, saw that crucifix. She had not changed its position. She probably never thought of it."

"He came back to change it!" cried Mr. Ricardo. "He meant to change it secretly, to avoid the scandal. That was why he crept so furtively along the terrace. That was why you said the readjustment had been made!"

"Yes. The second time we entered that room I slipped the crucifix off its nail and set it to stand upon the table and against the wall,

as a crucifix should stand, whilst you, my friend, were probing the mysteries of the Grand Canal."

At another time Mr. Ricardo might well have taken offence at Hanaud's irony and repelled it with stinging words such as "Oh, indeed!" and "To be sure." But he was by now wrought to a pitch of amazement and perplexity which made everything trivial except the satisfaction of his curiosity. The amateur of sensations sat forward in the window-seat, his mind a-tiptoe on the most satisfying expectations. Even the question he was now to utter had its thrill; and he attuned his voice to the proper note of awe.

"So in this—chapel—on that night, the Black Mass was celebrated?"

"Yes."

"By Robin Webster?"

"By Robin Webster, the priest."

As he spoke, Hanaud took his blue packet of cigarettes from his pocket. Mr. Ricardo, on the other hand, was so startled that he almost put out a hand to restrain his companion from a sacrilege. And even when the smoke of the cigarette rose blue, turned brown and shredded away, spreading its pungent odour about this recess of the window, he had a feeling that an indiscretion was being committed. The next minute, however, Hanaud began to talk.

"A pretty affair! The old Sabbaths—one can understand them better. Poor serfs, hungry, without pleasures, in revolt against the great injustice which gave all the colour of the world to a handful of nobles and all the misery of the world to the rest. One can see them fermenting to ecstasies of blasphemy and abomination in some forest glade or old burial—ground. But the Black Mass. That's sheer decadence. The people of disappointed ambitions, those who have exhausted the normal joys and crave the forbidden ones, those who would sell their immortal souls for a new thrill, those who look to Satan for the gifts which Christ refuses, the whole body of degenerates with the blackmailers who live on them—criminals seeking accomplices, poisoners seeking protection—you heard the mother Chicholle. There were great ones whom she would betray. That's the spirit and that's the congregation too. Great ones rubbing shoulders with the witches of the slums, and all of them looking for their profit to Adonis there"—and once again his arm shot out with a big outspread hand denouncing the idolatry—"Adonis the Sterile."

"Really! Really!" said Mr. Ricardo, himself aware of the inadequacy of his comment.

"It was the Vicomte de Mirandol who began the cult here. An odd, exotic creature, half crazy with long vigils, a shallow erudition and a lack of recognition, he found importance and no doubt, too, a response to a thread of mysticism in his nature. Satan's agent in the Gironde! A position, you understand, full of flattery. It needed a daring man. He stood aloof, awe-inspiring, wrapped in wickedness like a black cloak. And he believed it all. And not he alone. From the days of Madame de Montespan and the Abbé Guibourg, the Black Mass has had its congregation. Ennui, yielding to excitement, that to the conviction that the unpardonable sin of The Revelations has been committed, that again to a savage glorying in it—like a child in a rage at being punished who mutters obstinately, 'Rakah, Rakah,' because he who says the word can never be forgiven. Tidon joins the brotherhood—Paris may be the nearer. Diana Tasborough becomes a candidate. Here a person of standing, there a woman of the town. Jeanne Corisot would hear of it. The very thing for her! And the mother Chicholle! There will be pickings for her out of it. For the people who use the Black Mass are people who want evil things safely done."

Gradually the pieces of the puzzle were fitting themselves together in Mr. Ricardo's sight. He could imagine whispers of the celebration spreading very quietly, very gradually, but also very certainly. The dark secret could not be smothered. And whoever had it would also have all the worshippers in the hollow of his hand. He or she could insist upon admittance; and the cult with its associates would become almost automatically an organization for malevolence and crime. Diana Tasborough's obsession, her insensibility to her companion's petulant assumption of authority, at once became easy to understand. What would even the most persistent stream of querulous reprimands matter to a girl possessed by the unholy excitement of a dreadful and forbidden creed?

"But, of course, the keystone of the whole black business was the fact that Robin Webster was an ordained priest. The Black Mass postulates the supremacy of God. God has to be lured and tricked into the wafer and the wine, before He can be made subject to Satan. Only a priest can do that. The celebrant of the Devil's Mass must be the celebrant of the Mass of God. The Abbé Guibourg, Gille Lefrance, Davot, Mariette—they were all true priests, even as Robin Webster."

"Yes, who was he?" Mr. Ricardo asked.

"A curious history. He belonged to the Gironde. His family goes back to those days when Bordeaux was English. The Websters grew vines and made wine in the Gironde as far back as the old times when Gaufridi was burnt for witchcraft at Aix-en-Provence. They fell upon evil days. From proprietors they dwindled to managers and not very successful merchants in Bordeaux. Robin Webster's father was the last of them. Robin the son was mistaken enough to believe that he had a vocation for the priesthood. Odd? But people are odd. There isn't anyone, if you could lay out on a plate the inside of his mind as a surgeon lays out the inside of your body, whom you could call commonplace. There's some queer imp at the heart of each one of us. He was sent to Beaumont College, officiated for a time at a church in London—he was there when his father died—wearied of it and went off."

"With Evelyn Devenish," Mr. Ricardo declared confidently, but Hanaud shook his head.

"She had predecessors. Ho, ho, that fellow! I tell you. With his white hair and his fine looks, and his air of a man set apart, and a suggestion of passion which his eyes would let you see for a moment, he was fatal. The women tumbled for him—"

"Fell for or tumbled to," said Mr. Ricardo amiably, "and it is the first you mean. It would have been preferable if you had meant the second."

For once in a way Hanaud was baffled. He stared at his friend suspiciously, fearing that his leg was being distinctly drawn, but he did not dispute; he swept on with his story. "So much information we owe to routine. But we should still have been in very great difficulty but for one thing."

"That bundle of letters in Robin Webster's room which you photographed," said the irrepressible Mr. Ricardo.

"This time, my friend, you are right," Hanaud replied as he lit another cigarette. "That bundle of letters told the whole of the curious little story of passion and intrigue which led to the sale of the Blackett necklace to the mother Chicholle and reached its abominable climax in this room."

"And he kept those letters!" cried Mr. Ricardo astonishment. But a moment afterwards he remembered a case in his own country in which letters just as fatal had been preserved. "Isn't it strange that passion should so mislead a man?"

"No! No!" Hanaud interrupted. "In Webster's room, I told you, there was another reason besides passion which made a man keep letters to his undoing. And I preferred even then that second reason of the two. It was cunning, it was a horrible kind of prudence which persuaded Robin Webster to keep those letters. All the passion was on the other side. He—with the letters he kept the mastery over a woman mad with jealousy. For they were fatal letters scribbled by Evelyn Devenish, some in that very house down there, the Château Suvlac."

At what precise date Evelyn Devenish and Robin Webster had met, Hanaud was unaware. It was certainly before Webster had introduced Evelyn Devenish to Diana Tasborough at Biarritz. But there had been a compact between the two of them that all letters should be destroyed on the day they were received. Evelyn Devenish, to whose foresight the compact was due, had kept to the bargain faithfully. Not a shred of a letter had been discovered amongst her possessions. And up to a certain date, when they were all together at Biarritz, Robin Webster had kept his word too. But there had come a time when Evelyn Devenish's passion grew exacting and even dangerous. The letters gave to her lover a hold over her. He could answer threat with threat.

"One side of the correspondence—his," Hanaud continued, "had been destroyed. He was sure of Evelyn's loyalty. No written page of his could be brought out of the ashes to convict him. He was in a position to say, 'I didn't answer that,' or 'I was careful to make no suggestion,' or 'All my letters were intended to bring Evelyn into a reasonable frame of mind.' On the other hand, he was in a position to say to her at any moment—and the moment was coming—'I have done with you, and you will kindly keep as quiet as a mouse, or I cause you aggravations and inconveniences.'"

"But after Evelyn Devenish was dead," Mr. Ricardo exclaimed, "the letters had lost their value. Also, it seems, they were dangerous to him. He would have destroyed them on that night when Evelyn Devenish died."

"On that night, as you will see," Hanaud replied, "the good Robin Webster was very busy. The morning found him still at his labours. Had it not been very necessary that he should hold a little committee meeting at the Château Mirandol with our dear Vicomte and that ambitious young judge, those letters would have been little grey flakes before we ever cast our eyes on them."

Hanaud opened the leather portfolio which he had laid upon the table, and took out a copy of the photographed letters.

"Look at this passage," he said, and he pointed to the beginning of one of them. It had been written at Biarritz when Robin Webster had returned to his duties at Suvlac. "Ah, the poor woman! One who loves and one who is loved. The eternal story." Mr. Ricardo read;

> *Dearest,*
>
> *I shut my eyes. I won't see—yet how can I not see? Whenever I have finished a letter to you, I begin another. I notice all the little things that happen, and sift them out into things which may amuse you, and things which won't. And every little thing which will, I write down at once, whether it is a book I am reading or some queer-looking stranger who comes into the restaurant, or some funny story, so that in two days I have a great long letter written to you. And all yours begin "Darling, since the post is going out in half an hour I am writing a line to you in haste—"*

Hanaud turned over a page or two and came to the last of them, a dozen in all. Passages in them were heavily underlined with a blue pencil.

"Read them in their order," said Hanaud; and Mr. Ricardo took the letters upon his knee.

Chapter 25

Evelyn Devenish's Letters

In the first of the marked passages, Evelyn Devenish, writing from Biarritz to Suvlac, reluctantly agreed to a marriage between Diana Tasborough and Robin Webster. "Of course she's in love with you. She has already sent Bryce Carter about his business. She can't talk for five minutes without bringing you in—I sometimes wish that you were disfigured and rather horribly, so that no one in the world except myself would willingly look at you—Oh, I'd make up for them! But we are as poor as rats, and nothing's any good without money."

Once he was married to Diana, there would be money to burn—for both of them. There was to be but the most momentary of suspensions in their own relationship. A whole code of conduct was laid down for him, and very authoritatively. Diana was to become a negligible apanage, a sack of money. If she suffered—well, all the better.

Already there were allusions to the ceremonies of the conference room. She herself had embraced the faith with the fervour of a Madame de Montespan. She would keep her lover by the Devil's rites, and at the same time reduce Diana to the abject position of a Mormon's wife. Diana was to be initiated into those mysteries. She was to be provoked by subtle appeals to her curiosity, her love of excitement. She was to be persuaded that she had committed the unforgivable sin. Remorse and the fear of scandal would turn her into a puppet.

Other letters, some written whilst Evelyn Devenish was away in Bordeaux, some even when she and Robin Webster were under the same roof and Marianne was used to carry them, described

the gradual progress of the plot. Diana hesitated, was afire now, terrified at another time. She stood at the edge of a sea, venturing a foot in and withdrawing it to the warmth of the solid sand, thrilled and tormented. Of Evelyn she had no suspicion. "He loves me, I know," she said to her. "Whatever he has done in the past, or whomever he has been friendly with, doesn't matter at all. And what he wishes—even that!—yes, yes."

Hanaud laid a broad hand upon the typed copies. "So you see the position of affairs. Both of these young women in love with Robin Webster, and both of them fooled by him. Evelyn Devenish will let him marry Diana Tasborough, so long as she keeps him for herself. Meanwhile he keeps her letters. Diana is certain that he loves her, and if he worships the Devil—well, so will she. And he? Robin Webster? He cares not a snap of the fingers for either of them. No, he is '*L'homme a femmes*,' and to be '*L'homme a femmes*,' my friend, means that you mustn't be touched by one of them. You must be without pity; they must be so many sleepers over which the rails of your destiny will run." He looked with a curious smile at Mr. Ricardo. "Did you know that one of the Devil's names was Robin? Yes. That, too, I learnt at the Archiepiscopal Palace in diving into some old books. Robin Abiron, Robin this and Robin that—Satan himself, eh?" and with another glance he nodded his head gravely. "Yes, I, too, wonder"; and then with a burst of violence: "If you and I, who after all have lived in the world, and outlived our youth and all its romance—if you and I draw in our breath with a shiver and say, 'I wonder,' is it strange that these girls, their emotions stirred, their nerves frayed, should say instead, 'I believe'? Look at this!"

He turned back a couple of sheets and showed to Mr. Ricardo a passage which had not been underscored.

"Remember that Diana Tasborough, who had befriended Evelyn Devenish, was being played by her like a fish on a hook. To what sort of passion must Evelyn Devenish have been wrought, before she could write this of her friend," and Mr. Ricardo read:

> *What do I want her to be? I haven't the slightest difficulty. The dog that runs about after its master with its leash in its mouth. I have never discovered a better image of humiliation than that.*

Mr. Ricardo gasped, as he read the contemptuous prophecy; and it was with a shock of relief that he realized that this could never be fulfilled.

"That's the position, then," said Hanaud, "when Joyce Whipple, disturbed by the letters she had received from Diana, puts off that urgent return of hers to America, and invites herself to the Château Suvlac. Inexplicable the queer visions which Diana's commonplace letters set passing so vividly before Joyce Whipple's eyes. Eh? Yes, inexplicable—unless you are inclined to believe that at times the other hidden things outside," and with a great sweep of his arm he suggested the curve of a firmament which was a prison dome, "outside this world, break through to punish or to save."

"Save?" cried Mr. Ricardo, who could not imagine how Diana Tasborough was to be saved from an explicit responsibility in the murder of Evelyn Devenish.

"Yes, saved," continued Hanaud firmly. "That you will see. But first, see how the coming of Joyce Whipple upsets the carriage of the pears!"

"The apple-cart," said Mr. Ricardo resignedly.

"If you like it that way, I make the concession," Hanaud returned amiably. "Read!" and he placed a broad finger-end upon a sentence, so that Mr. Ricardo had to push it away before he could read at all.

You stare at her, like a schoolboy at a girl with a plait down her back. You are troubled when she speaks to you. You jump when she comes near you. You look—silly—yes, silly, Robin!

And again, a little farther on:

> *She's not even pretty really. And she's certainly nothing else. She's green, Robin, a little green thing for a little green boy. Oh, if I thought you were serious!*

There it was. Robin Webster had met his fate, as people said at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At the first sight of Joyce Whipple the fires which he was accustomed to inspire seized upon and held him. He must give now, he who had only taken. Her image was impressed upon the retinas of his eyes so that everywhere he must see her. He could not hide his passion and he did not want to. It was a glory to him of which he wished all the world to know.

> *Your name upon my forehead and my brow.*

He shut his mind away from the whispers of prudence, and was blind to the spectacle of jealousy. Diana, indeed, moving with the bandage of her dreams across her eyes, remained undisturbed. She was no more aware of the new and enormous change in the disposition of the household than of her companion's petulance. But Evelyn Devenish was of another mould. Accusations, reproaches, threats, alternated with violent appeals. Finally the threats became one threat, the appeals one demand. She wrote:

> *It's intolerable. I don't want to threaten but you have got to do what I want. My necklace has gone and you know where and why. You won't find it difficult to arrange. I don't believe for a moment that she's going to America. She's spying. I am sure of it. I have watched her listening. She means to use her journey to America as an excuse to get away when she has found out what she wants, and then she s going to make all the trouble she can to save Diana. I am sure of it. But you can use the journey to America as an excuse. She is going from Bordeaux to Cherbourg, she says. You can drive her into Bordeaux the night before she goes. She hasn't any friends there to see her off. You must fix it up or I'll do what she's meaning to do. Yes, I will. The whole story—the Black Mass, our plan concerning Diana—yes, I'd rather pull the whole neighbourhood down with a crash and go down with it myself than allow things to go on as they are going. Do you know I went to the Cave of the Mummies today? You remember that boy? I dream of that—just that for her! It would serve her right for interfering—for throwing herself at you. You needn't think she cares for you. You don't mean the least little thing to her. We shall all be at Mirandol on Wednesday night. You can arrange the little that is left to be arranged there, and then on Thursday—she can go with you to Bordeaux.*

This was the last extract to which Hanaud called Mr. Ricardo's attention. He took back the copies of the letters and, replacing them in his portfolio, locked it.

"So there's the history of this crime up to the point where Joyce Whipple begins her story," he said. "Evelyn Devenish demanding the murder of Joyce Whipple under the threat of a complete exposure; Diana Tasborough in a maze of fear and excitement; Robin Webster at his wits' ends, desiring Joyce as he had never desired anyone, and solving his dilemma as he thought by one swift blow which would implicate everyone, you understand—Diana,

the Judge, Cassandre de Mirandol. Not one would be able to lift a finger against him. Not one but must conspire to bury that crime amongst the mysteries which have baffled the police. Yes, and he would have succeeded—but for the audacity and the devotion of your little friend, Joyce Whipple."

He stood up as he ended his speech and reached for his hat. Mr. Ricardo, however, did not move. He looked about the room rather sadly.

"I am sorry," he said. "I had a hope that Diana, somehow, would be found quite outside the crime. But since she was here upon that night—here in this room all ablaze with light—" He did not finish the sentence. But, in his turn, he stood up and took one last look about the room. His eyes met the eyes of the image upon the wall, and now could meet them. Hanaud's hand fell upon his shoulder.

"I shall put your mind at ease," he said gravely. "Diana Tasborough was not here upon that night. It was I who told her of the murder of Evelyn Devenish. Let us go!"

He locked the door of the conference room behind him and handed the key to the sergeant in charge.

Chapter 26

M to O inconclusive

On the following evening four people sat down to dinner at the corner table by the window in the restaurant of the ›*Faisan d'Or*‹—Julius Ricardo and Hanaud in chairs upon one side, Joyce Whipple and Bryce Carter upon the cushioned bench against the wall. The days were closing in. Already the lights were beginning to twinkle through the leaves of the lime trees in the Place des Quinconces. Mr. Ricardo could not but remember that other evening of suspense, so recent in fact, so immeasurably distant judged by events, when his motor-car had waited on the other side of the roadway and Hanaud had sat with his back against the wall smoking cigar after cigar and Joyce Whipple's life had hung upon a thread. Now she sat in that same place, her delicate face still shadowed by the ordeal of terror through which she had passed, her old look of competence replaced by a tender wistfulness. She was as spruce and trim as ever in her suit of chestnut brown marocain, but her great haunting eyes turned continually to the lover at her side, and every now and then her hand would rest upon his arm, as though to assure herself of his neighbourhood. A tall vase of flowers had been idiotically placed upon the table after the fashion of restaurants, so that no one could see his or her opposite number without cricking his neck. But by a unanimous vote the obstacle was removed.

"Now!" said Mr. Ricardo, all in a twitter; and the shadow deepened upon the lovely face over against him.

"Now we dine," Bryce Carter rejoined quickly. "It is a solemn moment. Without dinner, there is no life. We begin with caviare. That is as it should be. We are now upon the banks of the Volga.

We listen to the far-famed song of its boat—We wear blouses and peaked caps and we dance very uncomfortably in top boots. But all that passes. For we proceed to turtle soup. We are dining now with the Aldermen, and the Lord Mayor, and Mr. Recorder at the Guildhall prior to the presentation of the Freedom of the City to Julius Ricardo, Esquire. Strengthened by the fat of the turtle, we proceed to lobster a l'Americaine. In a flash we are on the pier of Naragansett. Someone is singing. It is 'The Belle of New York.' Good! Let us catch the matchless words and the exquisite modest voice: 'All the men follow me, when I go out for a walk.' What follows? A partridge. Good! I am behind a hedge and over the hedge a field of turnips, in which there is no sign of life. In the far distance a line of men armed with white flags. I hear a whistle. I say to myself: 'Take them as they come. Shoot well ahead!' I hear a multitude of wings beating the air. There are partridges on the ground before every butt except mine. I say to myself: 'Nevertheless I shall be given two partridges to send home to my wife, who, poor creature, in her blind devotion to her husband will say, "Bryce shot these!" and will have them stuffed and mounted in a glass case.'"

Joyce Whipple laughed.

"If I know anything about that young woman," she said, "she will, on the contrary, observe: 'Such wonderful birds can only be a present from my friend, Monsieur Hanaud.'"

Hanaud with a beaming face waved a hand under Mr. Ricardo's nose.

"That is how the persons as one wants them, talk. They do not make the difficulties about the idioms. No! They do not look the offence if I give a tiny order to their chauffeur. They do not search all I say for the bad taste like a customs officer looking for the silk stockings. Gorblimey, no! They say 'Hanaud,' so," and he wagged his head and kissed the tips of his fingers, fatuous as a second-rate tenor of grand opera.

In a word, Bryce Carter and Hanaud between them saw to it that Joyce should eat her dinner with nothing to distress her beyond the puerility of their facetiousness. But when the crumbs were brushed from the table and their coffee smoked in front of them and darkness had quite fallen upon the roadway outside, she began of her own accord.

"I shall tell you what happened to me," she said, "for even Bryce, who flies back to London on any excuse of business, has not heard

the story in detail—from the date of my arrival at the Château Suvlac. But I understand that a phrase I once used has caused Mr. Ricardo"—and she smiled very pleasantly at him across the table—"a good deal of perplexity. 'Cinderella must be home by midnight.' That was the sentence, wasn't it? It surprised him, because two American girls let loose on Europe must according to all traditions be multi-millionaires. But my sister and I have never had millions of money. Three years ago, indeed, we couldn't have scraped up enough between us to buy a baby Austin. We were both employed in a big library at Washington; and though we had inherited a tiny property at San Diego, in California, it just kept us decently dressed. We were workgirls. There was a head librarian, an assistant, and six girls under them who divided up the alphabet."

Two points of importance to Joyce Whipple's narrative were to be borne in mind by her audience. Firstly, the letters of the alphabet for which she was responsible were M to O inclusive. She had to possess, and did possess, a working knowledge of the subjects which fell within those letters. Secondly, Professor Henry Brewer, of the Pharmacological Laboratory at Leeds, came out to Washington whilst she was employed at the library, to serve upon an International Commission for the suppression of the opium traffic. His duties took him frequently to the library, and since opium was his subject, to the particular department in the charge of Joyce Whipple. The pair became friends, and when Brewer returned home he left behind him a warm invitation to the two girls to make every use of him should they ever come to England.

"Soon after Professor Brewer went away," Joyce continued, "oil was found upon our little estate and a well was sunk. My sister and I became—I don't say rich as riches are understood today—but very comfortably off. So making up our minds to see something of the world, we gave up our positions and crossed to Europe. But a year ago the well went dry. My sister was on the point of marrying and returning to the United States. I had to make up my mind what I should do. Our original plan had been to spend two years on this side of the Atlantic, and I had still money enough in hand to complete the programme. Of course, if I had been a really good girl," she said with a bubble of laughter, "I should have gone straight back too, and saved what I had left. But I wasn't going to. I meant to have my fling whilst I was young enough to get every ounce of fun and enjoyment out of it. Afterwards I would go back to M to O. I was going back this summer. The library was taking me on again. That's what I meant when I said to Mr. Ricardo: 'Cinderellas must be home before midnight.' Midnight for me was on the point of

striking. But I was more and more troubled about Diana, and I got leave from Washington to put off my return for another month."

She shivered as she thought upon the terrible days which that month had included, and then her eyes turned to Bryce Carter and she smiled.

"Yes," said Mr. Ricardo sententiously. "It is very true. The darkest hour comes before the dawn."

Bryce Carter stared across the table, sure that somehow his ears had misled him. But not a bit of it. Mr. Ricardo sat benevolent, complacent. He had interpreted in one concise allusion both Joyce Whipple's shiver and her smile. And time and again during the rest of that evening Bryce Carter's eyes eagerly sought his fellow—countryman's face in the hope of another and as satisfying an imbecility.

"I reached the Château Suvlac a fortnight before you," Joyce resumed. "I had invited myself by telegram, and when Jules Amadee led me out on to the terrace in the afternoon I found, besides Diana, Evelyn Devenish, Monsieur de Mirandol and Robin Webster assembled about the tea-tray. It was obvious after a very few minutes that they were there to give me the once-over—I mean," she explained to Hanaud, "to inspect me."

"The once-over is better," returned Hanaud. "It is a phrase of the fashionables in New York. Yes. From the Bowery? Yes. Good, I use him."

Both Bryce Carter and Joyce Whipple had moved a good deal in Hanaud's society during the last week or two, and just accepted in grateful silence his promise to use their idiom, without discussing the residential quarter of the fashionables of New York.

"It will be perhaps better to allow Joyce to tell her story without interruption," Mr. Ricardo suggested coldly, and Hanaud bowed his head.

"For the future," he said, and he had clearly enjoyed some further conversation with Mr. Ricardo's chauffeur, "I hold my blinking tongue."

"That is sufficient," said Mr. Ricardo. "Joyce, proceed!"

And Joyce proceeded.

"I was a disturbance, you see. Diana was nervous, with lapses into dreams. I was all at once a stranger to her. With Evelyn

and Monsieur de Mirandol I was at once unpopular. On the other hand, Robin Webster showed me a good deal of attention. I had the misfortune to come over at him from the first," and under Mr. Ricardo's cold eye Hanaud repressed himself with extreme difficulty. "That relationship continued through the evening. Two young men from the neighbourhood dined at the château, and we danced afterwards upon the terrace to the gramophone until eleven o'clock. Robin Webster was troublesome, for I really didn't want to dance with him, though he danced very well. And as often as I did, I could see Evelyn Devenish glowering at me. Once, indeed, when she was quite close to Robin Webster and myself, she refused brusquely an invitation to dance and, raising her voice, so that Robin Webster could hear, said: 'It is hot. I shall stroll down to the river.'

"She went down the steps, waited without turning her head, and then wandered alone across the lawn. Robin Webster took no notice whatever. His face was smooth as a mask. Diana, in the library, put on a new record and set it spinning.

"'You must leave me,' I said to Robin Webster. 'I am not here to make trouble. Please go!' and I nodded to where Evelyn's white dress shimmered against the dark grass. Webster's eyes followed mine. I have never seen a face so harden into contempt as his did at that moment.

"'She doesn't know the difference between being a man's master and a man's mistress, and she has got to learn,' he said. I recoiled from him, and at once his whole expression changed. He became piteous, appealing. 'You think that hateful! I am overtried. The last thing in the world I want to do is to make you hate me,' and his eyes slid over me from my head to my shoes—oh, odiously! He was making an inventory of me and my clothes. He said with a sudden passion which took me aback: 'You have only to say the word, and I'll give up this dance and go down there to Evelyn.'

"But I wasn't going to tumble into that trap. If I did say the word, I—how shall I put it?—I established a relationship, I almost put myself under an obligation. He could come to me and plead: 'The moment you told me to sacrifice myself, I did it. Now, when I ask the tiniest little thing, you turn me down.' No, nothing of that for Joyce Whipple. I answered quickly: 'I haven't the slightest intention to interfere, and you have danced too often with me as it is. I hate being conspicuous. Good night!'

"I turned away to Diana and told her that I was tired and was going to bed. Diana looked at me for a moment, as though she was not

quite sure who I was and what I was doing there. Then she waked up.

"'I'll go up with you and see that you've got everything, Joyce,' she said. 'I am delighted you could spare the time to pay me a visit here.'

"She slipped her arm through mine, and Robin Webster, who was at my elbow, afraid no doubt lest I should give him away, had the nerve to ask—oh I in the melting voice of a musical-comedy lover: 'But you'll come backl I'll wait for you here. This is a wonderful waltz. Strauss wrote. it for you and me!'

"Diana hurried me up to my room, barely glanced round it, and said, 'Yes, I see you have everything,' and the next moment I heard her running down the stairs.

"Now, I really was tired, and being a healthy young woman I should naturally have slept from the moment when I got into bed until Marianne trotted in with my coffee. But, you see, I had come out to the Château Suvlac with a particular object, and my uneasiness was not at all relieved by what I had seen that evening. On the contrary. Diana was so unlike the Diana I used to know that I was alarmed. I thought Monsieur de Mirandol quite impossible and Robin Webster quite intolerable. I had a feeling, too, though, of course, I might have brought that with me, that something was being planned against Diana and that my presence interfered with the plan.

"I must have fallen asleep whilst I was worrying over these problems, but so restlessly that a mere murmur of voices underneath my window was sufficient to wake me up. The moon had now risen and my room was so bright that I could read my watch without turning on the lamp. The time was a few minutes past midnight. The gramophone had stopped. I heard no sound indeed at all but these voices whispering and murmuring upon the terrace, and an occasional quick 'H'sh! H'sh!' when one of them rose upon a higher note. Then my name was uttered. 'She is staying for a fortnight. She goes straight from here to America.'

"I could not mistake the thin, high voice of Monsieur de Mirandol any more than the precise articulation of Robin Webster, who replied to the remark.

"'She will be out of the way. Diana arranged that she should have the upper room on purpose,' and quickly upon that came the 'Hush! Hush!' of the third voice.

"I sat up in my bed then. I should be out of the way. Out of the way of what? I listened with both my ears, I can tell you. But the voices sank again, and only the intermittent 'Hush! Hush!' reached me intelligibly.

"Good manners or bad manners, I could stand no more of it. I slipped out of bed and crawled on my hands and knees to the window. I raised my head very, very carefully and looked down on to the terrace. Three people were standing at the edge of the terrace in the moonlight, not exactly under my window, but a little to the right, opposite to the window of the drawing-room. They were Monsieur de Mirandol, Robin Webster and Evelyn Devenish. Although the gramophone had ceased, the drawing-room was still alight, and Evelyn Devenish was keeping a watchful eye upon its open door. She stood sentinel, as it were, with her back to the garden, and it was she who continually broke in with her hissed warning. She was not concerned with my window at all. Someone in the drawing-room was now approaching, now retiring, from the glass door. I, no doubt, was comfortably supposed to be fast asleep.

"I heard a day named and then another. 'Wednesday or Friday, of course,' said Robin Webster. 'The sooner the better.'

"'Wednesday week, then,' Monsieur de Mirandol answered. 'It will take a little time to let the right people know. I can have all ready by then.'

"But there was a note of hesitation in his voice. It became evident to me that Monsieur de Mirandol was alarmed. The affair, whatever it was, was becoming trop repandu altogether. There was danger. People who knew of it, really knew of it, so that it was impossible to maintain any denial, could insist upon coming, and for their own ends. He reproached Evelyn Devenish. She had spoken carelessly over there in Bordeaux, and some woman who was 'affreuse' had simply bullied her way in. Evelyn defended herself. I heard the name Corisot, and Monsieur de Mirandol shrugged his shoulders like a man who knows the world, and said quite clearly—it was strange how that high, piping voice carried—'Oh, Jeanne Corisot! I don't say no! A different matter. But the old woman!' And a phrase struck my ears and tingled.

"'But since everyone is masked', argued Evelyn. 'Except me,' said Robin Webster. 'And, since it is my house which is used, me,' continued Monsieur de Mirandol; and immediately the 'Hush! Hush!' came more insistently than ever.

"'She is coming,' Evelyn Devenish said. 'Then I'm off quick,' said Robin Webster. What gave me the idea that he jumped at this excuse for getting away? 'Good night,' he said hurriedly, and as he turned away along the terrace towards the grove of trees and his house, an illuminating sentence was uttered. I might have listened to hints and allusions for a hundred years and never got near the truth. Now it flamed—blinding, horrible, so that I cowered down upon the floor in the cover of the wall.

"'Good night, my friend Guibourg,' Monsieur de Mirandol said with a piping laugh. Robin Webster laughed quietly, turning round in the moonlight a face grown suddenly sly, and more urgent than ever followed Evelyn Devenish's protest. This time it ran—'Oh, please, silence!' she whispered; and for the first time during that whispered conversation she turned an eye upwards to my window. It was then that I dipped for safety, praying that she had not seen me. I comforted myself with the thought that even if she had she would be confident that I could make nothing of de Mirandol's allusion.

"She did not know that I had served in a great library, and that my letters were M to O inclusive. 'O' contains 'Occult,' and I had to have a working knowledge of that subject—on what shelf and in what particular volumes information was to be sought. *'L'ami Guibourg*!' Monsieur de Mirandol had said. 'Good night, *l'ami Guibourg*!' His laugh as he spoke the name, Robin Webster's laugh as he greeted it, linked the name with the mysterious engagement for Wednesday week. There was only one Guibourg—the infamous Abbé of the Black Mass. Wednesday week, too! That was the date. A Wednesday or a Friday. Monsieur de Mirandol had stipulated for one of those two days of the week, and those two days were the days set aside for those unholy ceremonies. I had got to the heart of Diana's secret now, of her obsession, her indifference—yes, and of my forebodings too. In spite of herself, through the trivial phrases of her letters to me something had broken from another world—the world on the edge of which her soul stood shivering.

"I lifted my head again very carefully. I saw that Diana had joined Monsieur de Mirandol and Evelyn, and that Robin Webster had vanished amongst the trees. The three who remained talked openly now. In a few minutes they returned into the house. I heard the glass door close; I saw the yellow light disappear from the drawing-room and the floor of the terrace. The house and its garden were given over to the moonlight. Only between the dark boughs of the avenue a beam shone from the upper window of Robin Webster's

chalet."

Joyce Whipple omitted from her story the ordinary expeditions and amusements which occupied the days and evenings of the small party at the Château Suvlac. She kept to the incidents relative to herself. She was sent to Coventry by Evelyn Devenish and Monsieur de Mirandol, who was never out of the house. She found more and more continually Robin Webster at her side; Mrs. Tasborough, the companion, sunned herself in her newly discovered authority. Each night some few people from the neighbourhood dined and danced, and once or twice the Abbé Fauriel played his game of whist at the Château Suvlac. As for Diana, she walked apart with the bandage of her dreams across her eyes. Even the service of her house became indifferent to her, the small attentions to her guests neglected, and thus quite naturally Joyce slid into the habit of preparing the cocktails, and the nightcaps before the party separated of an evening.

On the third night of Joyce's visit two little incidents occurred which were of importance. She had danced, reluctantly, with Robin Webster, and he had guided her to the end of the terrace away from the others. Suddenly he stopped.

"I can't go on like this," he said in a voice of fever. "You must come down into the garden and talk to me. It's horrible what I am going through"; and he held her off from him, and again his eyes slid over her greedily from her head to her shoes, so that she felt herself dishonoured. She wrenched her hands away and said simply, "I'll come," and turning at his side, went down with him into the garden.

"It was hateful," Joyce said, "but I was afraid he would make some sort of revolting scene publicly, and that I should have to go away from Suvlac in consequence. We walked across the lawn to the hedge which separates the garden from the strip of marshland by the river, and then I turned to him.

"'You see, I can't hide any more,' he began at once, his mouth trembling, and his words overtaking one another. 'Up till now it has always been easy—amusing, too—to keep different things going—if you understand me—' I had no difficulty at all in understanding him. The amazing feature of him was his frankness, considering what his object was—I mean myself. It never seemed to occur to him at all that I might perhaps believe in another subject under M to O inclusive—monogamy.

"'Now I find it very difficult,' he continued. 'I can't trouble about concealments—I don't want them either—I want you—and you—and you—and all the world to see it. Joyce! I walk up and down my room half the night repeating it. Joyce! Joyce! I have thought that no one could want anyone else so—so overwhelmingly, without that other one being forced to come. I have expected to hear your step upon the gravel—to see the door open and you with your eyes full of wonder and soft light in the doorway. I knew all the time that I was a fool—that the way with women was to keep your head and only seem to lose it. But I can't help myself. I am like the man in hell. I want my drink of water beyond anything in the world—you, Joyce, you!' and his hands reached out to me shaking, and drew back and reached out again.

"I was in trouble too. I didn't dare to giggle because I was in the presence of a predatory animal. My whole object was to prevent a crisis for as long as I could—until after Wednesday week, at all events. I babbled a few remarks inanely. 'I have never had anything like this happen to me. I have never before been told that I was one of a number, even if for the moment the top one,' and luckily at that moment Evelyn Devenish ran down the steps of the terrace and across the green towards us. It was Robin Webster's turn to say 'Hush! Hush!' now. I made my escape at once and, a little more shaken than I had believed myself to be, I slipped into the drawing-room, which was empty.

"I sat there for a few moments watching the couples dancing outside, and then Diana joined me. She sat down beside me with an embarrassed smile, and began at once to talk to me rapidly.

"'I am going to tell you something, Joyce. I haven't told it to any of my friends yet. So you must keep it a secret for the moment. I don't mean to have people advising and interfering in what isn't any concern of theirs. They probably won't know at all until it is done. I am going to marry Robin Webster.'

"I was really startled by her announcement, and no doubt my face showed it. For she continued quickly: 'You're astonished, but you don't know him. He's wonderful, really wonderful.'

"'But—but—' I protested a little confusedly, 'are you sure that—I mean that you are rich and he—after all, he seems to have friends already, doesn't he?'

"I wasn't very tactful, but I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't stop to phrase things very decently. Diana, however, wasn't offended at all. She took my protest with the utmost calmness.

"'I know what you mean,' she answered. 'He is a good deal with Evelyn Devenish. But he loves me.' It is impossible to give you any idea of the simple, serious fatuity with which she spoke. I felt that no evidence would shake her at all. 'Since you came, Joyce, he has been showing you some attention too. He is just setting up so many screens to prevent anyone guessing until we want them to.'

"'But when are you going to be married?' I gasped.

"'Next month,' she answered; and then the most curious look, half pride, half fear, shone upon her face. 'I can't tell you everything. But we are set apart, he and I ;and a few other people. It's the most terrific secret. I was frightened at first—perhaps I still am a little. But one's carried away—one wouldn't go back if one could. It's a belief—no doubt people who didn't understand would take us out and stone us—but there are many, many, many of us, not only here—in Paris, in Italy. And people who are right are always'—she sought for a word—'punished, aren't they? It's the oldest thing in the world, too—it's revolt and passion instead of renunciation, and a world scarlet and vivid instead of grey and cold.'

"Her face was transfigured. She spoke in a low voice hoarse with emotion, her features quivering, her breast rising and falling as though she had run a race, and her hands picking at her frock. In that quiet room, looking across the garden to the quiet, shining river, with the gramophone in the library winding out its commonplace foxtrot, she sat, a devotee who had whirled herself into a frenzy of exaltation. And then suddenly she clapped her hands to her eyes and burst into a torrent of tears.

"'Oh, I am afraid—I am afraid—' she cried in a voice suddenly desolate and hopeless; and before I could utter a word she had risen and rushed from the room.

"I sat on, with a gleam of hope in my mind. De Mirandol and Evelyn Devenish—I set them aside as really sincere. That devil-worship still existed here and there in the world of drawing-rooms as vigorously as in the world of jungles and wide forests, I knew very well. And both de Mirandol, the disappointed degenerate, and Evelyn Devenish, the neurotic creature of her sex, were marked out for it. But Robin Webster was different. He was just the cunning manipulator who saw in it a weapon and an opportunity. He could marry Diana Tasborough. Yes, but he wanted a serf, not a wife. Believing in him as the High Priest of Satan, she was malleable as sculptor's clay. The one hope I had of countering his fine plans lay in Diana's sudden storm of tears and the words which had followed it.

She was afraid. Therefore she could be rescued. But how? I was still considering that question when the door into the corridor was opened and Evelyn Devenish came in. She walked straight across the room to me with a face very white and set.

"'I met Diana in tears just outside this room. What have you said to her?' she demanded; and I replied:

"'Mind your own business!'

"'I am going to,' she said, and nodding at me with a strange look in her eyes, she went out on to the terrace."

At this point Joyce asked for more coffee, and not until she had drunk it and lighted a cigarette, was she willing to resume her narrative.

Chapter 27

The Inspiration from the Mask

But even then Hanaud must interfere. “Let us make everything plain as the bedpost,” he said with a sweep of his hand. “I put the questions.”

“Yes?” Joyce replied, leaning towards him with a little frown of concentration upon her face.

There were difficulties in her story which she was well aware she could not answer. Why some men, for instance, of the stamp which other men detest evoke the blindest love in women. And why the adoration of idols and false gods is eternal. And why what is clean and of good repute is put aside for what is foul. She had no explanations to offer. She could only say: “Here at Suvlac these things were so, as they are so elsewhere.” But no such baffling problems were presented to her by Hanaud.

“When you come out for the first time on to the terrace at the Château, you see de Mirandol and Madame Devenish?”

“Yes.”

“And they give you the once-over?”

“Yes.”

“And that evening—with Robin Webster—you come over at him at once?”

Joyce blushed and answered rather shyly: “I’m afraid that I did.”

“I would not distress you,” said Hanaud apologetically. “I get the facts fixed in my mind. Now, as Mr. Ricardo would say, pray proceed.”

But Mr. Ricardo with some indignation raised a protesting voice. "Certainly, Joyce, you shall not let them distress you. He was not getting the facts fixed in his mind. He has had them there for many a day. No, he was getting the phrases fixed in his mind, and I can promise you, in revenge, that he will use them proudly on the most inappropriate occasions."

Hanaud waved an indulgent hand. "Well, well, such phrases are commodious. Pray, Mademoiselle Whipple, proceed!"

And she took up her story again. Her problem was how to rescue Diana from that unholy gang, in spite of herself; how to disperse them and send them to hide their faces and their names in the by-ways of the earth; and how to do it without involving her in a ruin of scandal and disgrace.

"I tossed about all night, and when the morning dawned I was no nearer to a solution," she said. "But I had reached one conviction. I must myself know all that was to take place on the Wednesday week in the house of Monsieur de Mirandol. I had certainty in myself, but none for anyone to whom I might tell the story. I must have every circumstance of the ceremony so exact that no one could doubt I spoke the truth. In a word I must be present in the house of Monsieur de Mirandol, I must be an eye-witness, and more, I must have some evidence to prove who out of the Château Suvlac took a part in those orgies of horror. Oh, I knew very well that my plan was dangerous—I mean dangerous for me. But I thought that if I could once secure my evidence, then perhaps from a distance, when I was safe, I could threaten to make it all public, and under that threat exact my conditions. Oh, it wasn't very brave, I know, but I had to release Diana if I could, without doing her any harm."

"Mademoiselle," said Hanaud gently, "I should welcome in myself a little more of just that cowardice."

Joyce Whipple smiled her thanks at him. "That is so prettily said that I shall make you out a long list of the most commodious American phrases I can think of," she said, and went back to her story. "I could get the evidence, I thought. You see, we had all walked up to the Château Mirandol the day before, to take tea there and see the library. We went along the road past the farm buildings and up the hill and entered the grounds by the little gate in the high hedge. It was the natural way from the Château Suvlac, and I felt sure that it would be the one used on Wednesday week. Now, I had a great friend in Professsor Brewer, as you all know. He had served during the war in one of the Intelligence Divisions, and amongst the

many stories he told me about those times was this. Just before the Irish rising, the Germans, by means of their submarines, were in touch with Irish leaders on the West Coast. It was necessary to identify those leaders, and an empty house on a lonely strip of cliff was suspected to be their meeting-place. But so many precautions were taken, and so much vigilance used at the times when these meetings took place, that no raid would have had any chance of success. Not a soul would have been found near the spot. Accordingly Professor Brewer concocted a mixture of mustard-gas and varnish which if you touched it would not trouble you for an hour or so, but after that time would develop a sore on your hand which no remedy could heal within six weeks. He was taken over to the West Coast on a trawler, and landed on a dark night on the beach at the foot of the cliff. He climbed up the cliff and smeared with his varnish the little gate which led to the front door. The authorities then had only to wait and gather in anyone going about with an obstinate sore on the palm of his hand. I remembered this story during my sleepless night, and the next morning I wrote to him at Leeds asking him to send me some of the varnish in a registered packet, and telling him why I wanted it.

"My next step was a little more difficult. In answer to Monsieur de Mirandol's complaint that his ceremonies were *trop repandu*, there had been mention that the company went to them masked, and again M to O inclusive assured me that the answer was sound. I wondered whether a mask was supposed to be sufficient or whether some more complete disguise was adopted. I hoped the latter. It was reasonable to assume that a blasphemy of this kind would be celebrated late at night after the world had gone to bed. The participants would assemble secretly, and it would be as easy for me to creep down the stairs and out of the glass doors of the Château Suvlac and up the hill to Mirandol as it would be for anyone else. But once there the case would be altered. I might by keeping my eyes wide open and imitating the others take a place without committing an error which would attract everyone's attention. But I should have been at Suvlac for a fortnight. Would a mask be enough to disguise me? Especially from Robin Webster, the celebrant, whose eyes made me hot and cold as they slid covetously over me from my head to my shoes. Was a domino used? I could get that and a mask, no doubt, in a big town like Bordeaux without the slightest difficulty.

"I thought of a way to make sure. My bedroom, as you all know, was above Diana's. I had been put up there at Evelyn Devenish's suggestion, so that on the night of Wednesday week I might be

out of the way. But there was a spiral staircase at my door which opened on to the ground-floor corridor at the side of Diana's door. I had but to wait for an opportunity when Diana had gone out, slip into her room and discover if I could what she was going to wear. In the event of her unexpected return, escape to my own room would be simple.

"I got my opportunity two days later. Evelyn Devenish and Robin Webster drove in to Bordeaux during the morning in the small two-seater, intending to lunch and spend the day there, and in the afternoon Diana and Mrs. Tasborough went off in the large car to pay a duty visit to a family in Arcachon. The only risk, therefore, that I ran was lest Marianne should come out from her kitchen and catch me. I was as quick as I could be, therefore, in running through Diana's clothes. But I had, of course, to refold and relay everything exactly as I found it, and I had been three-quarters of an hour at this work before I came across, at the bottom of a drawer, a boy's black velvet suit, a short cassock of scarlet velvet, and a black domino to cover them. There was a white cardboard box.

I opened it and caught my breath. I almost cried out. For in the box lay that curiously odious mask with the purple lips, the livid face and bright red hair with which you are all familiar. It—shocked me. Yes! I hardly dared to touch it. It was so perfect, so unutterably sad and at the same time evil in its expression. It seemed somehow to be alive." Joyce was talking almost in a whisper, with her face quite pale and her forehead puckered, as she lived again through that moment of discovery. "I had a stupid fear that if I touched it, it would spring at me, spring at my face and do me some devilish harm—perhaps even kill. I felt all at once very lonely in that sunlit, silent room, and a wasp suddenly buzzing upon a pane startled me out of my wits. I was seized by a panic. I was overwhelmed by a desire to run—anywhere from that accursed house, and leave it and everyone in it behind me for ever—whilst there was time. You know the way nervous people have of turning the head this way and that over the shoulder lest somebody should be coming up secretly behind them. Well, I suddenly saw myself in the mirror doing just that, with a face of sheer terror. The sight brought me back a little to my senses. It shamed me. And a queer notion—I was in the mood for queer notions—came into my head that if I put the mask on I should lose my fear, I should even get some inspiration which would help me.

"I took it out of its box very gingerly and put it on. It didn't want any strings. For it fitted well over the back of my head and quite closely

over my face. I looked at myself in the mirror. It was incredible how completely another personality had been fitted on to me with the mask. My own eyes were there shining through the long curled delicate eyelashes, but I could not have identified them myself. I had only to wear some dress no one at Suvlac had seen me in, alter it to give me a look of greater age, and with a mask like that over my head and face my own mother could not have recognized me.

"Yes, but I couldn't get a mask like that. It was the work of a real artist, a mask as finished as an ode of Horace. And then in a flash the inspiration did come. If I could take Diana's place! The dress itself showed that she was to take an actual part in the celebration. She was to be the acolyte who swings the censer. If I could take her place—and get away scot-free afterwards! Why, I should be mistress of the position and Diana would be unhurt. I could threaten, I could expose, if the law had a punishment for this particular abomination, I could help the law to inflict it—and Diana would not be touched. If I could only take her place! And the moment after the inspiration came, and whilst I was still standing before the mirror looking through the eye-holes of the mask, came the means of realizing it. They just unrolled themselves out in front of me.

"I won't say that I wasn't desperately frightened. I was. I knew that I should receive very little mercy from Evelyn Devenish once I was helpless in her hands. I shivered as I stood there. But it wasn't all from fear. There was excitement in it too.

"I took off the mask—reluctantly—for I fancied that with its removal my inspiration would vanish too, and my plan become an absurdity. But they both remained with me. I held the mask in my hand until I felt sure of them. Then I replaced it in its white cardboard box, set everything in order, and slipped out of the room. The house was still empty. I went down to a bench at the bottom of the garden and, sitting there, worked out my plan step by step, trying to think of every flaw in it, of every possibility of failure. But, of course, the dreadful crime which did ruin it altogether never entered into my mind.

"That evening was of good augury. I had made a guess that Evelyn Devenish was a woman who would never move without a little store of soporifics. I told her after dinner that I was sleeping badly at Suvlac, but that since I didn't have a doctor's prescription, I did n't see how I was going to get a sleeping-draught which it would be worth while to take. Evelyn Devenish first of all laughed contemptuously at my innocence. But she ceased to laugh. She looked at me curiously, and then with a gleam of pleasure.

"'But, of course, I can help you,' she cried. So I was right in my guess. 'I have some chloral in crystals. I'll fetch you a few,' and she hurried off to her room.

"I think it had come into her head that a good strong sleeping-draught taken by me on the evening of Wednesday week would be a sound proposition. I should be kept out of the way very completely. I was the more sure of that when she returned with a little paper packet. For she particularly insisted that I should let her know in the morning what effect the crystals had had.

"'You must dissolve them in water, of course,' she said. 'I have given you quite a small dose to be on the safe side. But it's important that I should know tomorrow how it has worked.'

"I promised to let her know, and took the crystals to my room. But once there, I was frightened to use them. Yet I had got to use them. I knew nothing about sleeping-draughts. I have slept like a baby all my life. I hadn't the slightest idea whether it was a weak dose or a strong dose—or even too strong a dose which had been given to me. Yes, that fear was unpleasantly vivid to me. I watched the crystals disappearing in the water under the light of the lamp by my bed and I wondered whether I was not dissolving enough to put me out of the way for good and all. Evelyn's hard eyes had held so mocking a smile: she had looked me over with such complete contempt. On the other hand, she was probably experimenting—just as I was. She was finding out how much of the chloral was required to induce sleep so profound that nothing would disturb it on the night of Wednesday week—just as I was. I got into bed and drank the glassful of water in a hurry. I was in a panic when I had done it, and I tried quite uselessly not to sleep at all. 'I won't,' I said to myself. 'I won't.' And the next thing I remember was looking at my watch in broad daylight and realizing that it was half-past eleven and my coffee stone-cold on the table at my side. I felt a little heavy, but nothing worse; and I was inclined to doubt whether if I had been naturally a light sleeper, the dose would have been strong enough. So all that I said to Evelyn was:

"'Yes, I slept a good deal better. I didn't wake up so often.'

"Evelyn Devenish nodded her head.

"'Well, I'll give you a stronger draught next time. But it mustn't be yet. If you get into the habit of taking this stuff it won't have any effect. You shall have some more of the crystals in a week's time, if you remind me.'

"Now, a week brought us exactly to the Wednesday when I was to be out of the way. I thanked her very gratefully for her kindness. She must have taken me for a zany, I slipped my foot so stupidly into her trap.

"So far all was very promising, but I had one more precaution to take. I knew that the celebration of the Black Mass followed the ritual of the true Mass, and I must be familiar with it. I therefore attended the little church at Suvlac assiduously during the next week, and I am afraid that I left the Abbé Fauriel under the belief that he was in the way of making a valuable convert of a girl from the United States with millions of money. As a matter of fact, I was watching every movement of the one small boy of the village who acted as his acolyte. There were movements not so very easy to get into one's head. For sometimes they corresponded with the movements of the priest, sometimes they were in a sort of opposition, like—I don't use the words irreverently—like dancers setting to partners. However, by the Wednesday, what with attendance at the church and rehearsing in my bedroom, I felt that I could get through. On Tuesday morning, too, the registered parcel arrived from Leeds, and so everything was ready."

Joyce Whipple drew in a breath as she thus reached the last stage of her adventure, and sat with her eyes brooding upon the table. A bottle of Evian water stood in the centre. She touched the arm of her lover and asked for a glass of it.

"Mademoiselle," Hanaud said gently, "if you are disturbed by your recollections of that night, you must not let us add the distress of relating them to us here. You will, alas! have to tell them once more."

"At the *Cour d'Assizes*," she answered. "I know, and I confess that I shrink from the prospect of the publicity and the gaping faces. But it will help me against that hour of ordeal if I tell it first among my friends. My story will be all the more ordered, and its repetition less of a penance."

She drained her glass of water and resumed.

Chapter 28

The Night of Wednesday

"On the Wednesday after luncheon I took Evelyn Devenish aside upon the terrace and startled her thoroughly by saying: 'It's for tonight, isn't it?'

"Her eyes opened to their full width in consternation, and the blood left her face.

"'For tonight? What's for tonight?' she stuttered, and waited in suspense for my answer. I took a little malicious pleasure in keeping her for as long as I could safely do it in her embarrassment and agitation.

"'What?' I repeated with an air of surprise. 'Oh, you won't have forgotten! I can't believe it,' and with every fresh sentence I spoke she lost more and more of her power to dissimulate, until her face looked like a pair of hard eyes bright with hate set in a white mask. I thought indeed as I looked at her: 'There's the very disguise for me.' But at the same time I realized that I wasn't being very wise. So I said quickly:

"'You promised me a sleeping-draught for tonight, Mrs. Devenish. I have been looking forward to it tremendously.'

"The colour rushed back into her face. 'Of course, I hadn't forgotten,' she answered. 'You shall certainly have it, Joyce.' Then she changed her note. 'I want you to do something for me in return. Oh, a little thing! It'll sound silly to you. Perhaps it is. But I am rather superstitious,' and she pulled herself up as though she had said too much. 'I want you to lend me something you usually wear—that bracelet, for instance,' and she pointed to the gold band round my wrist. 'I'll give it back to you tomorrow.'

"No doubt I looked surprised. I couldn't imagine why even the most superstitious person should want it. It wasn't a charm, or a thing which is supposed to bring luck, like a bracelet of elephant's hair. It was just a strip of gold with a fire opal at the clasp. I unfastened it, however, and gave it to her.

"'Of course you can have it,' I said, rather amused. Evelyn Devenish almost snatched at it. Then she looked at me with amusement too, but a secret sort of amusement, as though I was the greatest fool in the world to let her have it.

"I waited until after tea in the garden—we had no expedition arranged for that day—and then I slipped out alone for a walk, with the varnish, a small paint-brush and a thick pair of gloves in my handbag. I went by the hill road to the little gate in the tall hedge of the Mirandol garden. No one was within sight. I put on the thick gloves and painted the latch and the post and the rail carefully and quickly. Then I made a bundle of the bottle, the brush and the gloves and pushed it deep into the hedge; from which place Monsieur Hanaud has, I think, recovered it."

Hanaud contented himself with a nod of assent. This was not the moment for even the most commodious of phrases. For a curious uneasiness had been gaining upon Joyce's small audience. Each one felt that he was a spectator of the events which he was merely hearing related. Each one was present in the rose-pink château of Suvlac, watched the lone, fine-hearted girl in her crusade against the powers of darkness, and trembled at the issue. She was there in front of them, but the pinewood walls of the homely restaurant had fallen apart and they walked with her in the glamour of her high adventure.

"Whilst I was dressing for dinner Evelyn Devenish knocked at my door and entered the room.

"'Here's the draught for you,' she said. 'There are a few more crystals than there were last time. But not too many. I should take them all.'

"She pushed the white packet into my hand and went out again. The packet was a good deal heavier than the one which she had originally given me, and I was afraid to use it all. I dissolved about three-quarters of the crystals in a small amount of water whilst I finished dressing, poured the draught carefully into a little medicine bottle, corked the bottle and hid it in a drawer. Then I went down to dinner and found you"—she turned towards Mr. Ricardo with a smile. "You gave me a fine shock afterwards, although you

were unaware of it, but at that moment I was delighted to see you. I had been alone before—now I had someone who would stand by my side."

"Yes, yes! To be sure, I was there," said Mr. Ricardo, feeling quite ready for everything now that the danger of everything had passed. He was unable, indeed, to understand in what way he could have caused Joyce Whipple any serious alarm. Joyce was making a mistake. Her memories of that night were not unnaturally confused.

"I welcomed you all the more," Joyce continued, "because we were all, with the exception of Robin Webster, nervous on that evening. He was as calm, as self-assured, as though he had no anxiety upon his mind heavier than a doubt whether the shower of rain would fall in time to increase the vintage. But the rest of us were troubled, and when the Abbé Fauriel arrived with his story of the stolen vestments, I think we were all on the edge of hysteria. I know that I made the most terrible blunder when I cried out: 'It is not I who dispense the cold!' There was not a soul in the dining-room except the servants, Mrs. Tasborough and Mr. Ricardo who did not understand my allusion. I had given away my knowledge of the horrible secret which bound that little household as clearly as if I had stood up and cried it aloud. I remember that Evelyn Devenish, after the moment of consternation had passed, looked triumphantly across the table at Robin Webster. She was saying by her expression as clearly as words could have said: 'What did I tell you? She knows.'

"There was, indeed, a little conference held upon the terrace after dinner between her and Robin Webster and de Mirandol. But they had no reason to think that I was aware of what they had planned for tonight, and as for tomorrow—well, Evelyn Devenish had made her arrangements for me. I was afraid for a moment that the celebration might be put off until the Friday. For I had no excuse for altering my arrangements. I was bound to go in the morning. But as the conference broke up, de Mirandol said in his high voice: 'At one o'clock, then.' Then a low cry of impatience from Evelyn Devenish, but he added 'tomorrow,' and they all laughed.

"The arrangement was to hold, then. I have explained to you how I had slipped into the way of preparing the drinks of the party. I ran off to my room, got the little bottle with the sleeping-draught, and holding it in my handkerchief, returned to the drawing-room just in time to hear Mrs. Tasborough calling for Diana to mix a nightcap for the Abbé. Diana, Mr. Ricardo at all events will remember, came into the room last of all, and asked me for a brandy-and-soda. The

table was so placed that I had my back to the room. I took the cork out of the little bottle, put some brandy into the glass, and then, tilting the siphon with my left hand, squirted the soda-water into it. At the same time I was holding the glass on the table with my right hand, and I was able to empty the little phial into the brandy under cover of the noise made by the siphon. Immediately afterwards, the Abbé Fauriel and the others who were not staying in the house departed, and we dispersed to our rooms. It was still very early."

"Yes," Mr. Ricardo agreed. "I remember that it was exactly ten minutes to eleven when I began to prepare myself for bed."

"I had made up my mind to wait for an hour and a half before I stole down to Diana's room. I took off my dress and changed into black stockings and shoes, and put on a dressing-gown, all in a foolish fever. But after that I had nothing to do and I have never known time creep so slowly. With the passage of each everlasting minute I shrank more and more from the peril in front of me. I saw myself detected, my mask stripped from me. I imagined Evelyn Devenish gloating over me, her hate satisfied. But I had a shivery sort of intuition that even she could not be as cruel as de Mirandol with his red lips and his big, flabby face. And the mere sight of my bed, with its white sheet turned neatly down, began to make me drowsy. I began to argue: 'Suppose that I went to bed, Diana could not leave the house tonight. That's certain and that's the main thing.'

"Of course it wasn't. The main thing was that there shouldn't be another opportunity of repeating tonight with Diana present. But the invitation of my pillows was becoming irresistible, would have already become irresistible if I had not had just one little spark of shame glowing within me at the thought that all my fine plans and resolutions were dwindling to nothing at all because I couldn't keep my eyes open. Then I sprang up and turned out the light. I couldn't go on with the white sheets and the pillows shouting to me not to be a fool. In the dark, unable to see them, I might be better able to keep awake. And it was lucky that I did turn the light out. For a few minutes later, as I was sitting on the edge of the bed, I heard the scrape of a foot upon the stone staircase outside my door. Someone—Evelyn Devenish—it could only be her—was listening outside my door to make sure that I was asleep. At once I was wide awake and certain too that I was late, that I ought to be now dressed and ready in the hall. I had a fear that she would go into Diana's room, and I listened for the sound of a door opening and shutting, for a startled cry, for a rush of feet. But when a few moments afterwards I opened my own door, the house was so

silent that I felt I could have heard a mouse stirring.

"I had closed my shutters and drawn the curtains over the windows, when I first went upstairs. I turned on the light again and looked at my watch. It was within a few minutes of half-past twelve. I crept downstairs and very gently opened Diana's door. Her light was still burning, but she herself lay upon her bed in the dress which she had been wearing, breathing easily and sound asleep. I laid a quilt over her, took from the drawer the black velvet suit, the cassock, the domino and the mask, and was turning towards the door when I saw a parcel wrapped up in brown paper upon the table. For all I knew, it might have something to do with the dress she was to have worn. I unfolded it and saw that it was the lace-edged surplice which upon special days I had seen the Abbé's acolyte wearing at High Mass. I added it to my little pile of clothes, turned out the light, took the key from the lock, and after going out locked the door behind me. I didn't want Evelyn Devenish to blunder into the room at the last moment and find her asleep. If she tried the door, she would think that Diana had already made her way to our rendezvous and had locked her door for safety.

"At ten minutes to one, then, dressed and masked, I slipped out of the front door and went quickly down the road to the farm buildings. A small car without any lights stood in the road. Robin Webster quite undisguised sat at the wheel, with a woman beside him—Evelyn Devenish. She threw open the door upon her side, but I had quickness enough to see that fortune was favouring me. I waved with my hand, 'The answer is in the negative,' and climbed into the dickey. Neither Robin Webster nor Evelyn pressed the invitation to join them, and the car ran swiftly along the road across the pasture and up the hill to the gate. I let them both get down first, and I was still indeed on the step when I heard a stifled oath from Webster and a little cry of annoyance from Evelyn Devenish. Both of them had got some of my professor's varnish on their hands, and when I reached them they were rubbing it off as best they could with their handkerchiefs. 'Be careful of the gate. It's sticky,' said Robin Webster as he swung it open. I passed through behind him and Evelyn Devenish, and I kicked it to with my foot. I wanted everybody who used that gate tonight to open it with a hand upon the latch. The front door of the house was open and the passage lit. The light streaming through the doorway showed me some small groups of people, and here the light revealed a mask, there an enshrouding cloak. There were lights, too, in the library upon the ground floor, and the shadows of people moving to and fro were flung upon the gravel. The company, indeed, was larger than I expected, and at

one moment I welcomed it as a security, at another I dreaded it as multiplying the chances of detection.

"'This way,' said Robin Webster quietly, and he led us round to the back of the house. Here Monsieur de Mirandol was waiting, and we went up by a back staircase to a small room behind the conference room, and leading into it by a door in the panel. On a chair were the vestments of the Abbé Fauriel. Monsieur de Mirandol was in a fever. His face was patched with red and his hands shaking.

"'You are ready?' he asked. 'It is time.'

"Evelyn Devenish laughed, upon a low thrilling note.

"'This is my moment,' she said. 'The old days shall be the new days. What happened once shall happen again. As she won, so shall I.'

"They were the words of the fortune-teller, of the charlatan making mysteries, but they were uttered in a voice so passionate and sincere that I couldn't doubt they meant all the world to her. 'Lord of the Earth!' she cried in a low voice, and sobbed and spoke her prayer again. 'Lord of the Earth,' and she crossed herself upwards instead of downwards with her thumb. 'Give him back to me!' She looked at Robin Webster, her eyes shining bright through the holes of a black silk mask. She was wearing a long cloak which she held close about her, and I noticed for the first time, with a shock, that her feet in her slippers were bare. 'Give him back to me,' she repeated like a woman distracted, and de Mirandol took her by the elbow.

"'Come!' he said, and he led her into the big room, closing the door behind him. I heard the clicking of the switches of the electric light; and a few minutes later a subdued clatter of people entering the room and taking their places.

"Meanwhile Robin Webster had stood like a figure of stone, with his eyes bent upon the floor. He raised his face with a sigh of relief. He slipped off his long coat, and I saw that he was wearing a priest's cassock. He put on the alb and the stole very slowly, a man wrapt in his dreams. He took something from the pocket of his coat, which he hid in his sleeve. Then he turned and looked at me. I had taken off my domino. He pointed to a table on which a censer of gold with golden chains was resting. It was filled with incense waiting to be kindled, and a box of matches stood upon the table beside it. I struck a match and lit the incense and took the censer in my hand. A smoke curled up from it black as pitch, and the fumes filled the

room with an odour acrid, intoxicating. All the while his eyes were watching me. Every moment I expected a cry from him: 'Who are you?' But no cry came. I stood up and faced him, swinging the censer to and fro across my body and between us, so that I saw him only through a mist of smoke.

Even so, I felt he must know me, he stood and stared with so set a face, and such unwinking eyes. Suddenly an intense relief came over me. For I realized that though he stared, he did not see. I was nothing to him. His thoughts were turned in upon himself. A slow smile flickered about his mouth, his tongue moistened his lips, and he felt his sleeve with his right hand—to make sure. I know now that he was savouring the moment which was to set him free from the tedium and the exactions of his mistress—savouring it with a voluptuous slow delight.

"'Now,' he said, and he opened the door. A blaze of light rushed in on us.

"I followed him, with a prayer on my lips and a terrible fear at my heart. But no longer a fear lest I should blunder and be discovered. I had passed beyond that. I suppose the fumes of the incense were making me drunk. But I was at that moment afraid as I hope I shall never be again—afraid that I should see Satan himself taking shape in that room in the midst of his worshippers, baleful and hideous, with death in the mere pointing of his finger. What protection would my disguise be then? I went forward dazed and stunned. The room was a blur to me. But in a little while my vision cleared. I saw the room about half full, and not a soul in it but was masked and wore some concealing wrap. But here and there beneath the wraps of the women I could see the sheen of white shoulders and the flash of jewels. And all of them were muttering and whispering so that the room was filled as with the hum of bees. Then as Robin Webster prostrated himself before the altar I took my position at the side and behind him. The altar was a living woman. Yes!

"A great lamp hung in the ceiling flung down a light golden and dazzling. It lit up the youth beautiful with the blue, sorrow-haunted eyes, and the two panels at the side, and it poured upon Evelyn Devenish, stretched naked upon her back on a black coffin-pall. Her eyes were closed, but her bosom rose and fell with her tumultuous breathing, and her arms were outstretched stiff and rigid to make with her outstretched body the form of a cross. I understood then what her words had meant in the little room:

"'As she won, so shall I.'

"For just so Madame de Montespan once had lain as an altar for the Abbé Guibourg, that she might win back the wandering passion of her royal lover. And she had won it back.

"Robin Webster began the service of the Mass with the murmured Latin prayers and, as the ritual ordained, I changed my place from side to side, swung the censer and bent the knee. It was the true Mass, the Mass meant to deceive. For not until the Flesh had been made bread and the Blood wine, could begin the orgy of jeers and mockery, the frenzy of the adoration of Satan which in half an hour would make of that room a stew, a sty of animals met in a battle of lust. So the prayers to the true God followed one upon the other, and as I passed from one end of the altar to the other I saw my gold bracelet glittering upon Evelyn Devenish's wrist and—yes—a smear of the varnish dark on the palm of her hand. She had called herself superstitious, I remembered, when she borrowed the bracelet. She had gone back to the most ancient superstition in the world. If she wore something of mine in this supreme crisis, she would draw into herself and out of me the innermost heart of me, and all that I had of power to attract. As the sacred climax approached, a great trembling took her body and limbs, her eyes opened and fixed themselves on the Adonis; cries, uttered low like the whimperings of an animal, broke continually from her lips. Robin Webster took the chalice and raised it above his head, and then placed it between her breasts and bent over her, fumbling at his sleeve. The cries of Evelyn Devenish melted into one long-drawn wail, a convulsion shook her from head to foot, there was a rattle in her throat, her arms relaxed, and once more she lay still. Robin Webster raised the chalice again, and every murmur ceased. I could not look round, but I was as sure as if I had looked round that everyone in that assembly was fixed like stone in an extremity of horror. I was standing on the left-hand side by Evelyn Devenish's feet, and Robin Webster's back quite obscured my view. I saw him lift the chalice a third time, and now like corn in a wind the assembly swayed and bent. The murmurs broke out again, louder, more hysterical. Robin Webster stooped with the chalice in his hand, and I heard the trickle of a liquid running into it. Suddenly a woman screamed, there was a grating and overturning of chairs, a frenzied movement, and above the clamour rose the voice of Robin Webster, ringing triumphant, as he stretched out his arms with the cup between his palms towards the picture of Adonis.

"'Now, if ever, greet your worshippers! You have a sacrifice worthy

of you. Come! Come!'

"But even above his voice there rang another, more violent, more terrible, and it uttered one word only.

"'Murder!'

"I saw Robin Webster turn about towards the room; I saw Evelyn Devenish with the hilt of a knife upright above her heart, and her breast striped with blood; I felt myself caught up in a whirl of people, and then I heard above the uproar an order given with authority:

"'Lock the door! No one must go!'

"I dived, I reached the little door in the panelled wall. I opened it and slipped through. There was a bolt on that inner side. I shot it into its socket and raced down the staircase, tearing the surplice off me as I ran. It was white, and even in the darkness would guide a pursuit. I dropped it in the back entrance of the house, ran through the garden, unlatched the gate with a hand protected by the cassock, and ran down the hill towards Suvlac. There was no pursuit. In the confusion my escape was overlooked.

"But it couldn't be overlooked for long. I knew authority when I heard it. The voice which had ordered, 'Lock the door! No one must go!'—I know now that it was the voice of Arthur Tidon, the judge. Then I only knew that it was the voice of a man with the habit of command and his wits under control. Neither Monsieur de Mirandol nor Robin Webster frightened me now. It was the unknown owner of that voice. I took my mask off my head and carried it in my hand. I ran past the farm buildings—they were all in darkness—and up the slope to the Château Suvlac. I looked to the house of Mirandol on the hill. The lights were still blazing in the long upper room. They were debating there still; but with authority to conduct the debate. The debate wouldn't last long. They must act, and again I thought, with the authority of that voice to direct the action, it would be swift and decisive.

"I let myself into the house by the glass door of the drawing-room, and crept along the passage to Diana's room. I unlocked the door and turned up the light. She had not stirred since I had left her. I locked the door now from the inside. I had to undress her and put her properly to bed. That was absolutely urgent. Up there on the hill, when it came to counting heads, the absence of the acolyte was certain to be discovered. They had already without a doubt discovered it now—Robin Webster and de Mirandol and the man

with the voice. They would not be disturbed, however, so long as they believed the acolyte to be Diana. They would assume that she had fled, just as I did flee, at the first commotion.

"'No one,' I argued, 'of all those present can afford to give one word of information about this crime. They dare not confess that they were assisting at this abominable blasphemy. Robin Webster knew that very well when he planned to commit it. They are all his confederates, bound by their own interests to the strictest secrecy. Very well. Very likely everyone will be compelled to unmask. Certainly they will disperse at once, and two or three will be left to decide what to do—Robin Webster, Monsieur de Mirandol and the Voice. But what those three decide they must tell Diana. They must prepare her for the morning. They must come here tonight and soon—very soon. If they find her asleep in the dress she wore this evening, they must know that I took her place.'

"So I set to work. Oh, but it was difficult! I had to be very gentle lest I should wake her. She was a good weight too. I had to get everything off and her pyjamas on. It was done at last, but, oh, the time it took! Every moment I expected the sound of a footfall in the corridor. I got her properly into her bed, then I turned out the light, unlocked the door, left it shut and unlocked, and stole up the staircase to my own room. I locked myself in, turned on my light, and like a fool collapsed on my bed. I didn't faint, but I felt—oh, awful!! cried until it seemed impossible that I had any tears left. I had to stuff the bed-sheet into my mouth to stop myself from screaming. I felt that I was falling right through the bed down precipice after precipice. I thought that I was dying.

"I don't know how long the fit lasted. But after a time I sat up with just one longing—to get into the open air. With my windows shuttered and the door locked, I was being stifled in a prison. And then I remembered the *gabare*. It came three times a week to Suvlac and left in the night with the tide for Bordeaux. I had seen its mast above the little dock that very day. I might be in time to catch it before it sailed if I hurried. The captain would give me a passage if I paid enough for it. I didn't trouble about my clothes; I didn't think of anything except putting as wide a distance as possible between me and this house. I snatched up the domino and the mask—that I did not dare to leave behind—and turning out my light I stole from the room. My quickest way to the harbour was by the terrace door in Diana's room. It was latched but not locked. I ran down the steps across the lawn, stumbled at the flower-bed, ran on and came to a dead stop at the bottom of the avenue. The

gabare had gone. I flung the mask up into a tree. I had a horror of it. I felt that it made me an accomplice in the crime, and I was conscious of the most intense relief when at last I was free of it. I turned to the right and ran up the avenue in the black shelter of the trees. I had a thought of taking refuge with Marianne and Jules Amadee, but I still clung desperately to a hope that if only I could talk with Diana first of all, we could arrange some story which would keep her out of the scandal of the crime altogether. I reasoned that once back again in my room with the door locked and my bed drawn across it, I should be safe till morning. And morning could not be far away.

"But as I flitted across the terrace I saw something move behind the window of the library—you," and Joyce Whipple turned to Mr. Ricardo. "I sprang into Diana's room, locked the glass door and turned on the light for a moment. It was just as I had left it. Diana had not moved. And then someone knocked. My fingers were on the switch. I turned the light out. This was my moment. If the pursuers were out upon the terrace, I had time to reach my room and barricade it. I sped up the little staircase, went into my room. I was too late. The men from the Château Mirandol had been led by Robin Webster to Diana's room. They had found her sunk in a sleep so impenetrable that drugs alone could account for it. It was clear that I had taken her place. And whilst my fingers fumbled in the darkness for the switch a cloak was thrown over my head and a hand was pressed over my mouth. I did go out in a faint then. For when I came to myself I was being carried from a motor-car into Monsieur de Mirandol's house. There were three men, Monsieur de Mirandol himself, Robin Webster, and a man who still wore a mask upon his face. I was carried down to a cellar, and whilst the man in the mask stood over me, the two others brought a mattress and a water-jug and things like that.

"'We'll decide about her tomorrow' said the man with the mask, and I shivered. For I had recognized his voice. It was the voice of the man who had cried: 'Lock the door!' I remember that Robin Webster went out of the cellar last, and before he went he stooped down over me and whispered: 'Don't lose heart! I'll save you.'

"But of course he couldn't. I hadn't a hope that he could. He must agree to what the others decided.

"There was a grating in the cellar under the ceiling which let in air and a trickle of grey light. Some time after it was day Monsieur de Mirandol brought me some food and I implored him to let me go. I don't know what I promised, but he never replied to me at

all. Then the evening afterwards, Tidon and de Mirandol came together. They handcuffed me and put a gag in my mouth and tied my legs. I was carried upstairs by Tidon. His car was at the door, with an all-weather body closed, and no chauffeur. He laid me on the floor and covered me with a rug, and after a minute or two the car moved off."

Hanaud nodded his head.

"Tidon was the one man who could drive into Bordeaux through my cordon without his car being searched," he said. "But even so he took his precautions, the good man. As he neared Bordeaux he made a circuit of the town, and in some by-lane mademoiselle here was transferred to a horse-drawn conveyance driven by a kind friend of the widow Chicholle."

Chapter 29

Hanaud Dots the T's

Thus Joyce Whipple told her story. Before she had got very far with it she slipped her hand under Bryce Carter's arm with a pretty gesture, assuring herself by the touch of him that the bad days of which she was telling were really at an end. And before she had come to her flight from the house of Mirandol, his arm was about her waist and she held close to his side. Thus, too, they remained when the story was told, not even the charm of a bottle of very sweet pink champagne which Hanaud recklessly ordered sufficing to unlink them.

"Each one the glass full to the brim!" he cried. "So! We pledge Miss Joyce. And do we tap the heels? No! We do not!"

He raised his glass against the light, watched with evident anticipation the bubbles breaking on the surface of the wine, and bowing to her with kindliness and admiration so warm upon his face that not one of them but was stirred, he cried: "To the brave young lady from the Bowery!"

Joyce laughed and blushed and thanked him with shining eyes. Bryce Carter, justifying himself in Hanaud's thoughts at last, kissed her plump on the mouth, Hanaud smacked his lips, Mr. Ricardo shut his eyes as though he was about to take castor oil; and then they drank their glasses empty.

"The champagne!" said Hanaud. "On the occasion it is right to drink him."

"And this champagne is wonderful," said Bryce Carter shamelessly.

"A most nauseating beverage," said Mr. Ricardo, but he only said it to himself. He had shown heroism enough in drinking the decoction.

"Now," said Hanaud. "We have heard the story. All that remains is for me to—as you would say"—and he inclined his head towards Bryce Carter—"to dot the T's."

"Quite so," Bryce Carter agreed, but Mr. Ricardo was not so lenient.

"Cross the T's, my friend!"

Hanaud threw up his hands. "You hear? He calls me his friend, yet always he makes a mocking of me. But tonight I forbid. No, no! I am an inspector of the Sûreté, I think the best inspector, and I know my way about the English language. One crosses the C's, it is the habit of the English, but one dots the T's. Let it be understood, and I keep my biggest dot for the end."

He challenged Mr. Ricardo with a glare, but confronted with the monstrosity of a man who said the English crossed the C's, he was without reply.

"Good! I have silenced him. So! In the first place the *gabare* should have sailed with the tide at six in the morning. Yet when Miss Joyce runs to take refuge upon it, between two and three of the clock, it is gone. It puts out into the river to anchor there, or to drift farther and farther from its destination. There is no sense in the patron's action, eh? Well, let us hear what he says! He says that shortly after two he was waked by hearing someone step lightly from the dock on to his deck. He pushed his head and shoulders out of his cubby, and at once Robin Webster stooped down to him and said in a whisper: 'Don't make any noise, but come ashore!'

"Webster led him into the grove of trees and showed him the basket, already corded. He thinks that a little way off two other men were standing, but he cannot he sure. He was not told what was in the basket. But he was offered the *gabare* with its sails and ropes and furniture, just as it lay in the harbour, if he put out now at once and sank that heavy basket with a weight attached to it in the middle of the Gironde. The patron says that he is a poor man, and that to own that fine *gabare*, the ›*Belle Simone*,‹ was the dream of his life. He roused his two sons, carried on board the basket, which was, after all, not suspiciously heavy, pushed out into the river, and sank it weighted as he had been directed. But he had been told to be very quick, and no doubt, therefore, had tied the weight on carelessly. But that was now seen to be the will of the

good God who brings the crimes to the light of day. And for himself he is very glad, for he is naturally of a religious nature, etcetera, etcetera. That is the patron's story, and it fits in with the facts as we know them. The ›*Belle Simone*‹ cannot have left its little harbour more than a few minutes before Miss Joyce came to a sudden stop at the foot of the avenue and left the clear imprints of her shoes in the soft grass." Hanaud turned towards Joyce with a serious look upon his face. "You had a moment of despair then, yes, mademoiselle, but I am inclined to congratulate you upon missing the *gabare*, in spite of the patron's very religious nature. After all, a fine *gabare* with all its equipment—eh?" and he shrugged his shoulders. Mr. Ricardo, however, was not disposed to accept the patron's story. It was a defect perhaps pardonable in a character otherwise so white, that whenever that gentleman got a setback from Hanaud, he found it necessary afterwards to doubt his statements, his efficiency, the suitability of his age for his work, his sense of humour and his presentation of his case. So now:

"I have a little difficulty in believing that the basket could have been conveyed to the *gabare* within so short a time," he said, stabbing the table delicately with the tips of his fingers and smiling a trifle offensively.

"You would have, my friend," Hanaud agreed. "Yet, after all, though you merely wish to trip me up, you put a question. Let us consider the time.

In the first place, Miss Joyce runs down the hill. It is a kilometre. Then she undresses Mademoiselle Diana and puts her to bed. Ah, ah! Not so easy! Not to be done while you say: 'Twinkle, twinkle, little bedpost!' No!"

"Only a lunatic would make such a remark," said Mr. Ricardo acidly.

"After the undressing, Miss Joyce goes up to her room and, already overtired, does the breakdown. Good! Then she feels stifled, and only then does she think of the *gabare*. Now look at the other side! Tidon, with his ambitions and his wits about him, and as mademoiselle then noted, with his habit of command, Robin Webster, his black beast out of his way—both will hurry, hurry, for the morning somewhere beyond Bordeaux comes hurry, hurry too. They have a little preparation to make. They make it. They put the basket on de Mirandol's car. They come down past the offices and out on to the Bordeaux road. Half a kilometre from the main entrance to Mirandol, a gate leads into the plantation of Suvlac. They

drive the car into the plantation. They are now close to the avenue of trees. That basket is not so heavy for three men, as the captain of the *gabare* very truly said. There was time and to spare—even with that little preparation taken into account."

It did not need the slight emphasis with which Hanaud stressed the words to make clear to anyone at that table exactly what he meant. Joyce Whipple shivered and her face contracted with a spasm of pain.

"Yes, not pretty, mademoiselle, but what will you? There was the smear upon that poor woman's palm. Already the palms of Robin Webster and Tidon were tingling and burning. Already the flesh was raw. That good magistrate was taking no risks except those which he needs must take. He had seen crimes brought to light because the last necessary little precaution had been forgotten or despised. Suppose that, in spite of all, that body was discovered with a little wound on the palm which matched the wounds on the palms of Robin Webster and Monsieur Tidon—there might be some awkward talk, eh? So"—and Hanaud chopped the side of his hand sharply down upon the table, so that even the men jumped, and Joyce uttered a little cry. "Not pretty, eh? What became of that hand? Who shall say? The furnace or the earth. But it is curious about that bracelet, eh? It was disturbing to discover it—Miss Whipple's gold bracelet in that basket. Very odd, very disturbing. But it is plain now, eh? The hand was chopped on the edge of the basket. Very likely no one noticed the wound until a moment before. Then—" He raised his hand again edgewise to cut the air, and Joyce Whipple leaned swiftly across her lover and arrested it.

"Please! Please!" she pleaded.

"Well, I omit the chops," Hanaud conceded rather reluctantly, "but there was a chop and the gold bracelet—he slips into the basket. Why should they bother about it, with all that necessity to hurry, hurry? They did not know that it was the bracelet of Miss Whipple borrowed by a superstitious woman as a charm. So there is one T dotted."

"Crossed," Mr. Ricardo protested in an undertone.

"Dotted," said Bryce Carter quite loudly. "And mind you, I was in the Foreign Office, where we know almost as much about the English language as Monsieur Hanaud himself. Go on, Monsieur Hanaud! I beg you to dot a T for me."

Hanaud was magnanimity in person. He refused to trample upon

a prostrate foe. Perhaps one little look of triumph, and he turned to Bryce Carter.

"Perfectly. Your T, I dot him."

"How was it that Joyce survived during those two days at Mirandol? They ran such risks, those three. You had but to search the house."

"Oh, but I have no right yet to search the house," Hanaud interrupted. "I must have authorities, permissions, and who to grant them but the excellent Tidon? He make me some annoyances, I can tell you, if I ask him. Also some annoyances, perhaps, for mademoiselle there. No, I take another way. Oh, I ensure that mademoiselle shall keep her life in the house of Mirandol, never fear!"

Mr. Ricardo sniggered.

"I do that. Yes, I! No one else! Just I!"

Mr. Ricardo smiled across the table at Joyce. "Monsieur Hanaud is not at his best on these occasions. As he would say, modesty is not his summer suiting. And how do you do it?"

"I warn them. You hear me warn them, my friend," Hanaud replied with a gravity which quite disconcerted Mr. Ricardo. "I tell them that they cannot rid themselves of the dead. Oh, Tidon knows it, but I remind him. I have a cordon round the house. What can they do? There are just two ways—the earth or the stove. For the earth, they are sure I mean to go through that house like a repairer of the roads. For the stove? All that black evil smoke from the chimney—no, no—" And suddenly he caught himself up. "But, mademoiselle, I beg the pardon. On both the knees. It was not nice what I said. No, we blame Mr. Ricardo, who drives me on with snickerings."

He was speaking very remorsefully to Joyce, who was watching him with a strained white face and such a look of horror in her eyes as put them all to shame for their eager questions.

"You forgive? Yes. We are rough people, without the suitable delicacies. But we love you—even the indescribable Mr. Ricardo. So you forgive?"

But Joyce seemed for the moment not to hear nor to be aware of the real tenderness which underlay the absurdity of his words. With a shudder which shook her from her head to her feet, she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned in a low voice. "The black evil smoke! Me!" and she swayed forwards so that but for Bryce Carter's clasp she

would have fallen across the table. Consternation seized upon the little group. Hanaud filled a glass with Evian water.

"She drink this quick." He gave it into Bryce Carter's disengaged hand. "You make her drink it, or I say you are not her man and forbid the bands."

"Banns," came feebly from the lips of Mr. Ricardo. Bryce Carter gently drew the girl's hands from her face and held the glass to her lips.

"You are very kind—all of you," she said, smiling wanly. She drank from the glass, and reaching out a small white hand, laid it very prettily upon Hanaud's big paw.

"That is better, eh? I come to the rescue once more. So! now, mademoiselle, listen to me! I dot the last T with a big, neat, pleasant dot, and we all go home to bed."

He gazed round the table, gathering attention, beaming with satisfaction.

"Listen! I have had it in my mind that all this fine courage of mademoiselle, her devotion to her friend, and her terrible distress, must not miss their fulfilment. It was to save her friend, Diana Tasborough, that she ran these risks. Well, we of the police shall do our part too. That Robin Webster planned to lure Diana into his spider-web of wickedness, that Joyce Whipple took her place—yes, that must be told. But the tale shall end there. Robin Webster and the Vicomte de Mirandol are on their trial for the murder of Evelyn Devenish and the attempt upon Joyce Whipple—and, believe me, they have more upon their hands than they can manage. You shall trust to us, mademoiselle."

He rose from the table, discharged the account, and walked back with his little party into the town. Or, rather, he walked with Julius Ricardo. For the other pair lagged behind. Hanaud drew Ricardo's attention to their slow progression with a good many chuckles, and digs with his elbow, and playful archnesses; all of which were quite detestable to one of Mr. Ricardo's nicety. But Hanaud's manner changed altogether when the four of them stood together in the street under the lamp of the hotel. He took off his hat as Joyce thanked him in warm and trembling tones, and with a great simplicity he said to her:

"Mademoiselle, I have served."

The End